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The American Civil War and Black Colonization

100,000 words

Short Abstract: 'The American Civil War and Black Colonization'

This is a study of the pursuit of African American colonization as a state and latterly a federal policy during the period c. 1850-65. Historians generally come to the topic via an interest in the Civil War and especially in Lincoln, but in so doing, they saddle it with moral judgment and the burden of rather self-referential debates.

The thesis argues that, whilst the era's most noteworthy ventures into African American colonization did indeed emerge from the circumstances of the Civil War, and from the personal efforts of the president, one can actually offer the freshest insights on Lincoln by bearing in mind that colonization was, above all, a real policy. It enjoyed the support of other adherents too, and could be pursued by various means, which themselves might have undergone adjustment over time and by trial and error.

Using an array of unpublished primary sources, the study finds that Lincoln and his allies actively pursued colonization for a longer time, and with more persistence in the face of setbacks, than scholars normally assume. The policy became entangled in considerations of whether it was primarily a domestic or an international matter, whilst other overlapping briefs also sabotaged its execution, even as the administration slowly learned various lessons about how *not* to go about its implementation. By early 1864, the resulting confusion, as well as the political fallout from the fiasco of the one expedition to go ahead, curtailed the president's ability to continue with the policy. There are strong suggestions, however, that he had not repudiated colonization, and possibly looked to revive it, even as he showed a tentative interest in alternative futures for African Americans.

This thesis makes a case against unrealistically binary thinking, anachronistic assumptions, abused hindsight, sweeping interpretive frameworks, and double standards of evidentiary assessment respecting a technically imperfect and ethically awkward policy.

Long Abstract: 'The American Civil War and Black Colonization'

Introduction and Chapter 1, 'Reconsidering Lincoln, the Civil War, and African American Colonization'

There is a healthy corpus of scholarship on the colonization movement, and a widespread awareness of the federal government's pursuit of the policy during the Civil War, but these bodies of literature do not really meet, as these two impetuses involved different people, agencies, and target destinations for African American resettlement. Scholarly coverage of Civil War colonization is broadly but thinly spread, with the last specialist accounts dating to the 1950s, since which time crucial sources and research tools have become available; it is also now clear that many government files were scattered through a protracted fight between two of the policy's administrators.

Most academics agree that Lincoln either gave up colonization around the time of the Emancipation Proclamation, or that he never even really believed in it, but rather deployed colonizationist talk to forestall opposition to emancipation. Yet there are signs that such interpretations are changing.

With respect to the Civil War, Lincoln's prominent place in the story imbues what should be an even-handed historical investigation with a moralizing flavour of both facile condemnation and its opposite, a tendency toward interpretations based around moral 'growth', inappropriately judicial talk of Lincoln being on 'trial', and the general inclination to minimize his sincerity and persistence in pursuing the policy wherever such an opening presents itself. The historiography fundamentally misdirects its understandable incredulity as to the logistical and practical aspects of colonization into

arguments against those scholars who stress Lincoln's sincerity, rather than against the president or the policy itself.

Through a series of thematic subheadings, the first chapter simultaneously tackles the assumptions of the secondary literature and suggests new directions to go in. It addresses the fallacies of what it calls the 'lullaby thesis', the interpretation that has Lincoln only pursue colonization for a brief time in order to appease white racism; also, the mystifying, broader need in the literature for the president to have kept on speaking in public about a policy that he knew to be controversial, had he still been truly committed thereto; and the notion that he simply could not have adhered to colonization in the face of African American military recruitment and other presumed departures in his racial thinking. The chapter also warns against the temptation of double standards, namely, downplaying the unsuccessful colonization schemes of a man whose mere thoughts and intentions otherwise fascinate us, and whose activities in other areas of African American rights were far less substantial than those he expended on colonization.

Chapter 2, 'Race Adjustment'

Sectional tension after 1846 rekindled interest in the moderate solution of colonization, and turned the attention of the lower North and upper South to their free black populations. The discriminatory legislation that arose from such developments also had the effect of reopening an old and bitter debate amongst African Americans as to whether to emigrate or to seek assimilation at home.

The different exclusionary and racial separatist impulses of the decade were not always as institutionally connected as one might assume. In a period of such turmoil, black

emigrationists still encountered significant opposition from other African Americans, struggled with their own mixed feelings, and avoided the taint of the white colonization movement wherever possible. The American Colonization Society was intrigued by renewed interest in its work, but cautious of domestic political entanglement and, however disingenuously, dismayed at state exclusion and expulsion laws. National politicians offered words of support and toyed with endorsing colonization, but ultimately deemed it more trouble than it was worth. State-level sponsorship was hedged with qualifications and tapered off by the late 1850s.

Ultimately, colonization's long-term revival required a partisan basis in the form of the fledgling Republican Party. The policy's advocates made some headway with their peers, but their formal influence was limited, despite enthusiastic words from colleagues keen to fend off Democratic race-baiting. Their greatest achievement was to keep the idea of colonization prominent at the outbreak of a war that was to fundamentally change the relationship between the federal government and slavery.

Chapter 3, 'Chiriquí'

Colonization came up in connection with wartime confiscation, and through Lincoln's personal appeal to the border states to enact gradual, compensated emancipation, a conservatively antislavery solution to which it had long been linked. Congress voted to include appropriations for voluntary colonization in the District Emancipation and Second Confiscation Acts of 1862, and clothed the president with significant discretionary powers to pursue the policy. Suggestions of destinations flooded in from concessionaires, contractors, and US diplomats, mostly concerning the labour-hungry American tropics.

Republican opinion was mixed, even in Lincoln's own cabinet. The legislation that arose arguably ran along the path of least resistance between different factions, although this does not mean that it should be dismissed as window-dressing; the sums of money appropriated were certainly enough to initiate a credible colony that might provide a safe refuge to black Americans who felt the need to leave the United States at a later date, which is how most colonizationists understood the process working.

Despite its notoriety as Lincoln's first choice of colonization scheme for over a year, and its connection to his August 1862 address to a delegation of African Americans, the Chiriquí (in Colombia, or modern-day Panamá) project was a prominent victim of the loss of government paperwork. It is surprisingly well covered in the pertinent personal collections, however.

Challenging the standard assertion that Central American protest killed the scheme early in October 1862, this chapter argues that Lincoln had long been aware of its potential for diplomatic upset. The real stumbling block was more specifically that of who could actually speak for the Colombian government, which was wracked by a civil war of its own. Accordingly, the president tried to put colonization on a sounder legislative, constitutional, and diplomatic footing, one that could overcome such problems. He then retreated to secrecy once more, on account of the poor domestic reception of his annual message of December 1862. There was the added complication of a strong odour of corruption hanging over the project, and a conflict of interests reaching to Lincoln's second secretary of the interior.

The chapter suggests that we must avoid discerning an uncomplicated streak of empirical epiphanies in Lincoln's ventures into colonization, as he seems to have weighed up conflicting considerations over the Chiriquí project from an early date. This

section also suggests that colonization policy started to become a State Department matter as much as an Interior one, as it raised burgeoning diplomatic issues. This in turn set the scene for administrative dysfunction and an eventual shift in the president's approach to colonization.

Chapter 4, 'Île à Vache'

This was the first and only federally sponsored colonization expedition, and marked the culmination of nearly half a century of widespread advocacy of such an undertaking. Yet in a literature spellbound by the notion that Lincoln would have continued to address the public on colonization had he remained truly committed to the policy, the venture receives curiously short shrift, or even nothing more than the passing acknowledgment that it occurred. It sailed out in April 1863, and was in obvious trouble by that July, to Lincoln's known distress, yet he only ordered its recall in February 1864.

This chapter treats the affair at significantly greater length than the standard account of 1959. It develops the point made in the previous section about Lincoln's doggedness in the face of doubts, and our need to appreciate that, like all politicians, he could occasionally vacillate and make bad decisions. In this case, he closed the relevant contract after cancelling an earlier version, and engaged in the business with a striking lack of confidence from the outset.

Colonization's increasingly divided jurisdiction between the Interior and State Departments, the former headed by a man whose interests lay elsewhere and the latter by an opponent of colonization, also made it difficult to satisfy the precise terms of the contract, and ensured the nervous investors' premature withdrawal and abandonment

of the settlers. Thus did administrative dysfunction hinder colonization, whilst the initial lack of confidence from all parties concerned proved horribly self-fulfilling.

Chapter 5, 'The European Empires and Later Developments'

This chapter charts a hitherto overlooked 'second wave' of schemes, in which Lincoln belatedly acted on the lessons that he had learnt respecting the demerits of arrangements undertaken with shady private contractors rather than with the governments that were to receive emigrants. Concomitantly, the president started to call primarily on the State Department, though even now, he also used the services of an *ad hoc* agent of the Interior Department, James Mitchell, whose jurisdictional conflict with its head explains how many of the relevant records were lost.

Although various European powers with holdings in the American tropics had approached the administration as early as 1862, the remarkable thing is that Lincoln continued to favour this approach into late 1863 and early 1864, whereas he had soured almost immediately on the concurrent Île à Vache project.

The chapter also covers the foreign policy implications for the neutral governments that were interested, namely Britain and the Netherlands, and the hitherto unknown pro-emigration manoeuvres of select groups of northern African Americans this late into the war. Along with proper coverage of the Île à Vache venture, this section helps reveal the chronological 'missing link' between Lincoln's last public words on colonization and some long-known evidence of his late interest.

Active colonization policy appears to have hit a wall around early 1864, with the administration apparently initiating no new schemes thereafter. Yet we should not

confuse pragmatic reasons for suspending an unpopular, troublesome, and corruption-ridden policy, and the inevitable patchiness of the source record surrounding a completely stalled measure, with definitive proof of the abandonment of the same; nor our inability to 'convict' Lincoln for continued pro-colonization views with a consideration of the evidence on a balance of probabilities. Apart from the oft-misrepresented implications of a diary entry of one of Lincoln's private secretaries, there remains no definite evidence that the president had repudiated colonization. The remnants of a brief correspondence with his attorney general, the recollections of his navy secretary, and the kernel of an army major general's account of two conversations with the president just before the latter's death, all hint that the unknowable future of American race relations continued to weigh heavily on Lincoln's mind.

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Although some archival discoveries in London at the beginning of my second year set the tone for this study, and confirmed a nagging sense that attempting to cover colonization policymaking comprehensively and evenly from c. 1850 to 1865 was indeed too ambitious, it will always be my nine months in the United States, most of

them spent in Washington, D.C., that evoke the research stage of my work. Irene Upshur and the inhabitants of the house at South Irving Street, and Anna Sproul and her 'rococo' assortment of friends, turned what could have been an altogether isolating experience into its diametric opposite; thanks also go out to those kindly strangers who offered me the use of their couch, or even of a spare bed, whilst I toured the archives of what almost amounted to the Union as at 1861. Specific academic gratitude also goes to Phil Magness, Tyler Anbinder, Nan Card, Cindy VanHorn, the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress, and Arlington County Public Library.

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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter 1 16
Reconsidering Lincoln, the Civil War, and African American Colonization

Chapter 2 81
Race Adjustment

Chapter 3 138
Chiriquí

Chapter 4 194
Île à Vache

Chapter 5 260
The European Empires and Later Developments

Epilogue 309

Bibliography 313

Abbreviations

PUBLICATIONS

CG (37:2) (Appendix)	(Appendix to) *The Congressional Globe* (for the 37th Congress, 2nd Session).
CW	R.P. Basler (ed.), *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*.
FRUS (1863)	*Foreign Relations of the United States* (for the year 1863; where no year, 1862).
SED 55	39th Congress 1st Session, Senate Executive Document No. 55, *Transportation, Settlement, and Colonization of Persons of the African Race*.
HED 227	41st Congress 2nd Session, House Executive Document No. 227, *Accounts of the Colonization Agent*.

LOCATIONS

LC	Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Md.
TNA	The National Archives, Kew, Surrey.

MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

ACS	American Colonization Society Records, LC.
AL	Abraham Lincoln Papers, LC.
AWT	Ambrose W. Thompson Papers, LC.
BF	Blair Family Papers, LC.
B-L	Blair-Lee Papers, Princeton University.
JPU	John P. Usher Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.
RWT-ACPL	Richard W. Thompson Papers, Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, Ind.
RWT-RBH	Richard W. Thompson Papers, Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio.
STNC, *comprising*	Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior Relating to the Suppression of the African Slave Trade and Negro Colonization, *comprising*
---, DC	---, D.C. Donnohue Communications.
---, DLC	---, James De Long Communications.
---, FTC	---, Paul S. Forbes and Charles K. Tuckerman Communications.
---, KC	---, Bernard Kock Communications.
WHS	William H. Seward Papers, LC.

All citations to manuscript collections refer to their general correspondence series, unless stated otherwise. Citations to the collections BF and ACS, and to the (unabbreviated) Charles Sumner and Gerrit Smith papers, include a microfilm roll no. on account of their rather more chronologically overlapping arrangement.

Introduction

Any account of colonization during the Civil War is necessarily a study of the pursuit of a conciliatory, moderate scheme in an America so polarized as to have broken into two warring sections. It is an attempt to understand an idea with antecedents in the eighteenth century, and which had effectively crystallized by the early national period, but with an emphasis on the 'second' American Revolution, not the first or its aftermath. It is an investigation of how an older tradition of conservative emancipation coped with the twin heresies of immediatist abolitionism and proslavery, and of how a holdout of Enlightenment environmentalism fared in an intellectual milieu awash with novel talk of innate racial difference.

Yet perhaps more than anything else, it naturally lends itself to an almost old-fashioned focus on policymaking. For it was in this era – following an 1850s revival of African American interest in emigration, growing colonizationist sounds from white politicians, and a redoubled drive at the state level towards black exclusion – that the United States government officially committed itself for the first time to encouraging the departure, for foreign shores, of a group statistically more native to America than the white population. That little ultimately came of this does not decrease its significance. If anything, it makes it all the more important for the historian to chronicle an episode that might otherwise have been forgotten. This is especially true where contemporaries could not know for sure that it would end up without result, and indeed where many of them acted under quite the contrary assumption.

Although there are real shortcomings in the literature's treatment of colonization, as we shall see, it is making a straw man these days to suggest that scholars show little interest in the topic. Certainly, historians overlooked colonization for

decades after the Civil War because of the manifest non-fulfilment of its promise of a lily-white America, the inconvenient fit of its conciliatory premise with the notion of an avoidable but strictly binary conflict between the rabid defenders of slavery and the unyielding abolitionists of a 'blundering generation', and also because it pertained to race in an age where white Americans North and South were trying to write out black experiences in order to reach an understanding of events acceptable to both sections. When historians did start to investigate colonization early in the twentieth century, it was under what we would now deem unsavoury historiographical influences, although such scholars' relative lack of inhibition in tackling the topic of racial removal also placed them closer than recent historians to the mindset of mid-nineteenth century colonizationists. The author of the first monograph on the American Colonization Society identified closely with his subject, asking by way of conclusion 'was it not worth the effort required to bring the Society into being and to preserve it for so many years?' Around the same time, Frederic Bancroft – of prize-endowing fame – rather backhandedly wondered if 'a considerable measure of success in colonization might have … helped to lessen prejudice before the Civil War and during Reconstruction.'[1]

About mid-century, the civil rights movement and growing diversity in academia heightened scholarly interest in colonization, especially from the late 1960s. Concomitantly, even as updated and rather less questionable institutional accounts of the movement appeared, new methodological fields and approaches were opening up. Intellectual historians started to look at colonization's place in racial thinking, tending to accept its ambiguous brief as more at the antislavery end of the spectrum, and to see its talk of black 'degradation', as opposed to innate inferiority, as redolent of the Enlightenment. On the other hand, those coming from an interest in abolitionism leant more towards singling out its deportationist and anti-black side. Perhaps the most

[1] M. Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill, 2007), 227-32; E.L. Fox, *The American Colonization Society, 1817-1840* (Baltimore, 1919), 226; F. Bancroft, 'The Ile à Vache Experiment in Colonization', in J.E. Cooke, *Frederic Bancroft, Historian* (Norman, 1957), 258.

notable development of the last decade or so has been a crop of state-by-state studies of the colonization and black emigration movements, and a greater awareness of the workings of the Society 'on the ground', exemplified by Eric Burin's *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution* (2005). Such work has added flesh to the bones of a topic that is still too easy to discuss in rather abstract terms, and offers complexity and depth as the payoff of geographical and thematic specialization. All in all, the body of literature goes from strength to strength.[2]

Yet it is striking just how little this has to do with the scholarship on colonization during the Civil War. In a way this is quite understandable: although that conflict and the years immediately preceding it breathed new life into notions of black expatriation, the practical and institutional overlap between the traditional movement 'proper' and colonization's newfound enthusiasts was surprisingly limited.

The former, embodied especially in the American Colonization Society (ACS) and its state-level auxiliaries, was a loose alliance of self-styled philanthropists that desperately tried to retain nationwide support by officially offering nothing but the voluntary removal of free African Americans to Liberia. At heart, however, its central, heavily clerical leadership, and its key axis of upper southern slaveholders and northern humanitarians, saw colonization as a means of encouraging private acts of manumission and individual state action on slavery. By contrast, the Civil War-era movement, whilst holding appeal throughout the lower North and to some extent in the border states, was above all a movement of the Midwest, a region proud to be free soil but acutely conscious of its proximity to slave territory. It evinced more openly deportationist and racially exclusionist leanings than the ACS, and could not credibly have done otherwise; there could be no paternalistic, benevolent guise of tacit emancipationist plans in an area that lacked the institution of slavery. Drawing succour from the ever-harsher state racial legislation of the antebellum decades, this brand of colonization was more overtly

[2] Tyler-McGraw, 228-32; E. Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville, 2005).

'political' than its controversy-eschewing, established counterpart. Most notably, elements of the new Republican Party started to espouse it in the late 1850s as a means of addressing their weakness in the face of Democratic race baiting.[3]

It was also against this background of hostility and legislative proscription that many prominent African Americans started to reconsider emigration to an extent not witnessed since the 1820s, which kicked off a ferociously bitter and bewilderingly multi-cornered debate. Black emigrationists vied with those who continued to reject the idea as a denial of their American birthright and a green light to white prejudice, with each other as to the best destination, and even with their own shifting thoughts on that same score, as well as wrestling with their residual hopes that things might improve at home. As with the new generation of 'political' colonizationists, as an overall group they entertained ideas of the Caribbean, Central, and South America at least as much as Liberia and Africa. This represented another difference with the ACS, and perhaps the most important of all in practical terms. For not only did the new (white) colonization and black emigration movements offer each other general ideological reinforcement, but the former was at least ostensibly willing to listen to favourable African American opinions and to frame its specific suggestions accordingly.[4]

The Civil War colonizationist 'moment' emerged from such developments, even if the outbreak of war itself was more important than any other factor in hastening it along. It would be hard to regard the wartime window of opportunity for colonization as some kind of belated vindication for the Liberian movement, except perhaps for bestowing the original idea. As a result, historians do not really stray from studies related to the ACS into wartime policy, and it is indeed hard to connect them except at

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[3] Burin, 2-3, 31-3; E.H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana, Ill., 1967), 123-35; E. Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York, 1970), 267-80.

[4] F.J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863* (Urbana, Ill., 1975), 94-271; W.J. Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1820-1925* (Oxford, 1988), 22-54; J.H. Pease and W.H. Pease, *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861* (New York, 1974), 255-97.

an intellectual level without forcing the argument somewhat. Yet the traffic runs even less from the other direction, chronologically speaking, as wartime colonization comes under the massive and essentially self-contained field of Civil War scholarship – and even more than that, under the rubric of Lincoln studies.

Colonization has always proven difficult for those trying to understand its significance to Lincoln's thoughts, words, and deeds. After all, he put an abrupt end to a decade of earnest public advocacy of the policy a few months shy of halfway through his presidency, and that shortly before seemingly giving up altogether on initiating new resettlement schemes. If early white historians did not occupy themselves unduly with this apparent mystery, it was only because they did not tackle colonization that much at all. Where they did, they tended to take Lincoln's words at face value, and like some of their contemporaries, occasionally suggested that it was a good idea in spirit even where they conceded its impracticality. Around the middle of the twentieth century, Civil War colonization rose above the level of thumbnail sketches as a topic of interest in its own right. This development occurred slightly earlier than the white rediscovery of the ACS and African American emigration movements, owing perhaps to its clearer basis in conventional political history and to a more identifiable and discrete set of sources.[5]

[5] Sincerity assumed: J.G. Randall, *Lincoln, the President* (4 vols., New York, 1945-55), ii, 137-41; R. Korngold, *Two Friends of Man* (Boston, 1950), 265-6, 305-08. Discussion of practicality and desirability: J.T. Morse, *Abraham Lincoln* (2 vols., Boston, 1897), ii, 19-20; F.P. Stearns, *True Republicanism* (Philadelphia, 1904), 201-02, 222; W.P. Pickett, *The Negro Problem: Abraham Lincoln's Solution* (New York, 1909), 306-30; T. Dixon, *The Flaming Sword* (Atlanta, 1939), 156, 337-8, 342; T.G. Bilbo, *Take Your Choice* (Poplarville, Miss., 1947), 29, 263-4; M.D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York, 1994), 169. Early scholarly summaries: W.L. Fleming, 'Deportation and Colonization: An Attempted Solution of the Race Problem', in W.H. Dunning, *Studies in Southern History and Politics* (New York, 1914), 3-32; C.H. Wesley, 'Lincoln's Plan for Colonizing the Emancipated Negroes', *Journal of Negro History*, 4 (Jan. 1919), 7-21; N.A.N. Cleven, 'Some Plans for Colonizing Liberated Negro Slaves in Hispanic America', *Journal of Negro History*, 11 (Jan. 1926), 35-49; B. Dyer, 'The Persistence of the Idea of Negro Colonization', *The Pacific Historical Review*, 12 (Mar. 1943), 53-65. Burgeoning specialization: P.J. Scheips, 'Lincoln and the Chiriqui Colonization Project', *Journal of Negro History*, 37 (Oct. 1952), 418-53; W.D. Boyd, 'The Île a Vache Colonization Venture, 1862-1864', *The Americas*, 16 (July 1959), 45-62; Bancroft, 'The Colonization of American Negroes, 1801-1865', in Cooke, *Frederic Bancroft*, 145-258, although this work actually marked the posthumous publication of essays that Bancroft had completed by 1917.

Yet even as historians started to regard colonization in general as a sincere, perfectly serious, and even nuanced idea, which ought to have made it easier to accept that Lincoln subscribed to it and may never have stopped doing so, they have struggled to apply similar thinking to the morally charged person of the 'Great Emancipator'. In particular, the majority of scholars still see Lincoln as having abandoned colonization by the approximate time of the Emancipation Proclamation, despite the existence of evidence to the contrary, and they suggest wishful, even counter-intuitive explanations as to why this was so.

Before entering into a premature exposition of the historiography, however, a quick summary of the Civil War colonization narrative is in order. Though the Republicans had not formally written colonization into their platform in 1860, Lincoln belonged to a sizable, somewhat midwestern contingent of the party in favour of the policy. He spent the early part of his presidency consistently reaffirming the support that he had long shown it, most notably in his first and second annual messages, in an 1862 offer of compensated emancipation to representatives of the border states, and in a notorious meeting with a delegation of black Washingtonians that August in which he laid out his rationale for colonization at some length. Congress initially answered the call, backing him up in April 1862 with $100,000 of appropriations to accompany the District of Columbia Emancipation Act, and a further $500,000 for those slaves covered by the Second Confiscation Act of July. The president then promised to continue pursuing colonization in the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation of September 1862, his warning to the Confederacy of what loomed unless it laid down its arms, and also filled much of his annual message of December 1862 with an appeal to Congress and to the electorate to support constitutional amendments for compensated, gradual emancipation and colonization. Yet he ultimately dropped both compensation and colonization from the final Emancipation Proclamation of New Year's Day 1863. Indeed, his second annual message would turn out to be his last public commentary on the

policy, something that has continued to mislead historians trying to understand colonization down to this day.[6]

Moving away from the consideration of Lincoln's messages on colonization to that of actual projects and resettlement locales, the enthusiastic response of both domestic contractors and the labour-hungry parts of the American tropics presented Lincoln with a wide range of possible choices. Historians have followed his secretaries and later biographers, John Hay and John Nicolay, in identifying just two schemes as having 'commended themselves to the special attention of the President'. The first was a contract with an American concessionaire for a site on the isthmus of Chiriquí, in what is now Panamá. Behind the scenes, it was the administration's first choice for at least a year, albeit in an initially fitful way, but it encountered seemingly fatal difficulties in late 1862 once Lincoln had gone public with it. Scholars have tended to highlight the role of Central American protest at the venture, and to a lesser extent, the smell of fraud lingering over it. Proceeding from original research in the scattered papers of the Chiriquí interest and of the cabinet members involved in the formulation of colonization policy, this study suggests that the considerations involved were more complex than that, and that Lincoln actually kept the door open on the scheme until a later date than is normally assumed. It was in pursuit of the Chiriquí project that the president also allocated the new federal policy of African American colonization to the Interior Department, whose previous work in resettling the African 'recaptives' of the international slave trade arguably gave it some claim on the task, but whose two wartime heads also demonstrated a suspiciously greater enthusiasm for the Chiriquí venture than their cabinet colleagues. In what was to become a chronic point of conflict, Lincoln also appointed an *ad hoc* colonization agent, James Mitchell, who enjoyed a

[6] Paragraph draws on Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York, 2010), 186, 200, 215, 223-6, 231-7.

personally fraught and jurisdictionally ambiguous relationship with the president's later secretary of the interior.[7]

The second project was another arrangement with a shady speculator, for a small island off the south-western corner of Haiti, Île à Vache. This represented the only expedition that the government ever actually undertook, and although more or less adequately documented in the National Archives, it has never received treatment of the length and depth that it self–evidently merits. Having originally drawn up a contract in December 1862, Lincoln revamped the Île à Vache arrangement that spring and sent out roughly 450 emigrants in April, only for the project to immediately start going wrong due to an outbreak of illness, to neglect on the part of the manager and the contractors, and – much more than previous accounts have explored – to what appears to have been a pessimistic and mistrustful outlook on the part of everybody concerned from the outset, which turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy as both the administration and the investors held back resources that might have helped the settlement succeed. After some months of trying to secure reliable reports from the island, Lincoln recalled the pioneer party in February 1864, which historians generally take as closing the book on a policy that he had effectively shed a year or so previously.[8]

Out of disgust at the fiasco, Congress repealed the relevant appropriations as part of the routine end-of-session sundry civil expenses bill, which Lincoln signed early in July without recorded comment. At this juncture, Hay confided to his diary a rather cryptically phrased sense of relief that his boss had apparently 'sloughed off' colonization. Yet the remnants of a brief autumn 1864 correspondence between Lincoln and Attorney General Edward Bates, some later recollections of Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, and a notorious account by Major General Benjamin Butler of two April 1865 conversations with the president – in which the latter expressed his fear of racial

[7] J.G. Nicolay and J. Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (10 vols., New York, 1890), vi, 357. For the Chiriquí project, see chapter 3 of this study.
[8] See chapter 4.

violence and a consequent receptiveness to Butler's suggestion of sending black troops out of the country to dig an isthmian canal – all carry hints that Lincoln had not repudiated colonization in principle, and possibly even looked to resume it as policy.[9]

Nevertheless, when colonization started to attract greater scholarly interest from the mid-twentieth century, most historians, confronted by what they deemed a transformation in Lincoln's policymaking around the time of the Emancipation Proclamation – essentially, on account of his sudden silence on the matter – offered one of two explanations. The first was the 'lullaby' thesis, to appropriate the terminology of Gabor Boritt, one of its adherents; the second, the president's change of heart on colonization as per his 'growth' or 'evolution' on race, or at least as per a pragmatic realization that the Emancipation Proclamation had highlighted better uses of African American manpower and of the nation's resources.

The lullaby thesis holds that Lincoln was well aware of the racist backlash that he might face if he announced emancipation plans without the *quid pro quo* of offering to remove the slaves consequently freed, especially from the border states, whose favourable opinion he incontrovertibly attempted to cultivate during 1861-2. The idea seems to hold some weight when one considers the mid-term electoral setbacks that the Republicans indeed went on to suffer in 1862, in the wake of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. It also makes sense when viewed through the lens of Lincoln's clear desire to disseminate his colonizationist views as much as possible, most strikingly in having a reporter turn up to the infamous meeting with the African American deputation to make a verbatim account of his remarks. Combined with the president's silence once he had put his signature to the Emancipation Proclamation, it is easy to see his short-term record on colonization as posturing, as a temporary ruse for the higher goal of easing white acceptance of the newfound freedom of three million slaves. Despite some earlier antecedents, the lullaby thesis really took hold from c. 1970

[9] See chapter 5.

and has proven popular to this day, finding supporters in Peter Parish, Don Fehrenbacher, Stephen Oates, James McPherson, Michael Vorenberg, Richard Striner, and Michael Burlingame. In 1975, Boritt offered the intriguing variant that Lincoln was not deceiving the public so much as himself, turning to colonization to assuage his own qualms about emancipation, a point that David Donald echoed; in a more recent article, however, Boritt has incorporated others' work to spell out how this psychological phenomenon also helped to mislead a broader white American audience.[10]

Whilst the lullaby thesis never convinced everybody, dissenting voices remained rather subdued for some years, at least within the field of Lincoln studies. In 2000, the African American scholar Lerone Bennett published *Forced into Glory*, which, although highly polemical in tone and selective in approach, was also based on thorough research in the published primary sources, and gathered in one place much of the evidence that does indeed challenge the reassuring claims of both the 'lullaby' and the 'change of heart' thesis. Subsequently, even within mainstream academia, more scholars – notably the late Phillip Paludan – have come to express concerns about the former stance, and have thus shifted towards the latter. Accordingly, their work does not portray as optimistically a president who decided to ring in 1863 with a New Year's resolution to cease dabbling in colonization. But they concur with the lullaby school on what was at least the inexorable significance of the Emancipation Proclamation, especially that document's go-ahead to black military recruitment, which necessarily called into

[10] V.J. Voegeli, 'The Northwest and the Race Issue, 1861-1862', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 50 (Sept. 1963), 235-51; P.J. Parish, *The American Civil War* (New York, 1975), 230, 239, 241-2; D.E. Fehrenbacher, '"Only His Stepchildren": Lincoln and the Negro', *Civil War History*, 20 (Dec. 1974), 308; S.B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1977), 312; J.M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 1982), 277; M. Vorenberg, 'Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization', *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 14 (Summer 1993), 24-5; R. Striner, *Father Abraham: Lincoln's Relentless Struggle to End Slavery* (Oxford, 2006), 149-50, although Striner also admits of significant post-Proclamation activity and prefers to stress colonization's voluntary basis more than he does anything; M. Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (2 vols., Baltimore, 2008), ii, 384; G.S. Boritt, 'The Voyage to the Colony of Linconia: The Sixteenth President, Black Colonization, and the Defense Mechanism of Avoidance', *Historian*, 37 (Aug. 1975), 619-32, and 'Did He Dream of a Lily-White America? The Voyage to Linconia', in his *The Lincoln Enigma: The Changing Faces of an American Icon* (New York, 2001), 1-19; D.H. Donald, *Lincoln* (New York, 1995), 167.

question the wisdom of sending African Americans abroad, as well as planting doubts in Lincoln's mind about the ethical justice of continuing to strive for black expatriation.[11]

Foremost in the case for the president's growth have been George Fredrickson and Eric Foner, who assign a somewhat indefinite, but apparently early to mid-1863 time of death to the administration's active pursuit of colonization. Yet redrawing the presumed chronological watershed of the Emancipation Proclamation has exerted an altogether destabilizing effect on the literature: Michael Lind, Kevin Gutzman, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Paul Escott, James Oakes, and even Michael Vorenberg, now of avowedly changed opinion, have all questioned whether Lincoln ever really gave up thoughts of colonization. (Fredrickson would have once been amongst their number, but actually retreated to a Foner-like stance between a 1975 article and the 2006 lectures that gave rise to his final book, *Big Enough to Be Inconsistent*.) Although the pressing weight of the established literature means that some of those historians make their case more tentatively than the others, or even regard their own point as somewhat tangential, they should not be so modest or equivocal against the backdrop of a historiography that still largely holds out for an uplifting but all too optimistic assertion of the president's repudiation of colonization. Furthermore, one ought not exaggerate what are still only tentative signs of shifting winds in the prevalent interpretation: Lind, Gates, and Gutzman all earned searing responses to their suggestion that Lincoln had not abandoned colonization by 1865, whilst the lay popularity of Foner's *The Fiery Trial* will likely reconsolidate the narrative of 'growth' for some years to come.[12]

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[11] L. Bennett, *Forced into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream* (Chicago, 2000); P.S. Paludan, 'Lincoln and Colonization: Policy or Propaganda?', *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 25 (Winter 2004), 23-37.

[12] G.M. Fredrickson, *Big Enough to Be Inconsistent: Abraham Lincoln Confronts Slavery and Race* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), 103-14, 129-30, as compared to his 'A Man but Not a Brother: Abraham Lincoln and Racial Equality', *Journal of Southern History*, 41 (Feb. 1975), 43-4, 48-52, 55-8; Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 258-61; M. Lind, *What Lincoln Believed: The Values and Convictions of America's Greatest President* (New York, 2005), 224; K.R.C. Gutzman, 'Abraham Lincoln, Jeffersonian: The Colonization Chimera', in B.R. Dirck (ed.), *Lincoln Emancipated: The President and the Politics of Race* (DeKalb, 2007), 72; H.L. Gates, Jr., *Lincoln on Race and Slavery* (Princeton, 2009), lxiv; P.D. Escott, *"What Shall We Do with the Negro?": Lincoln, White Racism, and Civil War America* (Charlottesville, 2009), 222-3; J. Oakes, 'Natural Rights, Citizenship Rights, States' Rights,

Such is the field at the time of writing, bar a recent contribution by the author and Phillip Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, which has hitherto gone unmentioned so as not to interfere with what has really been a review of others' work. The book charts an unknown 'second wave' of colonization projects down to the end of 1863 or the earliest part of 1864, albeit one that initially overlapped with the administration's interest in the 'contract colonies' of Chiriquí and Île à Vache. Following enquiries from British, Danish, and Dutch representatives, on the last day of September 1862, the administration sent a circular to several European empires with tropical American colonies, requesting the terms on which they would receive African American settlers as agricultural workers. The president reiterated this offer in his second annual message, outlining his hopes for a system of treaties guaranteeing the United States reliable hosts for its black emigrants as well as the satisfactory treatment of the settlers themselves.

Ultimately, only the British and Dutch governments took up the administration's offer. The former shied from a treaty that appeared to presage diplomatic conflict with the Confederacy, but agents from the colonies of British Honduras (Belize) and Guiana (Guyana) secured personal access to Lincoln in mid-1863, receiving his permission to canvass 'contraband' camps, and that of their own legation to transport former slaves from the United States. Conversely, The Hague remained interested to the end in a formal resettlement agreement, and had indeed negotiated a draft treaty by December 1863 – subsequently shelved as the Lincoln administration wound down its diplomatic activities on behalf of colonization – but it never got as far as British agencies in making concrete arrangements for emigration to Dutch Guiana (Suriname). Indeed, compared to

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and Black Rights: Another Look at Lincoln and Race', in Foner (ed.), *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World* (New York, 2008), 132-3; Vorenberg, 'After Emancipation: Abraham Lincoln's Black Dream', in J.Y. Simon et al. (eds.), *Lincoln Revisited: New Insights from the Lincoln Forum* (New York, 2007), 216-20; McPherson, 'Twist and Shout', *The Nation*, 13 June 2005; S. Wilentz, 'Who Lincoln Was', *The New Republic*, 15 July 2009; L.E. Morel, 'Abraham Lincoln: The Better Angel of Our Nature', *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association,* 29 (Winter 2008), 55-7; R. McColley, '*Lincoln Emancipated*' (review), *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 101 (Fall-Winter 2008), 417-18.

the British colonial ventures, there is much less evidence from the US perspective about a scheme that largely managed to remain the secret of the State Department, the US minister to the Netherlands, and the Dutch government. Although Lincoln left no direct evidence concerning his motives for the 'imperial' solutions, at least not above and beyond his rationale for colonization in general, they seem to have appealed to him as the woes of the Île à Vache expedition piled upon the lessons of the abortive Chiriquí scheme to underline a point about the questionable merits of domestic contractors. According to Welles, the president 'lamented that every humane undertaking of the Government was at once seized by a swarm of swindlers and converted into a mercenary transaction', when it came to his administration's ventures into colonization. On the one hand, mid-nineteenth century political and legal thinking had probably not developed notions of corruption, and especially of conflict of interest, as thoroughly as we have today, and made allowances for claims of patriotic, enlightened self-interest and for government officials' involvement in profitmaking projects. Yet it is clear that the graft that colonization tended to attract nevertheless concerned Lincoln, both in terms of his administration's reputation and of would-be settlers' fate at the hands of shady businessmen. Indeed, colonization policy arguably underwent a comparable transformation to that witnessed in many other areas of wartime procurement, moving awkwardly and somewhat non-ideologically away from the use of contractors, and towards a heightened degree of direct government involvement.[13]

Yet the president increasingly stood alone and struggled to convince the cabinet of the virtue of his plans. Colonization encountered prominent opponents in Secretary of State William Seward, who had always entertained objections to the idea, and who dragged his feet whilst stopping short of refusing to do Lincoln's express bidding; in Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, who viewed the policy as antithetical to black recruitment; and latterly, in Secretary of the Interior John Usher, who had backed the

[13] G. Welles, 'Administration of Abraham Lincoln', *Galaxy*, 24 (1877), 441.

Chiriquí scheme out of interested motives but soured on later projects and especially on his (in)subordinate, James Mitchell. Indeed, it was the protracted Mitchell-Usher dispute that helped scatter much of the evidence pertaining to the British scheme, although it did leave some fragments in the files of the Interior Department, whilst the counterpart Dutch arrangements survived intact in those of the State Department. In combination with several other factors – notably, a lack of support from other quarters beyond a select band of African American emigrationists, rekindled and ultimately fatal jitters from the government of British Honduras as to its ability to jeopardize British neutrality, and the recall of the Île à Vache expedition – wartime colonization died the hazy, living death of a policy that offered few options realistically worth the trouble that they were likely to incur.

Viewing the matter generously, historians overlooked this second wave because much of the evidence was missing from the obvious places, and researching it requires some exploration of the files of the Foreign and Colonial Offices at the British National Archives in Kew, an overseas archive from an American point of view. Yet there were certainly enough extant pointers in material available in the United States to warn scholars that there might indeed be crucial sources abroad. After all, we did not pluck our lines of enquiry for the project that became *Colonization after Emancipation* from thin air, but chased up leads in the colonization files of the Interior Department. Furthermore, it is easy to exaggerate the 'foreign discoveries' aspect of our book, and especially of this rather wider thesis, whose treatment of the Chiriquí and Dutch projects is based wholly on overlooked sources in the United States, including a fifty year-old biography that more than adequately covered the arrangement with the Netherlands.[14]

[14] P.W. Magness and S.N. Page, *Colonization after Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (Columbia, 2011); R.F. Durden, *James Shepherd Pike: Republicanism and the American Negro, 1850-1882* (Durham, 1957), 85-93.

Thus, the real problem is that scholars were not really looking that hard at a topic that they have found uncomfortable when it pertains to Lincoln and wartime policymaking. In many cases, historians did not draw the intuitive conclusions from what they already knew, or put more effort into dismissing the warning signs, such as Butler's perfectly notorious story, rather than following up the potential implications of the same. Whilst one might have indeed reasonably wondered what new projects Lincoln was initiating after early 1863, even on the strength of the commonly known evidence alone, there was always a perfectly credible account of his interest in colonization to the end of his life. One simply had to work rather more from the date of the recall of the Île à Vache expedition than that of its initiation, which in turn would have done much to rehabilitate the fragmentary late evidence. Accordingly, much of the historiographical effect of the incorporation of the imperial schemes may simply be to tip the balance towards trusting our instincts once more on the evidentiary front. Whilst perhaps not as satisfyingly simple as the assertion that the substantive facts of the recovered episodes alone constitute a game-changer, such an admission may represent a more realistic appraisal of the role of discoveries within the discipline of history.

1 Reconsidering Lincoln, the Civil War, and African American Colonization

We have already noted the historiographical disjuncture that effectively exists between the field of colonization studies proper, with its focus on the antebellum period and on the work of the ACS, and Lincoln and Civil War scholarship. That lack of overlap presents the student of Civil War colonization with a real challenge, for whilst one should always hope to break out of the mould of biography and to look at the policy in general, it is difficult to escape the fact that Abraham Lincoln was the most important figure in colonization policymaking during this period. Not the most fanatical about colonization, and indeed rather less bigoted than some of his closest associates in the work, but still the most significant, even if partly by dint of legislation placing the task in his hands. Whilst he could call on the support of others who had been proactive colonizationists for longer, and who were always more stridently committed to the idea than he was, they flourished primarily because the president used the resources of the federal government and the powers of his office to sponsor their work.

Although our uneasiness about colonization makes it tempting to move the spotlight away from Lincoln as much as possible, the fact that he delegated colonization work – as one might realistically expect of the president, especially during time of war – simply does not detract from the fact he wholeheartedly supported the policy. And whilst the other complications and points of contention that colonization incurred as an official measure provide a fascinating subject of study, there is a simple point as to cause and effect that we should not forget, to wit, had Lincoln not been a supporter of colonization, the policy would have engendered very few of these divisions and complexities, for once Congress had passed legislation wholly entrusting it to the

executive branch – which supporters of colonization felt comfortable doing on account of the president's endorsement thereof – there would have presumably been little governmental colonization activity in evidence.

Moreover, whilst one ought not force an argument that Lincoln was somehow 'typical' of a dubiously monolithic northern opinion, the fact that he was burdened with the duties of the office of the president did expose him more than most to the sort of anguishing considerations of race, and of the after-effects of emancipation, that often lent themselves to a colonizationist stance. Accordingly, it would be somewhat perverse to over-compensate and to claim that there were other individuals who open up a significantly better window on the contemporary intellectual struggle with such concerns. There is also a further consideration that arises from the preceding one, that, whilst this study aspires to return to the primary sources where the historiography seems to have rather lost its way, it is also impossible to deny that many of the questions that it addresses constitute at least a conversation with the secondary literature. Since that body of work has in turn looked at the topic through the Lincoln lens, there is only *so* much that one can avoid answering it in similar terms, even whilst attempting to move the debate elsewhere.

Such being the case, one can only aim to strike the right balance between the aspects of the topic more related to Lincoln, and those less so; to link him to other figures, events, and developments where appropriate, whilst not pressing the template too hard; and to appreciate that, even where a certain patron was heavily involved in colonization, the measure was not just an expression of the limitations of an individual's innermost thinking on race, but also an official policy of the United States government that might have stalled from administrative difficulties and for want of wider support. This chapter therefore seeks to place Lincoln within wider debates and discussions over the relevance of colonization, over what constitutes good scholarly treatment of the evidence, and over the policymaking equilibrium that might have existed in this instance

between considerations of principle and of pragmatism, as well as between Lincoln's personal beliefs and his assessment of others' opinions. It enumerates several precepts that encompass both the existing literature and the themes that run throughout this thesis too. Realistically, the historiographical assumptions concerning Lincoln and colonization are so engrained that it is only possible to even attempt to remove them through means of considering arguments upfront that might otherwise have provided more by way of conclusion, had this study been on any other topic.

We must beware our natural tendency to try to fit a new study into the existing framework of what is actually a deceptively inadequate literature

Ostensibly, such a description of the historiography seems an extraordinary one. Historians have spent several decades paying ever more attention to colonization, even pointing the finger at their predecessors and peers for failing to do so; these days, colonization rarely escapes a mention in biographies of Lincoln and general accounts of the Civil War, where it might well have done just a few years ago. The literature does not fail to acknowledge the moral gravity of the fact that Lincoln pursued such a policy, or going by most accounts, how grave it would have been had he actually been sincere, or if he had not at least repudiated the policy by a certain point. As such qualifiers hint, sounding these condemnatory notes may not represent quite the same thing as taking colonization seriously, especially where its adherents evidently did not consider it reprehensible in the way that we do.[1]

First, the literature's coverage of wartime colonization is actually far more illusory than one might imagine. Whilst it runs to hundreds of pages, that figure marks a total thinly spread across multiple works that, whatever their exact line of argument,

[1] E. Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York, 2010), xx.

tend to recount rather similar details to one another. Most historians would surely agree that an official Civil War policy of the United States government realistically requires at least doctoral, book-length treatment to bring about something even approximating its sound treatment. Indeed, they might reasonably expect such a work to have already appeared where that project offered its author an opportunity to say something new about a figure who has attracted as much attention as Abraham Lincoln. For example, one would actually run out of fingers counting the books that have appeared during the last decade purely in a subset of biography that juxtaposes the 'parallel lives' of Abraham Lincoln with Frederick Douglass and Charles Darwin, whom the president met three times and never, respectively. If we are to criticize the concentration of collective scholarly efforts around Lincoln and the Civil War, then we should be consistent and aim that salvo across the board, rather than at an individual study whose conclusions we might not want to hear. There is clearly historiographical space, even a pressing need for a full work on colonization, which forever features as the bridesmaid and never as the bride in works on Lincoln and the Civil War. Looking at the overall body of literature, it seems that historians consistently deem colonization suitable for an article or as a dissertation for their undergraduate or master's students, but not for a book.[2]

Second, for a discipline that ought to be based on a very approximate balance between original primary research and argument from known fact, it is striking just how much the literature on wartime colonization leans towards the latter. A cursory inspection of the footnotes will reveal that the standard accounts of actual colonization schemes during the Civil War are still those of the 1950s, since which time many primary sources and search tools have become available. Even those who have delved deeper into the original evidence tend to limit themselves to the *Collected Works of*

[2] Although searches on [www.worldcat.org] reveal a perhaps unexpected number of unpublished undergraduate and master's degree dissertations on Civil War colonization, there appear to be just two of doctoral length, both based on a narrow range of sources by modern standards: W.D. Boyd, 'Negro Colonization in the National Crisis, 1860-1870' (UCLA, Ph.D., 1953); T.L. Spraggins, 'Economic Aspects of Negro Colonization During the Civil War' (American University, Ph.D., 1957).

Abraham Lincoln, to the Lincoln papers, and to the National Archives' holdings on colonization, whilst overlooking the personal collections of other figures involved in the execution of the policy. What the burgeoning literature really reflects is a top-heavy approach in which historians apparently need only turn to a close study of Lincoln's words in order to understand colonization, hence its frequent appearance as a public relations exercise or as an embodiment of his prejudices down to the end of 1862, rather than as a real, three-dimensional policy that might have been subject to the same repeated frustrations, sustained patronal input, and dispersal of evidence as any other.[3]

Third, much of the recent historiography is also remarkably counter-intuitive in its logic and prone to a somewhat forced minimization of Lincoln's colonization record wherever such an opportunity presents itself. For example, the president's earnest personal endorsement of colonization is in fact an insincere appeal with ulterior but benevolent motives; or at worst, colonization is receding from his mind even before he arranges, despatches, and sustains the US government's first and only African American colonization expedition; multiple witnesses attesting to his earnest or late interest in colonization are liars whom we must dismiss out of hand in order to prop up the non-existent evidence stating that he had never really believed in, or had repudiated, the policy; and so on. Curiously, then, the more stridently that historians have claimed over the last four decades to have come to terms with colonization, the less they appear to have actually done so. Whilst the accounts of the early twentieth century may have been brief, superficially researched, and even unnerving in how little condemnation they reserved for colonization, that lack of inhibition in tackling the subject of black expatriation surely placed them closer than us to the attitudes of its supporters. Whatever flashes of incredulity early historians evinced, mostly at the impracticality of

[3] The most cited works on specific colonization projects are Boyd, 'The Île a Vache Colonization Venture, 1862-1864', *The Americas*, 16 (July 1959), 45-62; J.D. Lockett, 'Abraham Lincoln and Colonization: An Episode That Ends in Tragedy at L'Ile à Vache, Haiti, 1863-1864', *Journal of Black Studies*, 21 (June 1991), 428-44; and, above all, presumably through its pertinence to Lincoln's 'transformative' year of 1862 regarding emancipation, P.J. Scheips, 'Lincoln and the Chiriqui Colonization Project', *Journal of Negro History*, 37 (Oct. 1952), 418-53.

the policy and at its poor execution, they took the evidentiary record at face value and avoided crossing the line into literal disbelief as to Lincoln's motives, which more recent scholars have struggled to do. Perhaps unsurprisingly, what we have really witnessed since the 1960s is actually a tandem historiographical dynamic: transformed attitudes have rendered unacceptable the old apologetics for colonization and made it clearer to scholars that the policy itself was ultimately indefensible, only for them to grow concomitantly more defensive about Lincoln's motivation, his sincerity, and the duration of his interest therein. Consequently, and despite no basis in Lincoln's own words or in the recollections of his peers, colonization appears as a political ruse for a nobler end of easing white acceptance of emancipation, or at worst as a vacated stepping-stone in his growing strides towards nascent racial progressivism by 1865. In effect, historians build up colonization, just to knock it down again; place greater weight than they used to on the 'against' side of the scales when assessing Lincoln, but even more on the 'for'.

Probably, we all too easily assert in our work that we have laid aside modern assumptions to understand the appeal of ideas in their own time, or managed to take historical figures off their pedestal, or generally avoided the perils of anachronism in whatever guise they might appear. In fact, the literature still evinces several signs of confusion and vacillation as to what colonization represents, variously describing the idea as somehow realistic, but also quixotic; humane in its own misguided way, but utterly bigoted; a fair assessment of the persistence of white racism and of the poor outlook of American race relations, but also an expression of personal judgement of the worth of African Americans; and so on. In fairness, the colonization movement embodied many of these contradictions, which do require thoughtful parsing and exploration. But the problem is that historians are accordingly able to vary what colonization signifies as suits their argument about Lincoln at any point in his career. Prior to the Emancipation Proclamation, colonization appears as a troubling but respectable solution with a long political pedigree, and it is perhaps no wonder that

Lincoln reaches for it, especially since he intends to keep removal to a voluntary basis; thereafter, colonization becomes so heinous that he cannot possibly have entertained thoughts of it. Prior to emancipation, white racism is so deep that Lincoln cannot begin to hint that he will free the slaves without colonization, and perhaps deludes himself too that it must be a prerequisite; thereafter, he can begin to conceive of a biracial society, however tentatively, and the preeminent problem of other whites' attitudes simply disappears from view.

Such inconsistencies sit easily in the context of a historiography that is still geared towards a fundamentally negative approach of picking away at the significance of colonization in whatever way possible, rather than of positively offering an overarching sense of what it actually meant to Lincoln and to its other adherents. Some scholars avowedly cover their bases, which actually makes for a less convincing argument: if colonization was a public relations exercise, Lincoln stopped it from New Year 1863; or, even assuming that he had been serious, he gave up on it; or, at least it did not work out; and so on. Bizarrely, Lincoln needs rescuing from nothing so much as the condescension of his would-be defenders, who effectively call him a liar willing to risk playing with racial fire, or fundamentally deluded and irrational, or too simple-minded to have managed to juggle thoughts of colonization with alternative futures for African Americans, or even a bigot who had to substantially 'grow' in order to lose sight of colonization – in short, anything except what he actually claimed, of being a sincere colonizationist and that for good reasons. Yet we should probably get less hung up on what colonization does *not* represent, and stick our necks out a little more as to what we reckon it *does*. A useful exercise for scholars might be to consciously set themselves a question as to what they understand colonization to mean that makes it impossible that

Lincoln could have still believed in it by 1865, then to check their answer against the record of the president's own words and deeds on the matter.[4]

As the historiography shows, we need not doubt that someone who wants to lambast the hypothesis that Lincoln was indeed committed to colonization will do so with perfect eloquence and logic, albeit of a rather self-reinforcing kind. It is abundantly clear that we are naturally very good at arguing, especially against a certain proposition, and doubly so where we do not feel obliged to constructively substitute much of an alternative. Accordingly, we perhaps ought to admit that we sometimes have a weakness for elaborate and sceptical hypotheses over those that arise more obviously from the evidence, since they seem to reveal greater intelligence on our part; how could we be so naïve as to take Lincoln's appeals in favour of colonization as sincere, or others' reports of his continued interest late in the war as anything other than a pack of lies? Yet the true naivety may lie with those who cannot step back and see that such standards of doubt would simply make most of history inadmissible if applied fairly, or that we are in danger of arbitrarily homing in on real historical topics like Civil War colonization and making them a mere showcase for our powers of abstract argumentation. When such an impulse emerges from within a scholarly cohort whose other members are guaranteed to enthusiastically adopt and build upon any attempt to see Lincoln in the best possible light, it becomes all too easy for the secondary literature to get trapped in its own logical cul-de-sacs, and to assume a dynamic of its own without adequate additional primary research.

[4] Covered bases: W. L. Miller, *President Lincoln: The Duty of a Statesman* (New York, 2008), 299, 305, and his *Lincoln's Virtues* (New York, 2002), 358-9.

We need to accept that policies can be both rational and imperfect, and to channel our doubts accordingly

However much historians have come to appreciate the breadth of the mid-nineteenth century belief in colonization, its purported irrationality and suitability for psychoanalytical assessment still loom large in the Lincoln literature, especially where its depiction as a moment of near-madness allows us to see the president 'coming to his senses' in reassuringly short order after the Emancipation Proclamation. For Gabor Boritt, Lincoln's interest in colonization is a 'defense mechanism of avoidance', whilst for Michael Vorenberg – at least in his earlier work – the president becomes so convinced by the outward message of his own public relations exercise that, for the briefest of windows around New Year 1863, he truly believes that he must pursue emancipation and colonization in tight conjunction. Yet colonization was a perfectly rational belief, one that Lincoln had actually entertained for years before entering a supposed fugue on the matter during the first half of the Civil War, to say nothing of the sizable ranks of its other adherents. Quite simply, colonization offered the removal of African Americans from amongst the white population of the United States in order to address the presumed impossibility of racial co-existence. Since the foregoing description of its rationale offers a lucid explanation in words comprehensible to all, with a perfectly sound internal logic, it is difficult to see colonization as fundamentally irrational, even if we passionately dislike it.[5]

Where there is ample room for debate is on the next tier of questions: whether colonization was impractical, unrealistic, and unnecessary, and whether it was liable to

[5] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 17; R.W. Fox, 'Abraham Lincoln's Model Leader: Henry Clay', [http://www.alplm.org/blog/2011/09/abraham-lincoln's-model-leader-henry-clay/%5D] (24 Mar. 2012); G.S. Boritt, 'The Voyage to the Colony of Linconia: The Sixteenth President, Black Colonization, and the Defense Mechanism of Avoidance', *Historian*, 37 (Aug. 1975), 621-2; M. Vorenberg, 'Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization', *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 14 (Summer 1993), 40. For the rationality of colonization, see J. Lander, *Lincoln & Darwin: Shared Visions of Race, Science, and Religion* (Carbondale, 2010), 186-93.

incur insurmountable diplomatic, constitutional, political, and social complications. Indeed, both contemporaries and historians have contested the fundamental logistics of comprehensive African American colonization. Complete sceptics point to the costs of transportation and of the loss of labour, resistance on the part of both blacks and whites, and the absence of a suitable location for what would have been four and a half million emigrants by 1860; the less dismissive, to the promising precedents of a proportionately greater emigration from Ireland and of Indian Removal, which attested to the potential of both non-governmental and governmental efforts, and to the ever-present possibility of linking enforced emancipation, colonization, and slave-owner compensation to a gradualist approach, and thereby to a tax burden thinly distributed amongst a healthily increasing white population over a period of several decades. The scope for counterfactual speculation only widens when we consider the intense but abortive period of Civil War colonization activity. Was the administration's policy aiming for mass removal in the short term, or just to found a refuge to which African Americans would eventually turn of their own accord? Would black settlements have become formal colonies of the United States, or merely remained as concentrations of immigrants loyal to another polity? Might colonization have enjoyed a resurgence at some point had the wartime appropriations never been repealed, and a well-placed patron like Lincoln not died?[6]

It is impossible to answer these questions, because colonization simply never occurred on the scale that its proponents hoped; the intended methods of its advocates were thus never really put to the test. Furthermore, as those who stress the contemporary credibility of colonization would argue, the issue is perhaps not so much whether it might *actually* have worked in one form or another, as that significant

[6] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 17, 221; W.W. Freehling, '"Absurd" Issues and the Causes of the Civil War: Colonization as a Test Case', in his *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War* (New York, 1994), 138-57; L.J. Friedman, *Inventors of the Promised Land* (New York, 1975), 252-3; E. Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville, 2005), 20-1.

numbers of people at the time *believed* as much and acted accordingly. For what it is worth, it appears that Lincoln intended to foster settlements of limited size that would subsequently grow through African Americans' own migratory drive, in turn fuelled by the persistence of white prejudice and by a purported racial attraction to tropical climes (both typical colonizationist assumptions), rather than those that would require coerced migration and indefinite government support; admittedly, the suggestions contained in his second annual message looked to offer far more long-term assistance to colonization than that possible with the appropriations then available to him, however. It also seems that, from a relatively early date, the president acknowledged that such communities were to come under the jurisdiction of their host countries and not of the United States, although the diplomatic ambiguities and complications raised by the policy remained most troublesome indeed. In terms of logistics, it is unclear how Lincoln pictured any kind of mass transportation working, though we do know that there were voices in the administration calling to delay colonization to peacetime, when more ships and funds might be available, and that the president himself made some enquiries in the last year of his life as to how he might proceed in the future with the policy. That being the case, the tempting assertion that Lincoln could not have been serious in light of the anticipated numbers of emigrants, low sums of money, and flawed official arrangements in which he dabbled is misguided, for there is every suggestion that he expected colonies to build upon their initial waves of settlers. Indeed, it is actually much less persuasive to maintain that the president would have even expended as much effort as he did if he truly felt that only a few hundred or thousand African Americans would ever leave the country under the auspices of the government, especially where his public confession that he envisaged only modest quantitative beginnings for colonization severely undermined the power of the 'lullaby'.[7]

[7] *CW*, v, 371-3, 534-6. Although present in Lincoln's address to the black deputation, and more clearly expressed in his second annual message, the 'isothermal' (climatic) argument had not always been present in the president's colonizationist rationale. Indeed, it represented a

Even so, it is hard not to raise an eyebrow at what we can tell of the specifics of Lincoln's plans; that is a perfectly natural response. Although historians tend to claim that it is the moral dimension of colonization that troubles us the most, our persistent inability to fathom how the president expected it to actually work suggests that it is really the practical aspect of the policy that vexes us more than anything. As a result, much of the historiography assumes that we have simply missed ulterior plans, namely, the political lullaby, hidden beneath the surface of a blatantly unworkable idea. Even the majority of those scholars who doubt the validity of that hypothesis nevertheless reassure their readers that Lincoln learned his lesson after getting his fingers burnt in the Chiriquí and Île à Vache ventures, or that he came to see the folly of pursuing colonization alongside the worthier, rival cause of black military recruitment. These latter lines of argument sound more convincing through their even-handedness, especially since they concede the sincerity of Lincoln's pre-1863 interest in colonization. Yet in positing a linear sequence of empirical epiphanies on the president's part, and in blurring the boundary between black recruitment as a practical challenge to colonization and as an ethical one, they arguably soothe our deeply quizzical minds almost as much as does the lullaby thesis.[8]

We need to remember that policies can be flawed and politicians dogged in pursuit of them, especially where personal conviction is involved – and yet still perfectly

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somewhat unorthodox, albeit common departure amongst many Republicans in 1862, for it suggested that slavery might indeed find natural territorial limits, short of legal restriction. (M.E. Neely, Jr., 'Colonization and the Myth That Lincoln Prepared the People for Emancipation', in W.A. Blair and K.F. Younger (eds.), *Lincoln's Proclamation: Emancipation Reconsidered* (Chapel Hill, 2009), 64-5.) For an example of the kind of calculation in favour of colonization's viability that contemporaries often made, see R. Patterson to Doolittle, 15 Apr. 1862, James R. Doolittle Papers, LC. For a judicious discussion of the issue of numbers, Lincoln's unclear quantification, and the resultant confusion amongst historians, see P.S. Paludan, 'Greeley, Colonization, and a "Deputation of Negroes"', in B.R. Dirck (ed.), *Lincoln Emancipated: The President and the Politics of Race* (DeKalb, 2007), 37-40. It would just be worth adding to Paludan's assessment that most other colonizationists, whilst sometimes keeping a foot in both camps on the question of whether to aim for comprehensive sponsored removal, tended to concede that their mission was to get the ball rolling in expectation of rather more spontaneous black emigration in the future; also, that the president's grim social realism before the African American delegation and the proposals of his second annual message seemed to anticipate rather more black flight than that for which the legislation of 1862 could provide.

[8] S.B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1977), 330, 342.

short of irrationality, and with plenty of troughs and moments of doubt on their part. This point would seem to be an obvious one, but too much of the colonization literature seeks to compensate for our inability to explain quite how the policy was supposed to work by resorting to somewhat elaborate explanations, such as the lullaby thesis and Lincoln's psychological defence mechanisms, or to eminently logical suppositions about colonization's post-emancipation fate that nevertheless exclude some very awkward evidence on the matter. In a similar vein, too often the historiography criticizes the notion that Lincoln remained committed to colonization where what it really means to do is to direct its protest and incredulity against the policy itself; to put it another way, most scholarly assertions that Lincoln gave up colonization really turn out to be arguments that he *ought* to have done, on closer inspection. It may well be true that colonization denied African Americans their birthright, wasted the nation's resources, co-existed uneasily with black recruitment, was doomed through lack of African American support, 'would never have worked', or even seems so ludicrous in its very conception as to be almost risible. Intending no flippancy, that would be a matter to take up with Lincoln and other colonizationists, not with those scholars who simply record his actions. As a rule, it is unsound to put such sweeping explanations in the mouth of a historical actor who did not himself express them, and who in fact spoke and acted in ways consistent with holding beliefs to the contrary. If we do not misinterpret Lincoln's remarks against systematic deportation in his second annual message as an attack on colonization *in toto*, then we only know him to have elaborated on the logistical difficulties of the policy once, in an 1854 speech at Peoria. Yet evidently he committed much thought and effort to colonization after that date, whilst James Lander correctly perceives 'Lincoln's courtroom style, conceding numerous points in order to win one, admitting short-term difficulties but allowing the "high hope" for colonization in some "long run"', in the tenor of that address.[9]

[9] Lander, 191.

If something does not seem to add up about colonization, is not necessarily because we have failed to crack Lincoln's master plan, so much as that he did not have one. No politician has complete control over the consequences of their actions, or manages to join the dots between their individual policies and to dictate how their various measures should interact with one another, or invariably gets to undertake plans at the time that they would have wanted. In Lincoln's case, it seems that the need for wartime emancipation pressed upon him quicker than he would have liked – certainly as compared to his cherished gradualism – and reports from late 1862 and early 1863 describing him as variously wishful, optimistic, and desperate for colonization's success should probably come as no surprise. Nor should the president's protractedly mixed feelings about the air of corruption and diplomatic complication hanging over the Chiriquí and Île à Vache projects. Ironically, historians tend to describe Lincoln as beginning to 'see sense' on the illogicality of colonization around the time of the Emancipation Proclamation, but one need only read the tone of his public appeals through 1862, and acknowledge that his treaty policy would have entailed bringing colonization before the public eye again, to appreciate that he probably expected his fellow Americans to have the opposite revelation at some point.[10]

If there are aspects of Lincoln's colonization policy that we cannot explain to our satisfaction, it may not be our fault. It may not be his either, in any meaningful or helpful way, given the deluge of less than controllable developments during the war and the unknowable future that lay before him. Being able to acknowledge as much, to stifle our own doubts where the subject of our study did not apparently enunciate or act on them himself, even to hold our nerve where the source record fully supports a thesis that otherwise requires us to suspend our sheer disbelief – such are the very qualities of detachment that make a historian.

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[10] Paludan, 'Lincoln and Colonization: Policy or Propaganda?', *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 25 (Winter 2004), 23. For strong expressions of incredulity, see P.J. Parish, *The American Civil War* (New York, 1975), 242; D.B Carroll, *Henri Mercier and the American Civil War* (Princeton, 1971), 237.

We should avoid twisting politicians' words and reading too much into their silence, especially where doing so runs up against the record of their actual deeds

The literature has long evinced an interest in Lincoln's words on colonization, but over the past forty years or so, rather more in their presumed political purpose than in their actual content. Such an emphasis provides the foundations of the lullaby thesis, which has proven a persistent interpretation of Lincoln's involvement in colonization despite the recent efforts of Foner, Fredrickson, Escott, and Vorenberg to move the debate towards an acknowledgement of Lincoln's sincerity. Indeed, it remains an incredibly attractive hypothesis for several reasons. For it is surely incontestable in its central premise, that politicians appeal to the electorate for support; perfectly correct as to the simple fact of Lincoln's public silence on colonization after his second annual message; and edifyingly affirmative in its overall gist, both of the historian who cleverly sees past outward appearances to spot Lincoln's trickery, and of the president himself, who has the wits to use political deviousness of the highest sophistication for an incredibly noble cause. Above all, the lullaby thesis spares us having to address the possibility that Lincoln really believed that African Americans might not have a future in the United States. Yet it also raises significant problems that attest to the ability of Lincoln scholarship to get stuck in its own logic, especially where wishful thinking enters the picture. We can perhaps divide the thesis's flaws into three categories: its tendency towards fallacy, its misunderstanding of contemporary public opinion, and its incompatibility with the president's known colonization activity.

First, it is a self-evident universal that politicians working within a representative system of government will crave support and seek it through messages to the public. For the most part, however, they will do so in order to bolster policies in which they truly believe. Whilst we might reasonably suppose that Lincoln hoped that public opinion would stand behind the colonization plans that he announced, this should

neither come as any great surprise, nor provide grounds in itself for elevating that same observation to an understanding of what his interest in colonization was primarily about. After all, we could go down the same road for absolutely any proclaimed policy: in Lincoln's case, we might stress his announcement of imminent emancipation plans as a means to the greater end of saving the Union just as much as we emphasize how he publicized his colonization plans as a means of checking an anti-emancipation backlash. For the sake of consistency, we need to be able to apply uniform standards with respect to how we treat the sincerity of political rhetoric, and should at least concede that the yardstick that the lullaby thesis seems to employ, that Lincoln's words really mean the opposite of what they say, potentially rules out any politician ever telling the truth or revealing their sincere intent. And if it turns out that we are not willing to proceed from that assumption in most instances, we need to ask ourselves why we are so keen to proceed from it in this one. Similarly, since 'Honest Abe' enjoys a reputation to this day for straight-talking on his political beliefs, one perhaps qualified only by his judicious use of silence at points, we ought to step back and ask why we accept at face value, say, his protests as to the inherent injustice of slavery, but find ourselves turning his words on their head when it comes to a morally awkward and logistically inscrutable policy such as colonization. Otherwise, as noted, the danger is that we transform the realities of the past into a plaything for our debating skills, whilst actually failing to register that the inexorable logic of doubt means that once we have decided to look for deceit and hidden messages, we will always find them.[11]

If the foregoing covers much of the theoretical scope for misconception, just a cursory look at the specific tenets of the lullaby thesis indeed reveals positive flaws. Most obviously, there is the fact of Lincoln's longstanding interest in colonization, stretching back to when he was not even a candidate for office, let alone in government and vested with the slightest power to attack slavery. Indeed, some advocates of the

[11] Paludan, 'Policy or Propaganda?'.

lullaby thesis have acknowledged as much, but argue, on the basis of no evidence whatsoever, that the president had more or less ceased to be sincere in the meantime, or that his colonizationist noises betray at least highly convenient timing and an obvious degree of stage management. Again, the problem is that no politician will turn down an opportunity to win over the public where they think their proposal as manifestly imbued with good sense as did Lincoln colonization, so it does not necessarily detract from the president's sincerity one iota that historians accurately discern a rather predictable appeal to popular opinion on his part. To put it another way, if a hypothetically devious Lincoln would bring up colonization as a smokescreen for emancipationist manoeuvres, so would a perfectly sincere Lincoln making genuine attempts to prepare for the social fallout from the imminent liberation of three million slaves.[12]

It may not be unreasonable, then, to demand that scholars essentially commit themselves regarding the president's sincerity or insincerity, whilst of course bearing in mind that the former hardly precludes an accompanying public relations campaign, rather than keep a stabilizing foot lightly in the 'sincerity' camp whilst really leaning the other way. By extrapolation of the lullaby thesis's own logic, moreover, for Lincoln to appease broader white racism, he surely would have had to espouse compulsory, comprehensive removal, and to have done so for the duration of the innately protracted process of emancipation, rather than lay out a rather complicated vision initially involving only a handful of voluntary emigrants, and to have gone completely quiet on colonization from January 1863. Indeed, contemporary oppositional commentary voiced clear doubts about the severe limitations of colonization without compulsion, and of allowing emancipation to precede reliable plans for black removal, even as Republicans insisted that African Americans would naturally gravitate south of their own accord.

[12] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 127; L. Goldman, '"A Total Misconception": Lincoln, the Civil War, and the British, 1860-1865', in R. Carwardine and J. Sexton (eds.), *The Global Lincoln* (New York, 2011), 111.

Furthermore, racial violence in America hardly ended with the Emancipation Proclamation, as the New York Draft Riots would show, and neither did the scope for political and electoral backlash against the president and the Republican Party. Presumably, it is also the case that Lincoln would have had to make good on his words at some point with blatantly visible colonizationist deeds, so as not to anger white racists by appearing to betray their earlier trust in him. Indeed, even during the timeframe of 1862 alone, Fredrickson and Mark Neely make the case that, if anything, Lincoln's words inflamed and indirectly vindicated white racial violence.[13]

Second, by its very argument, the lullaby thesis pairs its idiosyncratic reading of Lincoln's words with a rather unquestioning assumption that white northerners were indeed clamouring for colonization as the prerequisite of emancipation. At an abstract level, the latter argument seems perfectly reasonable, even quite compelling; after all, colonization had represented a moderate and conciliatory solution during antebellum times, one that offered to take the sting out of the tail of mooted emancipation plans by removing from the United States any African Americans thus freed. One can duly find a handful of contemporaries in the sources opining that colonization would indeed provide the Republican Party with a useful means of distracting the public's attention from issues of emancipation and race, although the fact that such commentary also emanated from Democrats suggests that the opposition was hardly incapable of seeing through the veil of such a ruse.[14]

Yet there is actually little suggestion in the sources that any significant number of white Americans felt that the wartime colonization schemes and immediate, military emancipation, which was perhaps not so obviously akin to the pre-war gradualism with

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[13] J. Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (New York, 2007), 193-4; Dirck, *Abraham Lincoln and White America* (Lawrence, 2012), 128; 'Negro Slavery and the Civil War', *Danville Quarterly Review* (Dec. 1862), 688-90, 707; Neely, 49-51; G.M. Fredrickson, *Big Enough to Be Inconsistent: Abraham Lincoln Confronts Slavery and Race* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), 111.

[14] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 126; Boritt, 628, where he attributes the coinage of 'lullaby' in this context to a Democratic congressman. This fact alone surely reflects poorly on the potency of the purported public relations exercise and, accordingly, on the explanatory power of the lullaby thesis itself.

which colonization had generally been associated, really constituted two halves of the same walnut. Just recently, Neely has employed newspaper databank search tools to find that most journalists expressed only incredulity, doubt, or hostility towards colonization, in the minority of cases where they touched on it at all in their discussion of emancipation. In reality, he explains, the press was too sharply partisan to offer the brand of moderation that presumably looked to both emancipation and colonization: Republican organs already accepted emancipation, and their coverage of the president's colonization schemes ranged from weakly favourable to somewhat embarrassed, whilst Neely finds literally no example of Democratic commentary suggesting that colonization had somehow palliated an erstwhile opposition to something as heinous as the slated emancipation measures. (Indeed, it seems that there was much for Democrats to dislike about a proposal that promised to enlarge the national tax burden and widen the scope of the federal government.) In short, there was no perceptible constituency that expressed grave concerns about freeing the slaves whilst also regarding the president's colonization plans as a credible answer thereto. Although any study based on newspapers must invite some routine questions about the balance that exists in the press between attempts to reflect and to mould public opinion, the systematic basis of Neely's findings is nevertheless striking; moreover, the many months of immersion in newspapers, and especially in manuscript collections, that underpins this thesis fully lends itself to the same conclusion.[15]

Since the foregoing argument might appear to question one of the central assumptions as to the place of colonization in wider public opinion, not just during the

[15] Neely, 53-7; 'The Civil War in America', London *Times*, 15 Nov. 1862; J. Brooks, *The Two Proclamations* (New York, 1862), 5. My own very rough approximation of the number of apparently disinterested (i.e. non-contractor and non-career colonizationist) opinions on colonization that I have encountered in the press and in manuscript collections is perhaps one hundred and fifty to two hundred. Of these, just two express the kind of sentiment that underpins the lullaby thesis, one positively, the other more as a warning that emancipation without colonization was unacceptable; neither post-dates early 1862, moreover, and thus the political stakes were lower than they would be later that year. (C.H. Schaeffer to McPherson, 16 Dec. 1861, Edward McPherson Papers, LC; Resolutions of the Tammany Hall Young Men's Democratic Club, 13 Mar., in 'Twenty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society', *Liberator*, 16 May 1862.)

Civil War, but also during the antebellum period, it is important to reiterate that there were indeed plenty of supporters of colonization other than Lincoln. Rather, it is more the case that such figures did not necessarily make a connection between that policy and executive or federal emancipation, as opposed to states' home-grown efforts, or of the administration's choice of Central America rather than Liberia, in the case of the established colonization movement. In fact, a certain disjuncture is in evidence: abolitionists, the strongest supporters of emancipation, opposed colonization except where grudgingly making concessions to its supporters within the Republican Party, whilst plenty of colonizationists and even contractors who stood to benefit from resettlement schemes were more or less conservative, and at the very least uncomfortable with the Emancipation Proclamation. Viewed one way, an acknowledgment of the limits of public support for Lincoln's colonization plans, at least in the form and context in which he presented them, does not in itself logically preclude the motives suggested by the lullaby thesis, and in theory might point to nothing more than his mere misreading of the public pulse. But it still severely weakens an argument based on the supposition that the president acted on what he actually heard when he placed his ear to the ground. Moreover, his own silence on colonization after the second annual message suggests that he ultimately took the correct hint as to wider sentiment respecting colonization.[16]

Third, the lullaby thesis simply does not tally with what we know of Lincoln's wartime colonization activity. Just as it puts a counter-intuitive and unfounded slant on

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[16] Neely, 56; L.A. Williams, 'Northern Intellectual Reaction to the Policy of Emancipation', *Journal of Negro History*, 46 (Apr. 1961), 180-2; J.M. McPherson, 'Abolitionist and Negro Opposition to Colonization During the Civil War', *Phylon*, 26 (4th Qtr., 1965), 391-9. Colonizationists and contractors unhappy at emancipation included Secretary of the Interior Caleb Smith and Richard Thompson, who pressed for the adoption of the Chiriquí project, Anna Ella Carroll, for a scheme in British Honduras, Hiram Ketchum, for St Domingo, and several figures in the African colonization movement. (J.P. Usher and N.H. Loomis, *President Lincoln's Cabinet* (Omaha, 1925), 17; 'Emancipation Proclamation: "A Still Further Step – Beyond the Law"', *Lincoln Lore* (Jan. 1959), 1-4; C.K. Larson, *Great Necessities: The Life, Times and Writings of Anna Ella Carroll* (Philadelphia, 2004), 416-22; A.E. Carroll to Lincoln, 15 Apr. 1862, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Brown University*; SED 55*, 30-1; H. Ketchum to Crittenden, 12 Dec. 1862, John J. Crittenden Papers, LC.)

the president's actual words, and jumps to an understandable but factually doubtful conclusion as to their public reception, so when it comes to his later silence on colonization, it also has to make tortuous assumptions attributing that newfound reticence to an earlier insincerity or to a damascene conversion over a policy that he had until recently endorsed as earnestly as anyone could. Indeed, it is quite important to tackle head-on this issue of the presumed significance of Lincoln's sudden silence on colonization, for several scholars who actually reject the lullaby thesis and stress his sincerity, such as Fredrickson and Foner, nevertheless dwell curiously within its shadow, and argue that he would have continued to speak on colonization if his support for the policy had not in fact been trickling away, even if to something more like a vague, perhaps mid-1863 demise, rather than a conscious and decisive repudiation that New Year. In essence, it appears that Lincoln's words and not his deeds are still the real indicator of his thoughts. More accurately, not his words themselves – had scholars simply drawn the obvious inferences from what Lincoln actually said on colonization, there would have been no problem – but it is an absence of words that is particularly portentous. Like some kind of colonization canary, the president must keep singing about the policy to all and sundry, otherwise we can reliably tell that events have stifled it. This interpretive need for Lincoln to keep speaking on colonization is a strange one, because we would surely laugh at the general notion that politicians will keep the public updated on all the measures that they are currently pursuing. Yet for several reasons – a failure to shake off the tendencies of the dominant literature, a certain preference for Lincoln's public rhetoric stemming from our admiration for his oratorical skills, and a relative over-reliance on the message-heavy *Collected Works* – such an assumption passes as a sort of tacit orthodoxy on this topic.[17]

[17] Fredrickson, 112-14; Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 258, 312. Even Boritt conceded that Lincoln might have continued to investigate colonization as late as his meeting with Butler, but stressed the primacy of the fact that any activity after 1862 occurred in private. (Boritt, 629.)

Indeed, one need only outline two contrasting versions of events from late 1862 in order to illustrate just how much we truly suppress our gut instincts through our thrall to the notion that Lincoln would have continued to make noises on colonization had it remained important to him. On the one hand, let us say, the policy was only ever a ruse; or at least, as per a psychometric interpretation of the president's sudden lack of colonization commentary, it was sincere but in terminal decline from January 1863. If the first argument is correct, that the whole business was a public relations exercise intended to pave the way for a final version of the Emancipation Proclamation that Lincoln already knew would not – and by his calculation, presumably did not need to – include colonization, it is certainly rather strange that he threw himself into secretly arranging a contract for Île à Vache just hours before putting his pen to that document. Both lines of argument also run into difficulties when they reach the point where Lincoln put substantial effort into rearranging and despatching that expedition in April 1863, for not only does the extent of his personal involvement rule out any suggestion that its departure was some kind of unthinking throwback to the original contract, but, awkwardly enough for an episode that is supposed to represent the mere vestiges of the president's earlier conservatism, it actually marks the federal government's first ever African American resettlement venture. Indeed, the lullaby thesis is already in severe distress, for the Île à Vache project occurred in as much secrecy as the administration could muster, and therefore with none of the fanfare that that interpretation requires in order to stand up. Furthermore, we know that news of the settlement's woes had reached Lincoln by early July and caused him genuine anguish, but also that he monitored the situation and only recalled the emigrants once an additional seven months had elapsed. Thus, it seems difficult to take his outward silence as evidence that colonization policy had somehow fallen off his personal radar, unless we prefer to see him as wittingly neglectful. All the foregoing is only to draw on the intuitive observations arising from a scheme that scholars already knew about, too. It takes

nothing from the far more ambitious second wave of imperial schemes, or from the small but assuredly existent evidentiary record on colonization for the last year of Lincoln's life.[18]

So, on the other hand, let us suggest that when Lincoln ceased to publicize a policy that he had openly supported for years, and which had recently brought forth some of his most memorable rhetoric in his second annual message, it was probably not because other people's hostility and indifference to the measure had helped him suddenly see the light. Indeed, adherents of the lullaby thesis can at least agree on that much, since from their point of view, Lincoln was in fact trying to *influence* the opinion of a racist, colonization-hungry public, rather than taking his cue from their opposition to the policy. Rather, with perfect consciousness of what he was doing, the president simply stopped talking about colonization because to do otherwise seemed to proffer no further benefit for the time being. After all, it is hard to imagine how Lincoln was supposed to surpass a year of repeated appeals for colonization that had culminated in a call for its incorporation in the very charter of the nation as a constitutional amendment, a procedure that had occurred just twice since the Bill of Rights, and on both occasions for significantly less contentious matters. As the president had said in that message, he could not make it any better known, than it already was, that he strongly favoured colonization. Instead, we might consider looking to the obvious reason for a politician's sudden silence on a favourite policy: a poor public response to their earlier efforts on its behalf. Actually, this is not mere speculation, for we know that in early 1863, the president referred to Montgomery Blair as his 'only friend' when it came to his propositions of the previous December; it also seems that Lincoln deliberately tried to

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P.D. Escott, *"What Shall We Do with the Negro?": Lincoln, White Racism, and Civil War America* (Charlottesville, 2009), 241. See also chapter 4 of this study.

hide his work on Île à Vache from all members of the cabinet except for Blair and the diplomatically indispensable Seward.[19]

Furthermore, although Lincoln had indeed aimed for additional legislative and constitutional endorsement of colonization, and apparently hoped to run emigration treaties past Congress at some point in the future, it was perfectly possible for him to keep pursuing the policy under the colonization legislation of 1862, which had charged the office of the president with such a task and credited it with hundreds of thousands of dollars in appropriations to that end. As events would show, the administration could do plenty on its own: make diplomatic overtures and arrange treaties for eventual presentation to the Senate, issue orders to the commanders of 'contraband' camps to allow canvassing agents to recruit settlers from amongst their numbers, meet African American emigrationists, and negotiate contracts or institute agencies that involved the disbursement of significant sums. Granted, Lincoln encountered internal resistance from Stanton, Seward, and Usher, abstained or refrained from exercising some of the powers listed above, and ultimately did not submit the Dutch treaty – but this all stemmed from the resistance of others, not for want of desire on his part, had he been able to work in a vacuum in which such figures did not thwart him. Even after he had gone quiet on colonization, Lincoln acted on the altogether respectable range of powers that he enjoyed, and he did so with the mixture of persistence, adaptiveness, frustration, moments of greater input, moments of lesser input, and eventual acceptance of the cumulative effect of opposition to colonization, that one might expect from a politician pursuing a fraught and divisive policy alongside pressing matters of state. And although he largely did so *in* private, we should avoid describing the president's efforts as flatly 'private' where he undertook them through and by dint of his office. Whilst Lincoln's understanding of the mechanics of his own colonization policy does seem to have

[19] K.R.C. Gutzman, 'Abraham Lincoln, Jeffersonian: The Colonization Chimera', in Dirck, *Lincoln Emancipated*, 71; *CW*, v, 530, 534; T.H. Hicks to M. Blair, 9 Apr. 1863, Addition II, BF; J.T. Doyle, 'An Episode of the Civil War', *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine*, 9 (May 1887), 539-41.

involved eventually winning it greater congressional, electoral and African American approval than it had hitherto enjoyed, we should remember that he was able to go underground with colonization until such time as others might turn to it. Indeed, working from the rough date at which administration colonization activity dried up, the policy's stagnation seems to have lain as much with behind-the-scenes divisions in the administration as with the putative indifference of a wider public to the idea.

Of course, it is still significant that the president went quiet after saying so much to the nation on colonization, but only for the straightforward reason other than that of actually giving up the policy. Indeed, it truly betrays the straitjacketing effect of a rhetoric-centred literature, that we fail to discern what someone completely unfamiliar with the historiography would suggest almost immediately if we presented them with the simple facts. By its own logic, an argument that emphasizes the pre-eminence of message over actual policy content may make perfect sense, although the difference as to Lincoln's sincerity between the 'lullaby' and the 'silence as a reflection of dwindling commitment' interpretations shows that inference from a lack of words can nevertheless produce highly divergent conclusions. Yet therein lies the problem: such analysis only works where we take it as read that policies are indeed primarily about their accompanying messages. Like any other political programme, wartime colonization involved a mixture of announced activity and dealings behind closed doors; just as with any other, the balance lay overwhelmingly towards the latter, although one would struggle to believe it from the content of the typical narrative on Lincoln and colonization.

Effectively, there is something rather self-reinforcing between the 'rhetorical' approach and our tendency to call colonization's demise around the time of the Emancipation Proclamation. Assuming from his abrupt absence of words that Lincoln had not really supported – or had at least now abandoned – colonization, we do not bother to stray far from the *Collected Works* in the direction of the files of the National

Archives, the manuscript collections, or the miscellaneous memoirs that might have reminded us of the day-to-day side of policymaking. Thus, we unsurprisingly find that Lincoln's colonization 'activity' essentially dries up after his last public words on the matter in December 1862. Likewise, we keenly point to the presumed significance of Lincoln's removal of colonization between the preliminary and final versions of the Emancipation Proclamation, but it is only because we are already working from the assumption that that the president did indeed drop colonization that we find ourselves able to single out that development without acknowledging several other significant edits that were merely cosmetic or themselves less than portentous; notably, whilst slaveholder compensation also failed to make the cut of a final proclamation more focussed than that of September on the niceties of military necessity, we know that Lincoln remained interested in that possibility all the way down to 1865.[20]

By way of conclusion, it may well be difficult to surpass Paludan's succinctness: '[w]e might note that through much of 1863 and 1864, while Lincoln stopped talking publicly about colonization, he was acting to do it.' Again, the scholarship is in need of nothing so much as a recalibration towards greater simplicity and intuitiveness, away from convoluted explanations of elaborate but flawed ruses, psychological defence mechanisms, and politicians who cannot stop themselves openly revealing everything that they do.[21]

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[20] A.C. Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York, 2004), 178-81; Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 240-4; Escott, 208-15; *CW*, v, 433-6, vi, 23-6, 28-31; Vorenberg, 'After Emancipation: Abraham Lincoln's Black Dream', in J.Y. Simon et al. (eds.), *Lincoln Revisited: New Insights from the Lincoln Forum* (New York, 2007), 218-19.
[21] Paludan, 'Policy or Propaganda?', 35-6.

We need to treat the relationship between ideas and plans on the one hand, and actual results on the other, carefully and with consistency

Colonization is a prime example of an idea that managed to hold great sway in its time but that evidently never worked out on the scale that its advocates desired. Wartime colonization is perhaps an even better microcosm of the same phenomenon, since it appealed to an arguably wider audience and received greater political endorsement than the traditional colonization movement, yet did not even produce one permanent settlement such as Liberia to show for it. As such, the topic raises key questions about the historical significance of an impetus that ended up with so few results for the disproportionately greater interest that contemporaries manifested therein.

To some extent, this type of problem is a balancing-act. Accounts that stress ideas to the exclusion of outcomes may provide a fascinating intellectual history that nevertheless struggles to justify its wider relevance or its placement within a political narrative, whilst those that stress only outcomes to the exclusion of ideas run the risk of teleology, of an unsatisfying emphasis on cause and effect, and of a denial of the place of contingency. Unsurprisingly, as with any other topic, a passable analysis of colonization must lie somewhere broadly in-between those extremes. Incontestably, a sincere belief in the prospects of African American colonization would have influenced the political, social, and racial outlook of its adherents, though generally in ways too mechanistically removed from their self-perception to find explicit expression in the source record. Naturally, in what manner and to what extent such an interchange occurred provides a legitimate matter for debate. Yet on balance, the American Civil War is surely one of those historical topics where we do struggle to truly purge our minds of what happened next – namely, the civil rights advances of Reconstruction – and to recollect that imperfect, human participants were entering thoroughly uncharted waters, or where we find it hard to avoid superimposing a rather progressive, even redemptive narrative on a

matter such as race relations. As such, the danger of writing out an option that seemed perfectly credible to many contemporaries is probably greater than that of playing it up, especially where the prospect of its success might have had an impact on their approach to other issues.

There is also a simpler matter to consider concerning plans and outcomes, that of the relative weight we put on each when we treat them in isolation. Whether rightly or wrongly, the literature places great emphasis on what we can tell of the thought, plans, and personal prognostications of Abraham Lincoln, even where they played out to little practical result. We revel in Lincoln anecdote, myth, legend, and even physical collectibles associated with the man that offer no analytical insight. It would be really quite inconsistent to turn around and downplay the significance of colonization if it became apparent that the president had sincerely believed in it, and that in all likelihood, he never stopped doing so. It is just too disingenuous to propose three cheers for Lincoln abjuring colonization and growing in moral stature to become a better human being, then to propose three more when we concede that actually, perhaps he did not, but thank goodness that the policy became unworkable, or at least that he initiated other measures that undermined it, and so on. If we deem residual colonizationist convictions on his part irrelevant or tangential at best, we should have the integrity to follow through and reconsider the merits of the biographical and intellectual approaches altogether.

The predilections of the literature are so slanted towards minimization of Lincoln's colonization record that some have also completely blurred the difference between intent and outcome in order to claim that, had he really cared about colonization, he would have done more to further it, or arranged for higher numbers of emigrants, and so forth. That is an instinctively tempting line of argument, albeit one that sounds more persuasive to our own doubtful minds than when laid down and rationalized on paper. Indeed, maintaining a mental wall of fire between plans and

results is one of those things that the discipline of history so often demands of us, and yet which we so frequently struggle to achieve. Leaving aside the fact that Lincoln did indeed expect his anticipated African American settlements to grow in size, and that the policy seems to have stalled primarily for want of support from others and not from the president himself, there is clearly something rather forced, unreal, and retrospective about arguing that somebody's failure to do their utmost somehow inverts the outward significance of their actions. Discerning a trait of self-sabotage on the part of a historical figure, or their failure to deploy an ill-defined godlike power to make their plans come to maturity, may provide rather more insight on just how little we have really managed to reconcile the person we want them to be with who they actually were.[22]

Furthermore, we should be careful about downplaying fruitless colonization plans where what we regard as the crowning glory of Lincoln's racial policies, his late advocacy of a limited black suffrage, was also an idea that ended up without directly attributable result, and indeed one that he advocated in far more tentative terms than he ever had colonization. If we prefer to see Lincoln as merely 'flirting' with colonization throughout his presidency, consistency demands that we accept that he barely shot black enfranchisement a quick glance across a crowded dance floor. It would be rather selective to argue that it is the thought that counts when a historical figure dabbles in something with which we sympathize, but to demand actual results before we take one of their less savoury pursuits seriously. Although it represented a minuscule proportion of the black population, perhaps the fact that Lincoln was responsible for even the temporary resettlement of four hundred and fifty African Americans should not invite the derisive snorts at the pettiness of it all that it often does, given that that number still represents four hundred and fifty more than those enfranchised under his auspices, a total that was in turn unlikely to change unless he had brought himself to surrender

[22] M.W. Fitzgerald, '*Colonization after Emancipation*' (review), *American Historical Review*, 116 (Oct. 2011), 1137-8; F.J. Williams, 'A Look at Lincoln: Lincoln and Slavery', [http://www.cwbr.com/index.php?q=4971&field=ID&browse=yes&record=full&searching=yes&Submit=Search] (25 Mar. 2012).

some of his crucial constitutional reservations. Whatever protests such a comparison inspires – that Lincoln's plans were unclear at the time of his death, that other political forces and institutions placed checks on him, or that his words were at least responsible for fortifying a wider sentiment in favour of what he spoke up for – apply just as much to colonization as to more uplifting developments. Such being the case, an investigation of the presumed relationship between colonization and other policies may be in order.

We must be cautious and consistent in how we link colonization to other policies and developments

Overall, the literature on Civil War colonization evinces a disquieting tendency towards intellectual binaries or at least unrealistically oppositional, mono-causal statements. In an example that we have already noted, since Lincoln advertises his colonizationist credentials to a wider audience and surely hopes that others will support him, the policy must be a ruse rather than sincere. Likewise, when the president hopes that holding out an offer of immigrant labour to the European empires might also tie them to the cause of the Union, the latter concern is clearly the main one rather than an afterthought or a fortunate by-product. In essence, Lincoln can only ever kill one bird with one stone; reassuringly, his real aim is the ostensibly peripheral one rather than that he actually claims, of encouraging African Americans to leave the United States. This polarized reasoning extends to motivation as well as to the actual execution of the policy, even though the nuances of the mainstream colonizationist rationale mean that it is about the last subject to lend itself to this approach. Either Lincoln is an inveterately racist deportationist, or he is not really a colonizationist at all, whether through deliberately misleading others or genuinely deceiving himself. Colonization seemingly cannot be a realistic appraisal of the persistence of white racism, or a somewhat middling position

on the racialist spectrum that admitted of distantly innate black equality once isolated from a 'superior' race.[23]

The reductionist logic of mutual exclusion also provides what is probably the most important prop to the argument that Lincoln abandoned colonization: that demand for black labourers and especially for black soldiers after the Emancipation Proclamation illustrated the folly of sending manpower abroad, whilst black military deeds and personal encounters with African Americans came to impress the president so much that ultimately, he looked to black suffrage and to the stirrings of a racially integrated society. In short, Lincoln drops colonization as part of his moral 'growth' and of his empirical learning curve, an argument most obviously associated with Eric Foner since the publication of *The Fiery Trial*, but which represents what has probably now become the prevalent scholarly view, albeit one less compatible with the lullaby thesis and the crafty 'secret Lincoln' than many of that school have yet conceded.[24]

The concepts of 'growth', 'progress', 'leftward shift', and their variants all offer an appealing, apparently convincing view of Lincoln's approach to race and slavery. After all, they do acknowledge the low points of the president's earlier statements and deeds, though if anything, scholars overstate gravity of these in order to strengthen the contrast between the immature and mature Lincoln that the trajectory of 'growth' requires. (When it comes to colonization in particular, historians have dug themselves into a hole by suggesting that the policy was reprehensible but also that Lincoln ultimately repudiated it, for there was surely always a better argument that his real greatness lay in coming to entertain thoughts of improved rights for African Americans whilst having *not* dropped old ways of thinking.) Furthermore, we should always applaud attempts at synthesis through the lens of an accessible and heuristic theme,

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[23] Diplomatic motivation: Fitzgerald, '*Colonization after Emancipation*', 1138; H. Holzer, 'Did Lincoln Want to Ship Out Blacks?', *Civil War Times*, 50 (Oct. 2011), 73.

[24] Since the crucial point is that we are supposed to feel the edifying closure of Lincoln having become a better person by his death, the 'secret Lincoln' and 'evolving Lincoln' approaches split the difference more than they ought to. (M. Lind, Letters, *New York Review of Books*, 26 Apr. 2007, commenting on McPherson, 'What Did He Really Think About Race?', in ibid., 29 Mar. 2007.)

even where it has to take minor liberties. Yet the narrative of 'growth' just ties together too many developments whose connections are not so obvious on closer inspection, not least because the moral judgment implicit in that notion offers a sizable entering-wedge to anachronistic, modern standards that contemporaries did not necessarily apply themselves. In weighing up the overall mixture of retrograde and progressive aspects to the president's thinking, it recalls a common but intellectually limiting habit of compiling a mental 'Lincoln – for and against' list. 'Growth' also has to take several eminently disprovable assumptions as read: that Lincoln was personally bigoted or at least prejudiced, that his racial policies stemmed primarily from his prejudice, and that his policies interacted flawlessly with each other as per a perfect practical command of how to implement a unitary and overarching personal vision. Even some of those who contest 'growth' bind themselves to its conceptual framework by simply questioning the degree to which Lincoln grew, rather than by opening up new axes of argument, such as whether a pragmatic statesman could really let himself act on whatever inner growth he might have experienced whilst having to bear other political forces and actors in mind, or how much that same figure mentally bracketed certain policies together so as to leave them subject to similar departures in personal ideology.

Indeed, we do not have to pick away at the thread of growth that much to feel its fibres start to unravel somewhat. There is no need to detract from Lincoln's powerful sense of conviction, his heartfelt praise for the performance of black troops, or his personal courteousness towards African Americans to see that his legacy by 1865 was essentially one of successful prosecution of a war that he had come to regard as ending an institution that he had always hated, albeit one against which he would not always have struck in the way that he now did, rather than that of a significant new departure in the area of black rights other than the negative liberty of personal freedom. We need not deny that the most racist of Lincoln's peers opposed all suggestions of black enlistment, war emancipation, permanent abolition, or any extension of black rights whatsoever, in

order to discern that, conversely, their more enlightened contemporaries might not have tied such developments so closely together in their minds, or that they might have supported some of those measures significantly more than they did others. With a little reflection, it may not be that hard to perceive that we are in danger of conflating the pragmatic and moral challenges that black recruitment posed to colonization, or that when we make an argument about the fate of colonization that falls back on Lincoln's rapport with Frederick Douglass or a wishful editorial in *The Liberator*, we may be skirting around the matter and letting a rather high-flying and rigidly conceptual framework of 'growth' drive our selection of the evidence rather than vice-versa.

In a similar spirit, several scholars have recently called for redoubled caution respecting the connections that we make when it comes to mid-nineteenth century thinking on slavery and race, and thus to break free of certain historiographical tendencies harking back to the civil rights era. 'Race is our obsession, not Lincoln's … Many aspects of the slavery controversy … were only marginally related to race', writes Foner, although his theme of growth ultimately prevents him heeding his own warning; with reference to 1863 onwards in particular, he must connect some rather disparate and tentative developments. 'One of the most striking conclusions that a close reading of Lincoln's speeches and writings yielded to me was that "slavery," "race" and "colonization," were quite often three separate issues for him', adds Gates. 'Sometimes these issues were intertwined in Lincoln's thinking, but far more often they seem to have remained quite distinct, even if we have difficulty in understanding or explaining how this could have been so.' (Gates here echoes an earlier point, about having to be able to suppress our doubts and not demanding that historical actors, or by extension the scholars researching them, have a perfect sense of how something was supposed to work.) We need not deny that Lincoln had come round to various stances by the end of the war that he would not have publicly entertained at its beginning, such as his advocacy of the abolition of slavery, his praise for those African Americans who were in

arms, and his tentative interest in black enfranchisement. Yet growth in this sense appears to be more of a retrospective, 'balance sheet' appraisal than a causal impetus actually driving the president's behaviour. We might do better to compartmentalize such developments to a greater degree than we currently do, on account of the unevenness of how far 'leftwards' – if that is even the correct word – Lincoln had gone on each of them, and especially in light of his not avowedly connecting the dots between them or chalking them up to a personal ethical reckoning himself. All the evidence suggests that Lincoln simply thought that colonization was a good idea and that it should accordingly enjoy official support.[25]

Yet colonization is actually at the forefront of the redemptive narrative of an ever-growing Lincoln, with some of the most recent literature's greater acceptance of the president's erstwhile sincerity simply making it all the more poignant when that same narrative has him cast off the policy. Whilst the historiography struggles to break free, however, from the assumption that colonization was fundamentally an embodiment of Lincoln's prejudices – and concomitantly, its apparent disappearance a mark of his inner growth – the president's own words and the recollections of those around him simply do not attest to his having made or acted upon such an equation. Even if broad swathes of public opinion attacked the impracticality and poor timing of the policy, it was only those of an abolitionist bent who framed colonization primarily in the moral terms recognizable to us, and they neither dictated administration policy nor necessarily spoke for others in affirming that the march of events would discredit colonization, however much we want to agree with them.

Whilst the president left us a lot fewer of his thoughts on race relations and black rights than he did on slavery, there is a strikingly recurrent theme that runs throughout the evidential record wherever it explicitly addresses such issues, from his speeches at Peoria (1854) and Charleston (1858), through his address to the black

[25] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 120; H.L. Gates, Jr., *Lincoln on Race and Slavery* (Princeton, 2009), xx.

delegation (1862), various private remarks to a number of people who actually witnessed him up close over the course of the war, and down to his contentious meetings with Benjamin Butler just days short of his death (April 1865). The common thread is that of the president's fixation on the breadth, depth, and persistence of white racism, with hints of increasing worries about its potential for violence by the second half of the war, and on the inability of political, legal, and constitutional measures to transform deep-rooted social attitudes. Even on the only recorded occasion where Lincoln admitted that his own prejudices limited his vision of black rights, his emphasis was really on how his feelings accorded with what he understood to be a universal sentiment.[26]

During the last five years alone, a noteworthy string of historians have identified and elaborated upon this fatalistic and resigned streak in Lincoln's thinking, one that was curiously deferential to the assumed will and prejudices of the majority on the matter of wider race relations in a way that he clearly did not countenance when it came to the expansion of the institution of slavery. Although perhaps not as simplistically 'bad' as Lincoln turning to colonization out of personal bigotry, such a suggestion makes it harder to shake off the case for his continued interest in the policy – and as opponents of colonization argued, such Pilate-like submission to discrimination also vindicated others' racism and raised the temperature for African Americans. Paul Escott, James Oakes, Michael Vorenberg, George Fredrickson, and Eric Foner have all entertained the 'wider racism' line of argument, although only the first three follow through with their reasoning to suggest that Lincoln probably never gave up thoughts of colonization, even if such concerns promised to bear little fruit by 1865. Fredrickson and Foner introduce similar ideas, but are ultimately rather torn and recur to the familiar narrative of the significance of black military service from the Emancipation Proclamation onwards; once again, what colonization is supposed to represent changes significantly from 1863

[26] *CW*, ii, 255-6, iii, 145-6, v, 371-2.

in order to support 'growth'. Yet this is one of the points on which we need to press scholars to come down more or less on one side or the other, for if colonization reflects a pessimistic, hard-headed calculation of other people's racism, where does personal growth even enter into it? Any attempt to straddle these alternatives comes curiously close to a sort of messianic narrative in which, like Christ dying for all our sins, Lincoln somehow grows on behalf of those untouched millions who know not how to.[27]

Laying aside the notion of colonization as a reflection of Lincoln's presumed racism, and of its demise as a hitherto lacking affirmation of African American worth, we must therefore ask how other policies and developments might have more practically sealed its fate. The traditional narrative is one of how a labour-hungry country's continued demand for workers, and especially the army's needs for black recruits, exposed the sheer idiocy of the idea. As noted, though, we must beware the siren call of the words 'simply could not have' where the evidence suggests otherwise. For the sake of this exercise, we should stick to the parameters of recruitment as a practical, political challenge to colonization, and not as a moral one, for there is no evidence that the president viewed them as ethically antithetical. And on that score, the literature falls back too easily on 'either/or' propositions that just do not ring true of the sheer complexity of human thought and behaviour in general, let alone of the outlook of a contemplative, cautious man who displayed a broadly middle-of-the-road understanding of race relations and who had to navigate his way in a fast-changing and unpredictable world.[28]

Without ever losing his moral compass on the wrong of slavery, the president always showed himself quite a juggler and pragmatist with respect to his understanding

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[27] Escott, 24, 224; Oakes, 'Natural Rights, Citizenship Rights, States' Rights, and Black Rights: Another Look at Lincoln and Race', in Foner (ed.), *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World* (New York, 2008), 111, 130; Vorenberg, 'Abraham Lincoln's "Fellow Citizens" – Before and After Emancipation', in Blair, *Lincoln's Proclamation*, 158; Fredrickson, *Big Enough*, 110-11, 113-14; Foner, 'Lincoln's Evolving Thoughts on Slavery, And Freedom', [http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=130489804] (24 Mar. 2012): 'Lincoln said the reason they should leave is white people are so racist that blacks will never be accorded equality in this country.'

[28] Escott, 216-18.

of various options lying before him. Even if his contemporaries and historians have deemed some of his preferences rather impractical – and perhaps rightly so – the point is nevertheless that such inclinations at least grew from what Lincoln himself claimed to be an empiricist, non-dogmatic mindset. For example, he evinced a passionate interest in compensated, gradual emancipation which both pre-dated and ran concurrently with the immediate freedom for the slaves of rebels that he laid down in the preliminary and final versions of the Emancipation Proclamation. Indeed, the content and timing of his second annual message, and of his remarks in cabinet on compensation in February 1865 – to say nothing of what transpired at Hampton Roads to elicit them – defy any attempt to discern either a complete shift in Lincoln's mind between an earlier, moderate antislavery vision and a more unconditional strain embodied in the Emancipation Proclamation, or a clear-cut distinction on his part between the institution in the loyal and the disloyal slave states. In a similar vein, the president's approach to reconstruction showed a characteristic aversion to being 'inflexibly committed to any single plan of restoration' and to 'pernicious abstraction' in general. As regards colonization specifically, Lincoln managed to look to several schemes simultaneously, putting significant effort into the Chiriquí, Île à Vache, and 'imperial' ventures during late 1862 and early 1863. Several times, he spoke of the policy as an experimental one, albeit one for which he held high hopes. Although this was an attitude that brought disaster to the settlers of Île à Vache, it rings true of someone willing to try a range of different resettlement locations and thereby to give would-be emigrants a meaningful choice of destination.[29]

Other historians have also commented on Lincoln's empiricist streak, but such an observation on its own evidently does not lead to a consensual conclusion, since most scholars regard the Chiriquí and Île à Vache ventures as having been more than sufficient to administer the pertinent lessons to the president as to the viability of

[29] See chapters 3 and 4, and also J.J. Barnes and P.P. Barnes, *The American Civil War Through British Eyes* (3 vols., Kent, Ohio, 2003-05), ii, 278, 308.

colonization *in toto*. For Foner in particular, one of the hallmarks of Lincoln's capacity for growth is that he was always able to move on from something that had been shown to be impractical, and to think anew. Whilst agreeing that the president displayed a remarkable experimental streak, this study respectfully dissents in suggesting that that trait was somewhat more dogged than conventional accounts argue. For someone who had believed in colonization for many years, the obvious lesson of the first wave of wartime schemes was not to abandon the policy, but to implement some of the changes duly witnessed in the second. Very little about Lincoln points to a man who liked to put all his eggs in one basket, or to hold an option 'for nought' where he could at least keep it open.[30]

Thus, assuming that colonization was neither an unadulterated expression of personal prejudice nor an idea destined to disappear in some kind of political universe where there exists only stark contradiction between potentially conflicting measures, what were the actual effects of the war against whose backdrop the administration pursued the policy? On the one hand, it is perfectly reasonable to continue to point to the detrimental effect of black recruitment. Although the Emancipation Proclamation did not mark a personal egalitarian epiphany for the president, or seemingly prevent him from trying to raise both black soldiers and black emigrants over the course of 1863, we should still remember the importance of the needs of the US army, albeit alongside a consideration of the demands of the civilian labour market too. Even if the president left no comment on the matter, we know that, within the administration, Stanton and Usher tried to thwart colonization on military grounds, to say nothing of the possible effect on Lincoln of growing voices of opposition outside the cabinet as well.

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[30] Foner, 'Lincoln's Evolving Thoughts': '[I]f there's one element of greatness in Lincoln, it's this willingness to change, this ability to grow, this not being … wedded to a policy once it is proven to have failed. And Lincoln has this tremendous open-mindedness, this willingness to listen to criticism and this … ability to change his course when he sees that the old policy is just not working.'

On the other hand, a situation in which colonization does not suffer repudiation outright, but rather stalls under the pressures of war, clearly raises several key questions. First, we have to acknowledge the importance of factors other than the attractive and inspirational cause of African American recruitment, to wit, Lincoln's frustration at the infighting, corruption, lack of support, and diplomatic complications that colonization seemed to attract. Indeed, the fact that the administration's colonization policy entered upon its period of final stagnation only at the turn of 1864 would appear to move the obvious explanatory emphasis from the issue of military recruitment to that of broader political and bureaucratic difficulties incurred in the execution of a non-essential policy during wartime.[31]

Second, we might consider whether the end of the war and the concomitant demobilization of the vast majority of the army brought with it the demise of any opposition to colonization premised primarily on military necessity, and perhaps on other logistical objections as well. Whilst it is tempting to unreservedly celebrate the administration's inactivity on colonization by 1864-5, and to meet others halfway on whether it was really an outcome born of ideological transformation or just of practical experience, the former would have evidently marked a more permanent settlement of the matter, and certainly represents the more edifying thought for us; the late evidence may, however, impel us more towards the latter.[32]

Third, we ought to appreciate that there was no such thing as a homogeneous African American population, and that policymakers could therefore entertain a range of plans for the future of black Americans. Yet examination of historical issues of race actually brings out the very worst of our binary thinking, partly because of the clear morality of right and wrong where racism is concerned, but perhaps also in light of a northern European tradition that discerns a relatively sharp dividing-line between

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[31] G.R. Planck, 'Abraham Lincoln and Black Colonization: Theory and Practice', *Lincoln Herald*, 72 (Summer 1970), 75.

[32] Vorenberg, '*Colonization after Emancipation*' (review), *Journal of Illinois History*, 14 (Spring 2011), 70; Gutzman, 'Abraham Lincoln, Jeffersonian', 72.

'white' and 'black', a comparatively polarized conceptualization of the matter that may creep into our thinking when we consider race in its other aspects too. Accordingly, we regard Lincoln's suggestions of voluntary colonization for some African Americans and for the enfranchisement of others as an implicit, but nevertheless comprehensive, condemnation or affirmation – respectively – of an improbably, even rather tokenistically singular people, where we would probably do better just to take the qualifiers, distinctions, and niceties of the president's comments at face value.

Furthermore, it represents no disparagement of the black contribution to the war effort to observe that the deeds of almost two hundred thousand African Americans still left four and a quarter million who, for various and valid reasons, had not donned the uniform of the United States. Indeed, it was hardly necessary for contemporaries to hold off some kind of rough racial audit until the close of hostilities for them to note that the obstacles of sex, age, physical ability, personal inclination, geographical location, and less than comprehensive recruitment efforts were always going to keep the vast majority of African Americans out of the army. From the point of view of a white politician who had expressed severe doubts about the prospects of racial integration after emancipation, less might have occurred to change his views – in a literal, quantitative sense – than we tend to imagine. Even assuming that those African Africans who *had* fought for the Union had indeed become better citizen material in Lincoln's eyes, be it through their personal sacrifice or the more formative aspects of their military service, there not only remained the critical question of whether other whites would accept them, but that of the fate of the other parts of the African American population.

In many ways, the situation as it stood in from early 1864 to the spring of 1865 represents the critical test of our handling of the themes outlined here. For there is evidence both of Lincoln's continued interest in colonization and of his willingness to go on the record in favour of the enfranchisement of black veterans and of 'very intelligent'

African Americans, a quality that he had previously linked to lifelong freedom. (Despite the literature's common preoccupation with a link between military service and Lincoln's suggestion of the vote as a reward or as a mark of personal respect, his inclusion of an African American civilian elite hints at a further consideration of how to keep readmitted state governments loyal, and also of which subsets of the black population the white political community was likeliest to accept.) Our need for rigid consistency and our tendency to let encompassing themes like 'growth' dictate our choice of sources means that we normally deploy an argument based on these developments in the area of black suffrage in order to discredit the notion that colonization continued to hold any water with Lincoln. Yet neither cause had drawn the president's interest remotely as much as had winning the war or readmitting the southern states with the greatest possible haste; neither represented some master plan for all African Americans, going by what we know of their details; and neither policy, nor indeed the general fate of black Americans, could fully come under his control in a world where, as he understood it, the power of the executive and of the federal government was about to shrink, the individual states remained basically supreme in regulating the rights on which any real integration of African Americans would depend, and the future behaviour of millions of potentially embittered ex-rebels represented a complete unknown.[33]

Indeed, Nicholas Guyatt has recently inverted the literature's normal equation between plans for black enfranchisement and the fate of colonization to suggest that many Republicans actually clung more tenaciously to the latter in order to avoid a fundamentally stark question that they could not otherwise defer indefinitely: whether Washington would readmit the southern states with, or without, significant interference in their domestic institutions so as to guarantee their African American populations a

[33] R. Cook, 'The Fight for Black Suffrage in the War of the Rebellion', in S. Grant and B. Holden Reid, *Themes of the American Civil War* (New York, 2010), 224-6; *CW*, v, 372-3, vii, 243, viii, 152, 403; Escott, 239.

minimum level of political, legal, and social protection. Certainly, the continued mooting of racial separation schemes during 1864-5, notably those of Sen. James Lane for Texas, and of William Sherman and Jacob Cox for the east coast of the lower South, hints at the persistence of such hopes. Ironically, it rehabilitates nothing so much as Gabor Boritt's notion of 'avoidance', albeit shorn of the more psychoanalytical elements of Boritt's thesis and modified with the crucial acknowledgement that the process of emancipation and the struggle for black rights hardly ended on 1 January 1863. Whilst scholars have regarded even tentative hints of black enfranchisement as the obvious foil to continued colonization plans, their suggestion that those policies chafed with each other evidently cuts both ways. By their own mode of thinking, there is no less reason to turn things on their head, and to stress how continued expectations of colonization limited the ambition and scope of proposals for awarding the vote to African Americans. The notion of colonization as avoidance is analytically valid, and if anything, deserves extension in its application beyond the Emancipation Proclamation and the close of hostilities.[34]

Even then, we might struggle to cope with the thought that Lincoln could hold a conversation with Butler based on lingering fears about race relations and yet openly advocate limited black suffrage on what we now know to have been the very same day, 11 April 1865. It may help us to recognize two things. First, the president paid an incredibly inflated price for what he actually spoke up for in his 'Last Public Address', itself an artificial name imbued with a misleading sense of finality. Other Republicans had gone further on the matter of black rights without suffering death at the hands of a violent pro-Confederate, and one who had actually been plotting against the president for some time. Second, Lincoln seems to have had an occasional, perhaps coincidental, but still noteworthy knack of leaving us with chronologically awkward juxtapositions as regards race relations, whether they attest more to a conscious or to a reflexive weighing-up of the various options before him. For instance, he put his signature to the

[34] N. Guyatt, 'A Topic Best Avoided', *London Review of Books*, 33 (1 Dec. 2011), 30-1.

Île à Vache contract and to the Emancipation Proclamation within hours of each other, and, as we shall see, asked the State Department to press ahead on colonizationist dealings with Britain, after two months' delay, on the same day as his celebrated first meeting with Frederick Douglass. As such, it may not be inconceivable that with the arrival of peace, Lincoln's mind turned once more to the potentially diverse and certainly unknowable futures of African Americans. We just do not know, because he then unexpectedly died.[35]

Yet what we *should* reject is the patronizing notion that it would have been impossible for him to consider both colonization and improved black rights at home. Since *we* are mentally capable of imagining a situation in which one could look to both, so presumably was he, as the evidence actually suggests. We should allow Lincoln to be a real human being, seeing glimmers of hope whilst continuing to harbour old, nagging doubts. Indeed, by his own terms – that is to say, in light of the role that he had always said he understood colonization playing – it probably would have been quite rash to give up the idea of black resettlement.

We must lay down our terminology from the outset and use it without being either so inflexible or so inconsistent as to miss key points of similarity

Owing to the semantic influence of the American Colonization Society, 'colonization' enjoyed an idiosyncratic meaning of black resettlement in the eyes of nineteenth-century Americans, though this did not necessarily supplant the more obvious definitions of the word. Its usual connotations notwithstanding, 'colonization' did not axiomatically evoke imperialism or formal annexation in this context – despite a once murky relationship to the US government, Liberia had been an unambiguously

[35] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 331; Gates, *Abraham Lincoln on Race and Slavery*, lxiv; Vorenberg, 'After Emancipation', 217-18; Escott, 223.

independent state since 1847 – yet the term did not altogether disavow such possibilities. Contemporaries might refer to the black 'colonization' of Africa, locations elsewhere in the Americas, an unsettled US territory, parts of an established US state, or even of a local town, almost like segregation writ slightly larger. Conversely, they might offer effectively identical suggestions to these, but term them deportation, emigration, transportation, or expatriation, sometimes in explicit, vocal, and somewhat forced contradistinction to 'colonization', and sometimes as an outwardly insignificant alternative choice of word. There may be no better illustration of the laxness of such terminology, or perhaps the strictness of our own, than Lincoln's second annual message, in which he referred to 'colonization', 'deportation', 'voluntary emigration', and, paradoxically, to securing the 'consent of the people to be deported', and to the permission of the host polity concerned to send a 'colony' to the American tropics.[36]

It is hard to know how to cope with such an embarrassment of lexicographical riches, but whatever our personal preference, we should at least start by deciding on a shorthand to describe the white impulse, strikingly recurrent throughout and beyond the nineteenth century, to place black Americans at a significant geographical distance so as to avoid the presumed difficulty or undesirability of racial integration. After all, if we are content to bracket together such diverse developments as black enlistment, war emancipation, the abolition of slavery, and Lincoln's personal comportment towards African Americans under single-word concepts like 'growth', 'evolution', or 'progress', then we really ought to be quite comfortable indeed at the degree of cohesion binding any general term for the white drive for black relocation. In this study, out of deference to the most common contemporary choice of word, the default label will be 'colonization'; unless stated otherwise, use of other terms will carry no more significance than avoiding the tedium of close repetition. Although there is perhaps a better case in the abstract for 'resettlement', 'colonization' spares us cluttering the text

[36] *CW*, v, 520-1, 534-5.

with inverted commas or cautionary footnotes every time that a historical actor uses it in a manner that we would otherwise have to deem incorrect. Moreover, it is surely not beyond the abilities of the average reader to keep in mind a blanket warning about the scope for anachronistic misunderstanding of one word.[37]

Indeed, there is a further complication: whilst the founders of the ACS perhaps chose an imperfect term in 'colonization', it is also somewhat difficult to regard that word as plain wrong. Given the nationalistic atmosphere and support for the American System prevalent at the time of the founding of the Society, and the congressional appropriations that it indeed went on to receive, earlier observers of the ACS might have quite reasonably deemed it a government agency, and by extension, Liberia a US colony. And we need not enter into considerations of 'colonialism' in a wider sense of hegemony or economic exploitation to see that, even in the literal sense of formal annexation and the wresting of sovereignty, it was far from clear to colonizationists that 'private' black settlements abroad would never become US colonies. Since most advocates of the idea genuinely believed that sizable, spontaneous African American emigration still lay in the future, even a small group of seemingly integrated settlers might receive a boost in their numbers and subsequently gain formal control of their host territory in the interests of the United States, or of a new jurisdiction of their own, especially over technologically disadvantaged peoples in western Africa or the under-populated countries of the American tropics. As ever with colonization, *we simply do not know, because it did not happen* – at least, not remotely on the scale envisaged. What is clear, however, is that many people assumed otherwise, and so it seems unsatisfyingly pedantic to blame

[37] There is rather more to be said for the convention that distinguishes between 'colonization' for (essentially) white-led movements and 'emigration' for black ones, since autonomous black action – and more than that, the outward appearance thereof – was so crucial to the prospects of any African American drive for resettlement. Even then, we should look out for moments of institutional and financial overlap between the white and black impetuses, behind contemporaries' rhetoric, and acknowledge at least some shared intellectual background between them, however differently they regarded their respective rationales.

either colonizationists or the historians who study them for the confusion that has arisen.[38]

None of that is to deny either the complex mixture of motives, or the remarkable variety of proposed means, that the idea of black resettlement encompassed. From the point of view of its white advocates alone, it covered hard-headed and essentially racist calculations about the presumed capacity of African Americans to depress wages, repel white immigration, commit crime, and have inter-racial sex; a guiltier sense that the nation's founding ideals promised black Americans certain rights in principle that they had a better prospect of actually exercising elsewhere; and even a philanthropic commitment to the uplift and christianization of Africa, for adherents of the ACS. Colonization comprised those who would resort to forcible deportation, those who would make the offer strictly voluntary, and those who occupied a significant grey area in-between by premising individual manumission on departure for Liberia, or by tightening racial laws so as to encourage black flight, or by at least remaining flexible on the matter whilst trying to gauge broader white opinion on coercion. As to actual means – and to some degree, motives – any plans to colonize US territories or existing US states evidently raised different constitutional, diplomatic, and logistical issues to those associated with a foreign locale, and to those associated with each other as well. Indeed, domestic colonization, both state and territorial, proved a popular idea throughout the war. In addition to dealing with the African American 'problem', it promised to punish rebels through confiscation, to consolidate a loyal presence in the South, and to appease opponents of the potential loss of national labour – and some African Americans themselves – in that such settlements were to remain part of the United States.[39]

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[38] Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 17-18; Vorenberg, '*Colonization after Emancipation*', 69.

[39] Berwanger, *Frontier Against Slavery*, 4. Flexibility as to coercion: *The Debates of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Maryland* (3 vols., Annapolis, 1864), i, 238; J. Mitchell, *Letter on the Relation of the White and African Races* (Washington, 1862), 25; A.D. White, *The African's Right to Citizenship* (Philadelphia, 1865), 6-10.

The foregoing lays out some significant differences indeed, but it is hard to shake off a powerful sense that the more one tries to grasp that diversity of motives and methods, the more it must involve an acknowledgment of their commonality: the suggestion of the geographical separation of African Americans from the white population as a panacea to imagined social problems stemming from race. To put it another way, discerning difference presupposes an acceptance of some degree of similarity; difference is relative, and cannot exist in isolation. We need to be careful not to draw sharp dividing-lines between methods, or to discern binary 'either/or' motivation where contemporaries did not necessarily do so. Much of colonization's appeal was that it was able to tick many different boxes, albeit some more convincingly than others, and even if partly on account of the flexibility it enjoyed from not having had much success to date, and therefore a relatively uncluttered record to defend. Furthermore, contemporary racial paternalism hardly needed to make a distinction between acting coercively or prejudicially towards African Americans, and yet also doing so in their supposed interest.

Conversely, we should also beware accepting the claims of those who purported to have found a method of African American resettlement that they proclaimed to be distinct from 'colonization'. Advocates of colonization, even those of a genuinely similar bent in what was an incredibly diverse movement, might seek support by variously tailoring specific messages to select audiences, enumerating as wide a range of reasons to support the policy as they could concoct for a national constituency, or falling back on pregnant silences or deliberately ambiguous constructions where beneficial. Those outside the ACS and its offshoots often realized that the word 'colonization' had a nasty habit of planting the kiss of death on any prospect of black support, or they genuinely believed from the propaganda war with abolitionists that the Society represented only deportationists and slaveholders. For both these reasons, one encounters people in the sources who announced that they did not support 'colonization', or that they had

pioneered a kind of emigration scheme distinct from 'colonization', which on closer inspection actually covers much the same bases as the mainstream colonization movement. We should not necessarily take their self-perception, or at least their self-presentation before their audience, at face value. Nor should we blind ourselves to our own ability to unconsciously pick and choose from within the colonizationist rationale as suits our argument: when the ACS engages in colonization work, it obviously reflects retrograde attitudes, but when Lincoln does the same thing, it must be far more humanitarian in motivation. Indeed, it is noteworthy that it tends not to be historians of colonization who lay down such unyielding distinctions between different kinds of white drive for black resettlement, but scholars coming at the topic from a narrower Civil War or Lincoln expertise, who may not be so familiar with the full range of factions, contradictions, complexities, and ambiguities within the established colonization movement. When Lincoln made a suggestion of voluntary removal, and anticipated that large numbers of African Americans would ultimately accept the offer on account of their poor prospects in the United States, he put forward a perfectly conventional colonizationist argument. It was neither disgracefully unenlightened nor uniquely humane in its conception as compared to the beliefs of many other supporters of the policy.[40]

Yet as is often the case with such things, it can be more tempting to highlight differences than similarities. Much like expressing scepticism about the source record on colonization or seeing hidden messages in Lincoln's words, it just feels somehow more intelligent, as though we have picked up on critical nuances that others have overlooked. Yet we should not forget that it is a virtue, indeed one of the crucial skills of history, to be able to generalize and to draw things together. Moreover, there is the ever-

[40] Freehling, *The Road to Disunion* (2 vols., New York, 1990-2007), i, 159. Disavowals of 'colonization': C.E. Lester, *The Life and Public Services of Charles Sumner* (New York, 1874), 466 n.; 'Notes of the Movement', *Pine and Palm*, 27 Feb. 1862; Redpath to G.W. Wilson, 1 Apr. 1861, James Redpath Papers, Duke University; W. Aikman, *The Future of the Colored Race in America* (New York, 1862), 12. Lincoln's distinctive motivation: Boritt, 628.

present risk of double standards, namely, that we prefer to reserve talk of difference, change, and contrast for the topics that we find more awkward than others, so that we do not have to confront ethically uncomfortable continuities or disrupt a body of literature that has Lincoln evolve and abandon something called 'colonization', whose precise definition we can of course adjust for the reasons noted above. Indeed, some of those scholars who acknowledge Lincoln's post-Proclamation interest in African American removal outside the United States prefer to see 'emigration' rather than 'colonization'. For Eric Foner, '[b]y 1864, although Lincoln still saw voluntary emigration as a kind of safety valve for individual blacks dissatisfied with their condition in the United States, he no longer envisioned large-scale colonization.' Having come to accept Butler's anecdote more than he once did, Michael Vorenberg still makes a firm distinction between 'a plan for colonization' and 'a plan for … black soldiers who were owed something but who, in Lincoln's mind, were unlikely ever to become citizens of the nation.'[41]

On the one hand, we could argue that the discovery of the second wave of 'imperial' resettlement schemes need not undermine the prevalent narrative that over the course of 1863, Lincoln reduced his efforts towards, and even abandoned, something that we could reasonably call 'colonization'. In this kind of telling, covering as many of its bases as one can collate from various responses to *Colonization after Emancipation*, or at least predict from the leanings of the literature, the president dropped his grand public plans for subsidized, mass 'colonization', notably the Chiriquí scheme, and fell back to the more modest, *laissez-faire* stance that some African Americans might want to pursue an option of 'voluntary emigration', with US annexation no longer implied. Accordingly, Lincoln made the appropriate provisions, mostly delegating the work to subordinates and undertaking it in private, and did so in the rather weak form of canvassing licences for recruitment agents. There was nothing exceptional or particularly interesting about

[41] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 260; Vorenberg, 'Lincoln's "Fellow Citizens"', 162.

such arrangements, as the labour-hungry, post-emancipation colonies of the American tropics were undertaking similar, far larger drives in China and India, and thus regarded the United States as just one potential source of manpower amongst several. Such efforts petered out and the president turned, however embryonically, to contemplate the biracial future of America. In summary, Lincoln believed in a rather backward-looking 'colonization' down to the end of 1862, but in a somewhat more progressive and yet effectively non-committal 'emigration' thereafter, thus vindicating the basic accuracy of the standard account of his personal evolution.[42]

On the other hand, such a version of events is highly selective, contrives points of contrast that simply do not stand up to closer scrutiny, and betrays our remarkably persistent tendency to opt for a certain 'minimizing slant' wherever we can look at something to do with Lincoln and colonization in two or more different ways. Granted, it is perfectly natural to want to fit new discoveries into the framework of the current historiography, and to plot our estimation of their significance on the downward-sloping line that we have already drawn in our minds between the administration's well-known colonization activity through 1862 and its evident inactivity by 1865. Yet a point-by-point appraisal of change and continuity ought to disabuse us of any such inclinations.

Whilst the idea of a second phase of schemes remains a helpful one in order to understand various eventual modifications in Lincoln's approach, it is most useful when understood primarily in reference to the later date at which the president still considered the 'imperial' ventures viable – as compared to the ill-fated Chiriquí and Île à Vache projects – and not to the timing of their initiation, which actually overlapped with that first wave of dealings with domestic contractors. There was no tidy and discrete transformation in the administration's approach to the execution of colonization policy, but an imperfect, sometimes backsliding shift over a period of more than half a year; despite the entrenched predilections of the historiography, the issuance of the

[42] Vorenberg, '*Colonization after Emancipation*', 69; Williams, 'A Look at Lincoln'.

Emancipation Proclamation did not itself herald any change in colonization strategy. Likewise, it is difficult to sustain such a clear-cut chronological distinction between the president's plans for 'colonization' – in the strict sense of formal annexation – prior to 1863, and his retreat thereafter towards a mere offer of diplomatic assistance to those African Americans interested in 'emigration' to parts of the world willing to receive them as naturalized citizens. For Lincoln had actually heard unambiguous warnings about the scope for infringement on Central American sovereignty no later than June 1862, whilst he also included all potential host locales – not just the European empires – in the treaty policy that he had formulated by the end of that year, and which he laid out in his second annual message.[43]

Admittedly, colonization policy raised certain ambiguities as to whether a given settlement might eventually wrest formal control of an area from a host power, but it had *always* done so; this was an ever-present point of uncertainty. Thus, we should guard against an inclination to variously emphasize either the probability or improbability of an eventual outcome of annexation as suits our argument about strength of intent. If we term it 'colonization' prior to 1863, we ought to call it 'colonization' afterwards, or at least not claim a fundamental difference between 'colonization' and other terms; if we prefer 'emigration', we should likewise stick with 'emigration', except where breaking the terminology's monotony for stylistic purposes. If one does encounter the word 'emigration' more in the sources pertaining to the imperial schemes than to the earlier, contract colonies, it is because other countries did not share the confusing American idiom of 'colonization' in the sense of black resettlement. The administration may also have realized from the Latin American response to the Chiriquí scheme that it was diplomatically insensitive to talk openly of 'colonization' of others' possessions, and had perhaps noted too that 'colonization'

[43] See chapter 3.

invariably went down poorly with African American emigrationists, even where plans effectively amounting to the same thing did not necessarily do so.

Similarly, we should be careful about placing undue weight on the fact that the earlier arrangements with domestic contractors envisaged the expenditure of US government funds, an element ultimately absent from the subsequent imperial schemes. Viewed one way, this change reflected a newfound spirit of *laissez-faire* towards colonization on Lincoln's part, in turn hinting at his growing tepidness towards the policy. Viewed another, it was simply the obvious practical response to the corruption that colonization consistently seemed to attract, a means of bypassing hostile elements within the administration that even included the head of the department charged with executing the policy, and perhaps really one of Mitchell's ideas where Lincoln himself had proven willing to subsidize the British colonial agents as late as May 1863. The limited significance of what the role of funding tells us about the imperial schemes is even truer when it comes to the slated emigration treaties and, indeed, to the wider implications of outsourcing colonization to foreign powers. Whilst it is tempting to regard the administration's delegation of the task of colonization as a mark of the policy's dwindling importance in the president's eyes, it is actually far from the obvious response to downplay his evident willingness to stake personal political capital on the eventual submission of emigration treaties to the Senate for ratification by an improbable two-thirds majority, especially in light of Congress's poor response to his second annual message. Except for his hurried arrangement of the Île à Vache scheme, we only know Lincoln to have ceded ground on the subject of treaties once Britain refused to enter into anything more than an informal arrangement, and once more when the administration scrapped the draft Dutch treaty as per its general suspension of colonization activity.

Indeed, as noted, we should be most cautious about referring to the president's 'private' colonization efforts where we actually mean that his dealings occurred in

private. If anything, his move away from contracts with domestic concessionaires, and towards more open-ended, formal diplomatic arrangements that he hoped to base on further legislative discussion and endorsement of colonization, actually comes across as more 'public' in its overall vision. Rather, what seems to have happened is that Lincoln eventually took the hint as to how unforthcoming such support had proven, certainly as compared to the administrative complications and political resistance that the policy had generated, and pulled the plug on initiating any new schemes over late 1863 and early 1864. Although such a suggestion might sit uneasily with our instinctive desire to plot a smooth trajectory to the lifespan of a given process, the developments of 1863 really point to an attempted, but ultimately abortive advance in colonization matters, not to a gradual, drawn-out retreat.

The most significant sticking points about Lincoln's later colonization schemes are likely to remain the morally charged ones: the place of consent therein, and what his actions seem to say about his personal estimation of African Americans, or his understanding of broader black prospects in the United States. Yet once again, we should not permit the fog of semantics to obscure points of continuity. Any notion that Lincoln grew into a stance of support for 'voluntary emigration' after the Emancipation Proclamation is simply incredible, for such growth necessarily implies a contrast with an earlier willingness to countenance *in*voluntary emigration, a position that the president never endorsed, and which we know him to have positively rejected. Indeed, the delicious irony is that it is those scholars who adhere the closest in this respect to the redemptive narrative of Lincoln's evolution on race who actually end up committing the worst libel against him.[44]

The other two major props of the argument for Lincoln's belief in 'emigration', as distinct from his pre-1863 support for 'colonization', are the suggestions that he envisaged the former occurring on a smaller scale than the latter, and with a black

[44] H.K. Beale (ed.), *Diary of Gideon Welles* (3 vols., New York, 1960), i, 152.

desire for personal betterment more prominently in mind. Once more, this is simply untenable from what we know of Lincoln's sentiments, except by dint of the generous scope for evidentiary selectiveness, on the matter of motivation, that stems from the failure of wartime colonization policy to produce the kind of permanent settlement that might have more fully embodied the administration's long-term designs.[45]

When it comes to the question of numbers of emigrants, all the indicators are that, despite being careful to plan only small initial waves of settlers, Lincoln anticipated sizable autonomous African American emigration in the future. It is worth adding that, quite apart from his humanitarian objections to the idea, coercion would have simply been unnecessary given the wider forces supposedly propelling colonization. Whilst it might be alluring to shore up the basic idea of change over time by positing that 'colonization' was essentially about large numbers of African Americans, and 'emigration' rather fewer, most hints of the president's sense of scale really depend on the context and nature of the source rather than its date. If Lincoln had publicly spoken of a vision of thoroughgoing black exodus in the mid-1850s, it does not necessarily mean that he subsequently slashed his understanding of the numbers who would ultimately leave, so much as it attests to the vagueness of a political candidate out of government and still getting his thoughts together. Likewise, if making provision for a few thousand settlers to move to European colonies appears to reflect on the essential lameness of post-1863 'emigration' efforts, it may simply be because Lincoln had ceased speaking about the policy in public – which naturally lends itself to more sweeping statements – and had simply knuckled down to arranging the nuts and bolts of specific projects.[46]

Certainly, it seems hard to quantify the difference between mass, pre-1863 'colonization' and select, post-1863 'emigration' when the president had admitted in his 1862 address to the black delegation, normally regarded as the archetypal expression of his commitment to 'colonization', that the Chiriquí project might get off the ground with

[45] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 260.
[46] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 127.

as few as twenty-five families. Indeed, Lincoln's only comment on the possibility of a change in projected numbers appeared in his second annual message, where he fleetingly predicted an *increase* in African American emigration to Liberia and Haiti, not its opposite, though he possibly intended a point of comparison with migration to other destinations as much as an absolute one. Although one would hardly expect him to say otherwise, given the overall content of the message, there is no reason to regard him as insincere. Such an expectation was perfectly consistent with a colonizationist's understanding of the likely after-effects of emancipation, and with Lincoln's known concerns about the persistence of white prejudice. Whilst some historians have taken as a coded rejection of colonization his countervailing admission that many African Americans would remain in the United States, and in his eloquent attacks on the lowest common denominator of free soil sentiment that underpinned demands for comprehensive black removal, such a prediction was not incompatible with the supposition that the number of emigrants was also still to rise. It constituted a reasonable confession to the public for an individual who was opposed to deportation, and yet able to see that emancipation had outpaced African American flight abroad.[47]

Similarly, one must resort to cherry picking to regard the president's post-1863 interest in black resettlement as more about African American advancement and avoidance of oppression than an 'uglier', earlier commitment to colonization, since his address to the black delegation also demonstrated an interest in African Americans getting a fair deal and expressed concerns about the violence that racial co-existence had engendered. The appeal of colonization to its supporters was that there was seemingly no contradiction at all between doing right by white and by black Americans; as Lincoln said, it was better for them both to be separated. All in all, when we perceive significant differences between the president's rationale before and after the Emancipation Proclamation, we really find ourselves on the tenuous and hollowly

[47] *CW*, v, 375, 520-1, 534-6.

semantic ground of contrasting suggestions of voluntary emigration for the sake of earning superior prospects with proposals of non-compulsory expatriation with a view to securing a better future.[48]

Although engaging in simple moral comparison hardly provides the most analytically helpful exercise, it is also worth suggesting that, apart from the administration's firmer insistence on a minimum quality for the treatment of would-be settlers, there are many aspects of the imperial schemes that are not obviously 'better' than their predecessors, or at least not as vaguely mitigating as we might be inclined to argue. Whilst it is tempting to make the case for a reassuring end to formal, serious 'colonization', and a move towards the tepid encouragement of 'emigration' to other powers' colonies, it is actually rather questionable that the president's willingness to thereby reinforce a European hold on the Americas, especially a British one on the isthmus, really conveys some kind of low prioritization of domestic racial issues on his part. Likewise, it may well be true that the slated emigration systems were somewhat unoriginal and recalled those already in operation for obtaining Indian and Chinese labourers. Yet it is no great comfort that the president allowed himself to take inspiration therefrom, or that he envisaged the use of indentures where emigrants lacked sufficient means to relocate without assistance, or that Suriname had not yet abolished slavery when he had the State Department initiate negotiations. In fairness, nor should it be a source of tremendous anxiety, in that emigration was to remain on a strictly voluntary basis and settlers were to receive a level of care that host polities could not necessarily guarantee their own inhabitants. Either way, the president's remarkable over-estimation of African Americans' desire to leave the United States certainly prevented the occurrence of another humanitarian fiasco along the lines of Île

[48] *CW*, v, 372.

à Vache; although, as ever, the fact that his plans came to nothing hardly detracts from intent.[49]

Yet what these points do illustrate is that just because we can find some *differences*, this does not unravel the thread that ties together Lincoln's ventures into colonization. To put it another way, we should not see only a variety of means to the exclusion of a consideration of ends. Admittedly, it is of *some* interest whether the president acted on lingering doubts about the prospect of racial harmony in America via paid or unpaid arrangements, or sought to have African Americans relocate to new US colonies or established European ones, or continued to entertain a limited vision of the viable extent of black rights with, or without, a treaty-based emigration system foremost in his mind. But such points of debate are simply not as interesting as the key continuity that connects them, and in order to meaningfully discuss those differences, we must first accept some important similarities. One certainly gets the uneasy feeling that, had we always known about the imperial schemes, the standard account would probably be one of Lincoln's abiding interest in black resettlement, whatever changes in his practical approach such a narrative would also acknowledge. Concomitantly, it may now be incumbent upon us not to shirk a similar conclusion just because those ventures in fact represent a recent discovery. Above all, we need to avoid the inverted logic of denying the internal cohesion of one man's impulse to provide for African American removal so that we can avoid upsetting that of such nebulous concepts as 'growth', 'evolution', and 'progress'.

[49] G. Horne, '*Colonization after Emancipation*' (review), *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 109 (Spring 2011), 251.

We need to approach the evidence with an open mind, consistent standards, and a substantial degree of self-scrutiny

Source criticism is a problematic skill: as per the ambiguity of the word 'criticism', which covers both neutrality and hostility towards a certain proposition, we sometimes lose sight of the fact that it is our job as historians to reaffirm as well as to demolish evidence, especially by checking it for consistency with the rest of the record rather than considering it in isolation, which tends to make it easier to dismiss. Good, rigorous assessment is not just about highlighting bias, alleging fabrication, and pointing to the scope for misrecollection over time. It is also about accepting that, whatever their perspective on events, people are generally not liars on factual points, that distant memories might be fuzzy or embellished more around the edges than at their core, and that many sources necessarily derive from potentially self-interested and opinionated parties, such as the policymakers who work on a given policy. It is also about acknowledging that, through non-creation or subsequent loss, there is rarely as much extant documentation as we might like, even for some of the most crucial and interesting episodes in history. If we cannot concede such things, there is little point undertaking any kind of research because too much evidence becomes inadmissible.

Just as with the impetus that drives the lullaby thesis, the problem is that when we single out an awkward topic like wartime colonization – and we may not even register that in the big picture, that is exactly what we are doing – and lean towards casting a sceptical eye over the sources, we are highly likely to confirm ourselves in our suspicions; seek, and ye shall find. The internal logic of doubt is insatiable and the intellectual cost of seeing it through to its conclusion enormous, for when we reject sources out of hand, we start sawing off the very branch on which the discipline of history rests. We should not doubt that any scholar who wants to pick away at the colonization evidence will do so in a manner that sounds perfectly plausible, and we

need to accept that ultimately there must exist a 'liar' card for them to play where circumstances truly demand it. It is also quite true that it is impossible to prove Lincoln's late interest in colonization to anything approaching judicial standards, although such legalistic analogies are rather out of place in history, since they introduce analytically unhelpful notes of condemnation and the overwhelming likelihood of a subject's 'acquittal'. (The probability of such an outcome also raises questions of who is actually 'on trial'; Lincoln, for adhering to colonization in 1865, or, say, Benjamin Butler, for the libel of alleging the same?) Indeed, it is because of the very universality of such considerations that the sceptical historian would also do well to pause for a moment, take a deep breath, and ask not only what colonization means to them that Lincoln could not possibly have believed in it by the war's end, but also what compelling motivation for untruth they can clearly identify on the part of the author of the source. Having done so, if they still feel inclined to demonstrate the untrustworthiness of the sources, they should at least make a point of running constant mental crosschecks with the evidentiary standards that they accept elsewhere, even where this entails the task of tracing the primary sources cited in trusted secondary works. If it turns out that they have confidence in using, whether directly or indirectly, a memoir's account of a private conversation in which the president expressed his hatred of slavery, for example, or his fondness for pardoning condemned soldiers, they should be wary of reeling off the standard reasons why we should not trust a later recollection of Lincoln speaking up for colonization, which would be equally consistent with his public statements and known measures. As historians, we just owe too much to the sources, our very lifeblood, to do otherwise.

It is also worth noting that, once we finally break free of arguments based on inference from silence and presumed mutual exclusion with other developments, the actual source record on Lincoln and colonization is remarkably consistent down to his death, albeit rather thin from early 1864 and endowed with one ambiguous reference,

the Hay diary entry, which, although self-evidently deserving of careful consideration, does not actually make the statement that scholars usually ascribe to it. Whilst the final chapter of this study provides the more appropriate place for a thorough assessment of the fragmentary late evidence – also comprising a recollection on the part of Gideon Welles, as well as Butler's famous story, and some intriguing details of a brief official correspondence between Lincoln and Edward Bates – it may not be premature to speculate that this body of sources is the likeliest to invite a counterattack on any argument that one puts forward for the president's lifelong interest in colonization. After all, the protracted duration of the Île à Vache venture after Lincoln's last certified contribution thereto, other than that of ultimately recalling the expedition, has always betokened some ostensibly minor, though perhaps somewhat revealing, scholarly differences as to whether the president abandoned colonization in 1863 or in early 1864. Rather, by the terms of the dominant, morally loaded narrative of Lincoln's evolution, what matters most is that he had certainly given up the policy by 1865, a stance that dismissal of the purportedly incongruous later evidence would allow us to maintain.[50]

Yet there is little objective reason to rule out the obvious implications of those sources, as powerful as our conditioned response to do so may well be. Though one would scarcely credit it from the tenor of the secondary literature, the onus has always been on sceptics to positively demonstrate that Lincoln had repudiated a policy that he had always openly supported, that he continued to assist for a year or so after his last public message on the matter, that he was under significant congressional pressure to openly disavow by early 1864 – and yet did not – and for whose suspension on purely practical grounds there was always more than adequate reason. Policies that effectively come to an end, one way or another, may well leave absolutely nothing in the source record, not even material referring to their demise. Thus, were there an absolute void of

[50] See chapter 5.

material to work from, there might be a stronger, albeit still perfectly ambiguous case that the president had cast off colonization out of ideological conviction rather than giving it up from administrative frustration. Yet there is indeed material suggesting that the policy was merely dormant and that Lincoln possibly looked to revive it, and we must treat it with seriousness. For we could not reasonably expect there to be significantly more documentation pertaining to a measure that had stalled amidst the pressing distractions of war. It takes actual activity to create paperwork; historical actors do not leave autographed notes in their manuscript papers to help keep future researchers updated as to what they still believe in. Even where someone like Welles *did* consciously look to posterity with his articles on the Lincoln administration, he could hardly have known that it would help to write down absolutely everything he recalled about colonization so as to pre-empt historians who, more than a century later, were to invert the obvious meaning of all Lincoln's recorded remarks on the policy. Furthermore, the thinness of part of a body of evidence does not somehow overturn its consistency with the rest, and even for an individual source, the burden is on the scholar to disprove rather than to prove its veracity.

There are three further, somewhat more colonization-specific points that should lend themselves to our consideration. First, we now know for certain that much of what ought to have constituted the government's paperwork on colonization is missing as a result of the Mitchell-Usher dispute, and likely also of the latter's complicity in handing over official material to the Chiriquí interest. Whilst we cannot use the 'absence of evidence' fallacy to make utterly unfounded speculations in history, knowing that the colonization records are signally incomplete should allow us to occasionally air reasonable conjectures in line with the evidence that we do have, and certainly make us

even more sympathetic towards some of the otherwise stand-alone, fragmentary sources.[51]

Second, we also know that Lincoln pursued colonization with such secrecy that even members of the cabinet and his private secretaries seemingly failed to register most of his activity, especially from the Emancipation Proclamation onwards. Consistent with his apparent acknowledgement that colonization was proving a politically divisive policy, the president could be curiously unforthcoming towards people whom he arguably ought to have kept in the loop, and managed to keep projects and personnel surprisingly compartmentalized. This is an important point, for even under less secretive circumstances than these, one person's recollection or suggestion that a figure had positively done or said something on a certain matter ought to outrank another's merely 'negative' supposition, from having witnessed no such thing, that that same person was actually inactive on that score. Since Lincoln was indeed so furtive about colonization, we should avoid arguing that any given person would have had to leave us some commentary on the president's continued interest in the policy were that fact actually true. Instead, we ought to simply draw inferences from the collective import of what we know for certain. Accordingly, when it comes to Lincoln's last known disposition towards colonization, the 'positive' recollection of Welles, and the implications of the Bates and Butler material, may well trump arguments stemming from Hay's diary entry. Not only does the secretary's evidence pre-date Butler and Bates, but it also does not state that the president had even commented on colonization, let alone proclaimed his personal repudiation thereof.[52]

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[51] P.W. Magness, 'James Mitchell and the Mystery of the Emigration Office Papers', *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 32 (Summer 2011); Burlingame et al., *Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay* (Carbondale, 1997), 217; Mitchell to Lincoln, June 1864, AL. In particular, much of RWT-RBH appears to be material that 'ought' to have found its way to the National Archives.

[52] Nicolay and Hay seem to have known little of the imperial schemes, and indeed initiated the scholarly convention that only Chiriquí and Île à Vache had really drawn Lincoln's interest; since they hardly attempted to draw a veil over the Vache fiasco, it is doubtful that they deliberately wrote out the second wave of colonization in order to avoid damaging their boss's reputation. Mitchell had little to do with Chiriquí by the end of 1862, and, save some unofficial approaches to

Third, it has always been problematic that the late evidence pertains to a period significantly after the last time we know – or thought we knew – Lincoln to have initiated any kind of colonization scheme. Even Hay's diary entry, the only piece of evidence that scholars can offer to suggest that Lincoln expressly disavowed colonization, was slightly troublesome for those dating the policy's demise to the Emancipation Proclamation. Were that true, we might well have expected Hay to make such an observation earlier, although since his words only provided a *terminus ante quem*, a significant lapse since Lincoln's last colonization activity was admittedly perfectly possible. Historians have largely regarded dismissal of the late sources as the obvious answer to the conundrum, and whilst perhaps rather optimistically so – given not only such fragments' consistency with the earlier record, but also the possibility that Lincoln held out prolonged hopes for a turnaround in the fortunes of the Île à Vache mission – such assumptions were nevertheless understandable. Yet the evidentiary gap of early 1863 to mid-1864 also raised the simpler but more disquieting alternative of lost colonization schemes, and the rediscovery of the imperial ventures indeed provides that 'missing link' between Lincoln's personal involvement in despatching the Île à Vache mission and the implications of the later sources. It may be hard to shake off decades of hostile inclinations towards the Butler anecdote in particular; despite appearing in well-known sources, the evidence from Welles and Bates has not tended to make the cut of the secondary literature as much, which may in turn hint at how mystifying and troubling it has proven as compared to the straw man that one can make

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the Haitian commissioner, apparently dropped out of Île à Vache from an early date. Usher, whilst charged with monitoring the worsening Île à Vache situation as it unfolded, was not privy to later developments in the British scheme. Blair, the cabinet's preeminent colonizationist, was heavily involved in the beginnings of the Chiriquí, Île à Vache, and British projects, but – perhaps only ostensibly – disappears from view in all of them, probably owing to the inability of the Post Office Department to claim any sort of official purview over colonization policy. Stanton's position as secretary of war necessarily exposed him to efforts to recruit contrabands, though not the northern free black pioneers for Chiriquí. Only Seward seems to have been involved to the end of colonization's lifespan as active policy. Apparently not consulted after the cabinet discussions of late 1862, Welles still witnessed enough of Lincoln to conclude that the end of the Île à Vache mission had not ended his interest in colonization, whilst the legal controversy over Mitchell's status also apprised Bates in late 1864 of the president's views on the policy.

of Butler's account. Yet we do need to note that such 'chronological' scepticism now looks rather out of place in light of what has suddenly become a more smoothly continuous timeline.[53]

Ultimately, it is fully in our power to dismiss sources outright, but prior to doing so, we should always draw up a mental balance sheet that sets the primary evidence we wish to discredit against that which we reinforce in so doing. Whilst it is perfectly natural to feel uneasy that there are not more surviving sources for the last year of Lincoln's life, we should remember that the overall question of the depth of his interest in colonization does not hang thereon. Rather, we are merely looking for a continuation – or alternatively, the repudiation – of a fully attested earlier commitment to the policy. Viewed that way, it seems difficult to dismiss the three late suggestions that the president had not rejected a cherished policy, two explicit (Welles and Butler) and one possibly implied (Bates), in favour of what actually amounts to zero statements for a decisive change in his longstanding attitudes, at least once we have cleared the decks of the multiple wishful inferences of abolitionists and historians. At least, we should acknowledge that we are choosing to dismiss eyewitness contemporaries so that the appealing, but disprovable and potentially anachronistic reasoning of late twentieth- and early twenty-first century scholars need not be found wanting. Likewise, we should beware disparaging the size of such a body of evidence, as per some rough metrics of how much colonization presumably meant to Lincoln by the end of the war, when that for the total of his dalliances with black enfranchisement is of a similar scale and hedged with rather more substantive qualification.

[53] Vorenberg, 'Politics of Black Colonization', 42.

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If a focussed thesis can often complicate assumptions that historians have hitherto taken as read, especially where it constitutes the first detailed study of a topic, just occasionally, it will compensate by actually offering more countervailing points of simplification. This generally occurs where the literature that it addresses had got rather top-heavy with ideas that were perfectly logical, but nevertheless somewhat detached from the evidence, and where scholars had come to draw more inspiration from secondary sources than primary.

On the one hand, this thesis admittedly muddies the waters to some degree, since it argues for Abraham Lincoln and others' persistent adherence to a policy that we often strain to understand. Yet historians have more or less covered all points of the colonizationist rationale; it might be more accurate to say that they simply struggle to reconcile such insights with the antithetical orthodoxies of Lincoln and Civil War scholarship. And in challenging the latter, this thesis probably simplifies more than it complicates. Would it really be such a surprise if Lincoln and all those who recorded dealings or conversations with him about colonization actually turned out not to have been liars, or not even innocently mistaken in their abiding impression of his genuine commitment to the policy? That the unpredictable future of race relations continued to weigh heavily on the mind of a mortal individual, or that historians have perhaps not shed anachronistic assumptions as much as they claim to have done? That a complicated policy more likely collapsed through known problems in its execution than an unattested ideological epiphany? Considered together, these are wide-ranging questions that will continue to provoke the reader even by the end of this study. The gentlest way into the topic may be through an appreciation of colonization's antebellum background, which should in turn remind us that Lincoln was far from being the policy's only supporter.

2 Race Adjustment

The title of this chapter is borrowed from the first volume of Allan Nevins's *Ordeal of the Union*, and provides a pithy summary of a number of kindred developments during the 1850s. The political salience of slavery had erupted with full force during the Mexican War and the debates that ended up as the Compromise of 1850, but even as such controversy revealed sharp sectional differences that only grew over the decade, it also brought out a countervailing moderate tendency, North and South, to find points of agreement. Colonization was often at the forefront of such efforts. Furthermore, although the most memorable conflict of the era centred on the federal government's powers over slavery in the territories, the individual states also seized the opportunity to review domestic race relations and pass legislation accordingly. Since such business unambiguously pertained to the states and not to Washington during this era – and certainly not to a divided Washington – it was down to them to address slavery and race as 'real' institutions, rather than as ideological abstractions about the form of an expanding United States.

Broadly understood, the antebellum decade witnessed a tightening of the kind of racial legislation to which the states had often resorted in the past, with a renewal of black exclusion laws in parts of the Midwest during the early 1850s, and a wave of state appropriations for colonization in the lower North and upper South. If race law was often the product of contemplation or at least tradition, however, it could also emerge abruptly as a knee-jerk response to what neighbouring states were doing; failing to match others' standards of proscription might suddenly make one's own state relatively attractive to African Americans in search of refuge. It was more in this vein that a mania swept across southern statehouses at the end of the decade for the expulsion of free

black residents – on top of the more conventional practice of exclusion of those who tried to enter the state – and even for their enslavement. In combination with some agitation, rather louder than it was popular, to re-open the international slave trade, it also represented an ambitious proslavery impetus to unite the South around its common institution, and to drive the region's hardening attitudes to what fire-eaters assumed to be their logical conclusion.

These developments also rekindled emigrationist sentiment amongst African Americans. In fact, the decade was one of near-constant crisis in that respect. Whilst the slavery debate in Washington cooled down until 1854, the appearance of the new Fugitive Slave Law brought the literal, immediate question of whether to leave the country into sharp relief for many black Americans from 1850, to say nothing of a broader, ongoing assessment of their long-term prospects in a country that officially denied the possibility of their citizenship by 1857. Although most of the emigration plans put forward in conventions and the press never materialized, or at least did not make the leap from scouting exploration to settlement expedition, the white abolitionist James Redpath engaged with northern black leaders to send pioneers to Haiti on the eve of the war. The results of that venture would ultimately be poor, but this was not yet clear when fighting broke out at home. In the natural course of things, the emigration debate, and any outcome that might have arisen therefrom, was probably due to peak when war intervened and changed its direction. Subsequent events would push ever more African Americans into the anti-emigration camp. Yet it was less of an inexorable process than hindsight might suggest, and there were still voices in favour at a far later point into the war than historians have assumed.[1]

[1] F.J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863* (Urbana, Ill., 1975), 94-271; J.H. Pease and W.H. Pease, *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861* (New York, 1974), 255-97; W.D. Boyd, 'James Redpath and American Negro Colonization, 1860-1862', *The Americas*, 12 (Oct. 1955), 169-82; J.R. McKivigan, *Forgotten Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making of Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, 2008), 61-80; P.W. Magness and S.N. Page, *Colonization after Emancipation* (Columbia, 2011), 29, 32, 43-9, 86-8.

Perhaps unexpectedly, the picture that emerges from all of these trends is one of mixed fortunes for the established colonization movement. At an intellectual level, 'race adjustment', 'exclusion', and 'separatism' remain perfectly sound terms to describe a decade during which Americans, black and white, contemplated the imposition of geographical distance between the races as a solution to perceived problems. Yet such generalization also raises questions, quite apart from the obvious fact of whites' advantage in setting the legal and political background, or of the different nature of the 'problems' that they discerned.

First and foremost, whilst some historians discern close institutional and political connections between the drive for black exclusion and the colonization movement, these separatist impulses did not always overlap as much as one might expect. This becomes more apparent when one teases out more focussed questions of chronology and causation, rather than summarizing the spirit of the decade as a whole, and when one looks at the relationship between the groups involved. Most obviously, black emigrationists avoided association with the ACS as far as possible, but even amongst whites, the strongest supporters of colonization were often not the same people who pushed for harsher racial laws. The core leadership of the ACS largely kept its distance from such legislative innovation, though the movement's state and sub-state auxiliaries were able to act with greater flexibility than the central organization in this respect, sometimes taking on a more deportationist flavour in the Midwest and the upper South. Whilst abolitionists were right to accuse colonizationists of disingenuousness in not acknowledging the link between others' discrimination and the dissemination of their own views, it nevertheless seems that many colonizationists *did* find the developments of the 1850s distasteful, even if events also vindicated their oft-proclaimed pessimism over race relations. Reservations on their part about engaging with current affairs reflected not only a desire to hold together a broad base of support

by shunning controversy in all its forms, but also the belief that black exodus would come of its own providential accord and did not need a helping hand.[2]

Indeed, if the rather clerical, non-partisan, and trans-sectional ACS regarded dabbling in 'politics' with the utmost caution, the political world did not exactly make herculean efforts to endorse the cause, either. Although the crisis at the beginning of the decade inspired a chorus of pro-colonization sounds, there would be no federal legislation or appropriations to show for it until the Civil War. It may be too cynical to assert that statesmen paid mere lip service to the idea in order to advertise their moderate, conciliatory ways: the argument over slavery was initially far more heated in Washington than in the country at large, and there is little reason to doubt that the scramble to find potentially consensual policies was genuine. All the same, rather more congressmen proved willing to appear on the roster of the ACS's (honorary) vice-presidents, or to deliver an occasional cut-and-pasted speech, than to actively involve themselves in the Society's work. More importantly, the very divisions over the peculiar institution that gave a traditional response like colonization its appeal still made it ultimately more problematic than not. In carrying a hint of emancipation, however tame, it offered a solution to slavery in the face of a growing southern and Democratic assertiveness that there had never been a problem in need of one. In the context of a collapsing party system and the calm before the Kansas-Nebraska storm, politicians seem to have gone a bit quieter on colonization during the middle years of the 1850s. When the idea emerged once more, it was essentially a partisan one – as it perhaps had to be, to enjoy any support more meaningful than mere words – attached to the nascent Republican Party.

Around the same time, the ACS was looking to do little more than keep its head down. If state legislation earlier in the decade had looked promising, a new wave of laws and judicial decisions forbidding manumission by the later 1850s placed crippling

[2] E.L. Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana: A Study of a Minority* (Bloomington, Ind., 1957), 82; N. Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1865* (Cambridge, UK, 2007), 188.

checks on its work. The Society retained the administrative apparatus that it might need to exploit a favourable change in circumstances in the future. But for the time being, the torch of colonization had passed from churchmen to politicians, from eastern states to western, and to a movement that matched its openness to all sorts of destinations other than Liberia with a greater willingness to look to forcible removal.

Traditional responses, new departures: political moderation, state legislation, and the ACS

The American Colonization Society was founded at the end of 1816 by a curious alliance of southern slaveholders and northern evangelicals, many of them worthies of national renown. United only by the lowest common denominator of wanting to check the growth of the free black population, the new-born Society comprised members who wore their antislavery credentials on their sleeve, others who saw the idea as a means of bolstering slavery by removing a 'vicious' and destabilizing element, and many in-between – most notably Henry Clay of Kentucky – of a conservative, economically motivated brand of emancipation generally associated with the upper South. The ACS's self-proclaimed remit, of aiding the removal of the 'free people of colour' with their consent, tried to sidestep these divisions. At the heart of the Society, however, was always the Clay formula, which exploited the crucial ambiguity that slaves might be considered eligible for its work if freed on condition of their departure. This would offer encouragement to private acts of manumission and even state legislation for gradual emancipation, whilst avoiding the controversy of directly attacking the peculiar institution.

Such was the idea, at least. The ACS passed through most of the 1820s without attracting vocal condemnation from whites, although the Missouri crisis introduced the competing idea of 'diffusion' of excess slaves to the west, whilst proslavery forces and

the lower South in general cooled almost immediately on an idea with such double-edged implications. The Society founded the settlement of Liberia and secured congressional funding for the return of the 'recaptives' rescued from the illegal international slave trade, who could be neither sold nor freed in America without seeming to drag the federal government into implicit commentary on the issue of slavery. Whilst the founding of the ACS sparked instant African American condemnation in the North, and with it a period of black intellectual ferment over racial and national identity, a few hundred southern free blacks did go to Liberia that decade, even as the majority in that section too attacked the notion.

Colonizationists' cautious optimism soon rebounded on them, however. Many supporters viewed the policy as an integral part of the 'American System', and indeed an established part of the federal government's work, but legislative bills for further subsidies incurred ever more ire from the lower South. The backlash came in 1830, when the Jackson administration reported that only a fraction of the emigrants sent to Liberia on Washington's dime had qualified as the recaptives envisioned in law. The federal government consequently withdrew funding and forced the ACS to turn to private charity and state support. Nat Turner's rising provided a timely case in favour of the latter, and whilst episodes like the 1831-2 Virginia debates did not deliver on the apparent possibility of comprehensive, coerced removal, Maryland passed appropriations for the colonization of both the already-free and new manumittees. In national politics, colonization would find an unofficial home amongst the Whigs more than it did the Democrats, chiming as it did with their vision of social harmony, their willingness to use federal funds for such 'improvements', and their slightly stronger correlation with conservative antislavery – especially in the North, which provided most of the ACS leadership and donations from the 1830s.

Even as doors opened, though, proslavery and strident antislavery thinking were both finding a voice. During the early 1830s, most of the well-known white abolitionists

of the era converted to immediatism and quit the ACS to join African Americans in opposition to its work. The sectional divide showed up within the Society itself, and in 1833 an internal coup tipped the balance of power from southern management to northern. Times remained hard, with an alarming tendency towards balkanization of the state chapters into independent societies. But a new constitution in 1838 that made the Society a federation of state auxiliaries, in combination with some severe retrenchment, assured the ACS's survival, even as it forced cutbacks on its *raison d'être* of sending emigrants to Liberia.

Strangely, it was on the same count – that of the numbers going to Africa – that the Society's revival would in time become the most apparent. On the one hand, it was exhausted for new ideas after the 1830s, engaged in an eternal pamphleteering war against abolitionists replete with reheated arguments on both sides. On the other, the ACS's vision of manumission with colonization drew succour from the death of an early national generation imbued with an older, post-Revolutionary guilt over slavery and a willingness to free its slaves by testament. 'When judged by the number of ACS emancipations effected, the late 1840s and 1850s were the Society's "golden age"', writes Eric Burin. 'More slaveholders sent more bondpersons to Liberia between 1848 and 1860 than in the previous thirty years combined.' Even if debate over the exact goal and application of state racial legislation limited its impact, the 'unremitting hostility … of the 1850s reign of terror' also saw a sizable number of southern free blacks take up the offer of a passage to Liberia over the decade. As well as African Americans, white abolitionists took a second look: Harriet Beecher Stowe provided for George Harris's move to Liberia at the end of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), whilst a worrying ruling from the Supreme Court inspired James Birney to remind blacks in danger that that country was always an option.[3]

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[3] Survey history up to this point heavily indebted to E. Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution* (Gainesville, 2005), 13-29, and the quotation is from 29; J.G. Birney, *Examination of the Decision of the Supreme Court of the United States* (Cincinnati, 1852).

Success in high politics remained somewhat elusive, with Clay, the Society's president from 1836 to his death in 1852, barely missing out on the White House in 1844. Kentucky's 1849 constitutional convention, the most keenly anticipated upper southern debate on slavery since that of Virginia, did not end up with a single emancipationist delegate. Yet the controversy that culminated in the Compromise of 1850 saw a wide range of national politicians, from each of the main parties and both sections, reach almost instinctively for colonization as a potential point of agreement. On the Whig side, Daniel Webster spoke up for it in his infamous Seventh of March speech, to no little criticism from antislavery quarters. 'With sorrow be it said, that even your virtues lean to vice's side!', Kentucky emancipationist Cassius Clay admonished him. 'I am a Colonizationist … but colonization, with a view merely of getting clear of a free colored class, who are "a thorn in the King's side," has none of my sympathy!' President Fillmore also planned to stump for colonization, though following consultation with his cabinet he ultimately did not, in his final annual message, with words that the ACS could have practically drafted for him:

> I confess that I see no remedy but by colonizing the free blacks, either in Africa or the West Indies, or both. This, it appears to me, is all that Congress can do. It cannot abolish slavery, it can only invite emancipation by removing the free black from his dangerous proximity to the slave. But this would, beyond all question, offer a strong inducement to manumission … at the same time that it would be left entirely to the slave-holding States themselves to determine when manumission should be permitted, or slavery abolished.[4]

For the Democracy, R.M.T Hunter was in contact with British minister Henry Bulwer by late 1850, impatiently angling for official negotiations on black emigration from Virginia to the British West Indies. 'I talked with some of my colleagues upon leaving Washington

[4] C.M. Clay, *The Life of Cassius Marcellus Clay* (2 vols., Cincinnati, 1886), i, 204; F.H. Severance, *Millard Fillmore Papers* (2 vols., comprising vols. x, xi of the series *Buffalo Historical Society Publications*, Buffalo, 1907), x, 322-23. Although he straddled abolitionism and emancipationism in the upper southern, economic modernizing mould, and was not averse to colonization if it proved the *sine qua non* of any act of emancipation, Clay did not regard it as necessary and thought that it dragged down the credibility of antislavery; he accordingly called his cousin Henry 'the chief defender of slavery in the world!' (Letter from C.M. Clay, 24 Aug. 1852, Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection, Filson Historical Society.)

all seemed to think it a good scheme', Hunter told the diplomat, adding that he suspected that Governor Floyd 'will favor the plan of deporting the Free negroes from this state.' Indeed he was even willing to bypass the governor and present the plan directly to the people of the Commonwealth, if Bulwer would outline the kind of proposal that London was likely to offer. Nothing came of this, although in an episode prefiguring events under Lincoln a decade later, Colonial Secretary Henry Grey appears to have made fruitless overtures to the US government in 1852 to the same end. Hunter's muse in the art of cultivating Anglo-American connections, Robert J. Walker, also showed an interest in colonization that would last into the Civil War. His 1856 pamphlet, *An Appeal for the Union*, consciously re-iterated the ideas of his 'safety-valve' theory on the annexation of Texas, and argued for using colonization to win over the non-slaveholders of the South in much the same way as the Blair family would do on behalf of the Republican Party. Walker excitedly told James Buchanan, another moderate in search of a compromise on slavery, that the party committee to which he addressed the *Appeal* had told him that it would have an even greater influence than his Texas letter of 1844. He added that he looked forward to establishing a regular steamer to Liberia after the election.[5]

Nevertheless, for all these friendly sounds, national politics still proved barren ground for the ACS. An 1849 appeal for federal assistance for colonization, presented by one of Kentucky's senators with an explicit nod to his state's upcoming convention, descended into a predictable fight and was shelved by a sectional vote. Even the Society's supporters were keen to protect it from political debate and to remove references to its work from the bill under consideration. Stung by such controversy, the Society's journal, the *African Repository*, went silent on the question of emancipation,

[5] R.M.T. Hunter to H. Bulwer, 9 Oct. 1850, 9 Feb. 1851, Bulwer Papers, Duke University; *CG* 35:1, 296; J. Bigelow to F.P. Blair, 8 Mar. 1860, B-L; R.J. Walker to Buchanan, 3 Oct. 1856, James Buchanan Papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, LC. Bigelow reported that 'the American government were being saucy about it seeming to regard it as a very meddlesome not to say impertinent business. This correspondence was never published here nor … its contents ever transpired.' Walker had earlier gone on the record in favour of a steam line to Liberia with a letter to the 1850 Indiana constitutional convention. (*Debates of the Indiana Constitutional Convention* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1850), i, 606.)

going so far as to impose gag rules on itself from 1855; the executive committee even slapped its own president on the wrist in 1858 for a fleeting allusion to the ultimate end of slavery. Less domestically controversial aims also foundered on the rocks of sectionalism. A spirit of retrenchment of an especially southern flavour dashed the Society's hopes that the federal government might establish a mail steamer route to Liberia, with the potential to double up as an 'Ebony Line' for emigrants, and forced it to invest in a conventional sail ship when its own efforts to raise money for a steamer fell short.[6]

The most chronic source of disappointment, however, was always that of not achieving recognition for Liberia. The colony had proclaimed its independence in 1847 with the ACS's encouragement, but the US was not to acknowledge its offspring until the Civil War. Even then, the feat was only made possible by the withdrawal of rebellious southern congressmen, who had been inveterately opposed to the acknowledgment of black nationality. The Society had tried to bypass the near-certain revulsion at the thought of a black diplomat frequenting the halls of Washington, and the more down-to-earth danger that such a figure would fall foul of racial laws the moment he stepped outside the District, by offering a white American colonizationist as an official representative on Liberia's behalf. Yet the ACS was only scratching the surface of southerners' objections. For slaveholders inevitably bracketed Liberia with Haiti, another unrecognized and eminently black state; the Caribbean nation was almost symbolic for them rather than a real place, a chilling reminder of slave insurrection.[7]

Tantalizingly for the ACS, the issue of recognition was not without its optimistic moments. Fillmore and Webster were favourable in principle to appointing a consul –

[6] *CG* 30:2, 206-10; *African Repository*, Mar. 1855, 74; Journal of the Executive Committee, 3 Dec. 1858, ACS 292. The beginning of the decade had witnessed interest in the commercial benefits that might accrue from running government-sponsored steam lines to other parts of the globe, but such hopes were founded on an unrealistic and premature assessment of demand, and the whole system was under fire by 1853. In support, with a colonizationist rationale: *Report of the Naval Committee to the House of Representatives, August, 1850 in Favor of the Establishment of a Line of Mail Steamships to the Western Coast of Africa* (Washington, 1850). Opposition to the general idea: *CG* 32:2, 1086-91.

[7] *African Repository*, Oct. 1854, 297-8; W. McLain to J.H.B. Latrobe, 9 Apr. 1853, ACS 194.

with the president also approaching the ACS in 1852 for information on the cost of sending emigrants, shortly before the public endorsement that never was – but they ultimately refused to take the lead where Congress had not ventured first. What little chance of that there was came in 1853, when Sen. Jacob Miller (W-N.J.) used the political freedom of impending retirement to remind his colleagues of Liberia's origins: 'there is a "Monroe doctrine" as to colonization in Africa, as well as to colonization in America, equally orthodox, though not quite so popular.' Calling for recognition, and pointing to the need to relieve those affected by the black laws of the free states, Miller responded to criticism of its colonizationist aspects from both poles, and pared it down to a simple exploration of the interior of Africa; it still failed on a somewhat sectional 21-21 tie. With the death of Clay and Webster in 1852, and the arrival of a doughfaced Democrat in the White House the next year, Liberia's prospects sank that bit more. In 1855, the ACS tried to form a committee to lobby for recognition with a majority from the slaveholding states in order to pre-empt the obvious objection, and lamely hoped that the appointment of a low-ranking US commercial consul to Monrovia would see Washington officialdom inadvertently sting itself into acknowledging the existence of Liberia. The last chance during antebellum years came when an upsurge in the numbers of successfully intercepted slavers forced the US government to negotiate with the ACS for their 'return' to Liberia. This was the one aspect of the Society's work where it could still just about expect assistance. Society officials asked President Buchanan to transfer the government contracts from the ACS to Liberia, on the grounds that the latter was now independent and that the Society should not intrude on its business. But Buchanan spotted the trap and replied 'that he should prefer to acknowledge the independence and nationality of Liberia, directly, than to do it "as it were" by any quasi policy, [and] … that personally he should be willing to do it, with certain limitations.'[8]

[8] Journal of the Executive Committee, 17 Jan. 1851, 28 Oct. 1852, 20 Apr. 1860, ACS 292; McLain to J.N. Lewis, 29 Dec 1851, ACS 239; *CG* 32:2, 1064-5, Appendix, 231-4; *African Repository*, Feb. 1855, 45-6; J. Tracy to J.J. Roberts, 17 Feb. 1857, ACS 235.

Emblematically, the ACS still had friends in high places on the eve of war; just as typically, those friends could not, or would not, do much to actually help it. If African colonization were to take off, it would have to be at the state level, via legislation paying for the emigration of their free black populations. The ball started rolling in Virginia in 1850, which passed a law appropriating $30,000 annually for five years, funded by a poll tax on free black residents. The Commonwealth modified the law in 1853 to add a board to oversee the 'removal of free negroes', thus making it an arm of state government. In 1852, Pennsylvania voted $2,000 annually, Missouri $3,000 annually for ten years, and Maryland, the only state not to have let its financial support for colonization lapse after the first wave of the 1830s, $10,000 annually for six years. The *Repository* saluted such measures as 'a great moral demonstration of the propriety and necessity of state action!' Other states faltered, however. Tennessee mandated the removal of emancipated slaves to Liberia in 1853 but made the law a dead letter by not providing the requisite funds. The governor of Iowa vetoed a colonization bill; conversely, in New York, the legislature failed to respond to the governor's misjudged appeal in his 1852 annual message, with one representative pointing to the dangerous precedent of doling out money to private charity where the local branch of the colonization society still had funds. (This was a chronic concern for the ACS, that reaching for the public purse, as it started to do again in the 1850s, would inevitably stifle private philanthropy, and vice-versa.) The lower South toyed with the idea of financial support, which came up in the Louisiana house in 1853 and the Georgian in 1856 and 1858, but little came of it.[9]

Even where appropriations passed, their effect was limited. The figures involved could hardly have removed more than a fraction of the African American population. Indeed, the invoice generally ended up being even less than the nominal totals, as the

[9] P.J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York, 1961), 244; M. Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill, 2007), 56-60, 244; 'Colonization Scheme – Speech of Senator Munroe', *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 22 Apr. 1852; Annual Report, 1853, 1855, ACS 286; I. Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1992), 356.

Society could only draw on the appropriations at an often miserly rate for each settler actually sent to Liberia, of whom there were never many. There was also much debate about such appropriations' remit and purpose, with restrictions on using them for those not resident in the state at the time of the legislation's adoption, and in the case of Virginia, a ban on using them for emancipated slaves rather than the already free. As early as 1853, the governor of the Old Dominion expressed his disappointment that emigration to Liberia was not even removing the annual increase in the black population; the colonization law actually turned a profit from the accompanying tax. In 1858, Virginia would join several other states that had decided against renewing such appropriations.[10]

In sponsoring colonization, the South had reached for what was a traditional solution for that section. Yet its efforts at black removal were always somewhat qualified in practice, whether through unwillingness to establish a system of proper enforcement of state removal laws, through slaveholders' paternalism, or through the challenges presented by heirs to the popular formula of testamentary manumission. Colonizationist sentiment emanated more from the upper South, which looked to a growing free black population and the decreasing profitability of local slave agriculture as a sign that the region might yet become free by natural processes. Yet by dint of the same, it might dispose of the slave population the profitable way, by sales southwards, whilst it had to address questions of whether it could cope with an immediate loss of free black labour, which accounted for half of the total African American workforce in Maryland's case. In the less apologetic and slave-hungry lower South, on the other hand, the number of free blacks was so low that the ACS remained fairly suspect, though not without its successes. Opponents of the Society held that it simply had to be looking to emancipate slaves; its operations in the Cotton Kingdom could not be viable otherwise. But mixing these different rationales, in a particularly noxious combination, was actually

[10] Tyler-McGraw, 59-60; A. Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union: Fruits of Manifest Destiny, 1847-1852* (New York, 1947), 514.

the free soil of the Midwest. It shared the upper South's interest in economic diversification and reserving American soil for the use of the white population; the lower South's small overall percentages of free blacks, which seemed to make comprehensive removal feasible; and the humanitarian hang-ups of neither, since it did not have slavery or the concomitant personal relationships of whites with African Americans – however paternalistically understood – that the institution forged. Moreover, the lower part of the region was home to a large number of former southerners, who had brought their racial attitudes with them. Only the newest territories and states, the frontier of Kansas, California, and Oregon, surpassed the area in terms of legal discrimination, as they were sparsely settled and thus in danger of allowing African Americans – or in the Pacific West, Chinese immigrants – significant social mobility.[11]

Still, the most notorious exclusionary impetus of the 1850s came from the Midwest, with Indiana perhaps the only state in the whole Union to make truly concerted efforts to tie the proactive pursuit of colonization to black exclusion. As noted, those impulses did not always overlap as much as one might expect, and colonizationists could be outspoken in wanting to disentangle their work from exclusion. 'In the name of humanity I ask what is to become of them – where are they to go?' asked Henry Clay in the wake of Indiana's adoption of a constitutional article banning black entry. The disjuncture sometimes played out in broad political correlations, too. Though there could be local majorities from either party in favour of both, under the second party system it tended to be the Whigs who were more supportive of colonization than the Democrats, especially where the movement asked for federal funding – but their positions were slightly reversed when it came to tightening racial laws. (Admittedly, Democratic domination of the Midwest's statehouses and constitutional conventions put the party more in the spotlight in that respect; the region was also the most prone in the

[11] E. Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York, 1970), 262.

whole Union to bipartisan crossover on the merits of both colonization and exclusion.) Even as alignments blurred by the 1850s and new parties emerged, something of an awkward fit between discriminatory deeds and words was always in evidence. Although free soil ideology had a perfectly racist lowest common denominator, the Free Soil Party was far from at the forefront of the drive for harsher black laws. Moreover, Eric Foner found that there were no statistical instances during the antebellum period of Republican voters 'out-discriminating' their rivals in state referendums on racial propositions, despite the party's immersion in free soil ideology and its frequent willingness to match Democratic deployment of the race card.[12]

All the same, the majorities in favour of discriminatory measures could be overwhelming, especially where they were put to a series of individual votes rather than bundled together with other propositions. Constitutional conventions in Illinois and Indiana adopted black exclusion provisions in 1847 and 1851, and passed laws to enforce them in 1853 and 1852 respectively. Voters in the Prairie State approved their new clause 60,585 to 15,903 in 1848, whilst their Hoosier neighbours approved the infamous Article XIII by a runaway 113,628 to 21,873. Ohio rather idiosyncratically repealed the worst of its black laws in 1849 when Free Soilers obtained the balance of power between Democrats and Whigs, and actually allied with the former to get their way; pro-exclusion forces started a fight-back from the constitutional convention of the next year, however. More than anywhere else, Illinois became synonymous with black laws – and thus with northern hypocrisy, in the minds of both abolitionists and southerners – for laying down the most severe penalties to date for a free state. It

[12] In another example, Alvin Hovey asked delegates to separate exclusion and colonization in the 1850 Indiana convention, but the reformer Robert Dale Owen countered that the state needed to enact both to successfully keep down the black population. Likewise, Hoosier philanthropist and long-time colonizationist Calvin Fletcher toyed with voting for Article XIII, but ultimately could not bring himself to do it. Nevins, 515; E.H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery* (Urbana, Ill., 1967), 41; R.H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York, 1976), 185; Foner, *Free Soil*, 284-5; K.J. Winkle, '"Paradox Though It May Seem": Lincoln on Antislavery, Race, and Union, 1837-1860', in B.R. Dirck (ed.), *Lincoln Emancipated: The President and the Politics of Race* (DeKalb, 2007), 18; *Debates of the Indiana Constitutional Convention*, ii, 1792; G. Thornbrough (ed.), *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher* (8 vols., Indianapolis, 1972-81), iv, 304, vii, 530.

imposed a fine of $100-500 and a year's prison sentence for anyone taking an African American through the state, whilst non-resident blacks who entered the state for more than ten days would find their labour publicly auctioned if they could not pay a $50 penalty, at the end of which term they would be expelled.[13]

In practice the laws proved largely unenforceable wherever they existed, with Indiana even failing to make proper provision for the removal of those who had already entered the state illegally. As long as the laws remained on the books, though, people could appeal to them where a personal grudge was afoot. Their real significance may have been to dangle the sword of Damocles over the heads of black Americans for more than a decade. They also provided a stark reminder of the limitations of northern opinion, as well as a potential foothold, both as a legal and an ethical precedent, for further assaults on African American rights.[14]

If Illinois was the most visible face of black exclusion, and that despite Iowa and the new state of Oregon also banning black entry in the late 1850s, Indiana was certainly the embodiment of colonization. This was due in no small part to the efforts of Rev. James Mitchell, a heretofore somewhat shadowy figure in Lincoln scholarship. Born in Londonderry in September 1818, Mitchell's family immigrated to Jeffersonville in 1836, where a maternal uncle owned a business; after finishing his engineering studies in England, James joined them. He entered the United States via Philadelphia in July 1837, and became involved in a Jeffersonville Sunday school and Bible class. Despite an Episcopalian mother, a Presbyterian father, and an irreligious uncle, Mitchell was drawn to the Methodist Church, which would provide him with a solution to a crisis of conscience already erupting over his relocation to a country that held millions in slavery. Indeed, Mitchell had initially refused to take the oath of citizenship, but the presiding elder pointed him to the policy of Henry Clay as a way out of the moral

[13] Berwanger, 49.
[14] E.L. Thornbrough, *Negro in Indiana*, 70-1.

impasse. Mitchell seized on the idea and never looked back, adhering to a belief in the separation of the races for the rest of his life, which lasted into the twentieth century.[15]

The minister's calling to work outside the church came at an opportune time. One Benjamin Kavanaugh had revived the state colonization chapter in 1845, whilst in 1848 the Indiana legislature endorsed the policy. During the next session, a house committee warned of internecine warfare if the state made no move on colonization. Gov. Joseph Wright, an antislavery Democrat, assured sceptical lawmakers that they had the right to make appropriations for colonization. He reiterated this point once Article XIII had passed, which used the fines levied on those who fell foul of the law to colonizationist ends. In 1853 lawmakers capitulated, revoking the charter of the old colonization society, and replacing it with a state board consisting of the governor, secretary of state, and state auditor. Mitchell was appointed secretary of the board, and a black minister John McKay its agent.[16]

James Mitchell was a thoroughly paradoxical man. Most of what we know of his views comes from a body of pamphlet literature, published both at his own instigation and by the state of Indiana – later, by the US government too – in the form of reports on colonization's progress. In truth, they hardly ever stayed on topic. Mitchell invariably recurred to a much cherished list of personal racial 'propositions' that accepted that all men were created equal, but also that stable republican government required racial homogeneity; the real crime of slavery was that it had mixed the races in violation of the laws of nature. As an Ulsterman who had moved to America, he held some equally striking views on foreign relations. He regarded Britain with manifest ambivalence, singling it out as the instigator of an Old World plot to stir up both the abolitionists of

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[15] L.F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago, 1961), 263; M.E. Mitchell, *Memoirs of James Mitchell: Statesman, Educator, Minister* (Mt Zion, Ga., 1939), 4-7. Mitchell was likely alluding to himself when he wrote of 'an acquaintance [who] weighed [the question of citizenship] twelve years – seven years before he took the first oath, and five years before he took the final one, and then ended by becoming a reluctant but firm believer, in the doctrine of African colonization'. (J. Mitchell, *Answer of the Agent of the Indiana Colonization Society* (Indianapolis, 1852), 47.)

[16] Berwanger, 55-7; E.L. Thornbrough, *Negro in Indiana*, 81-5.

the North and the 'aristocrats' of the lower South in order to keep the United States saddled with an alien black population. Such agitation was designed to undermine republicanism and to place monarchical institutions in America, Mitchell explained. Yet he also admired Britain's genuine antislavery and, during the Civil War, would also come to see its limited monarchy as the ideal form of government to keep the black man under control, readily accepting that London should dominate the American tropics to that end.[17]

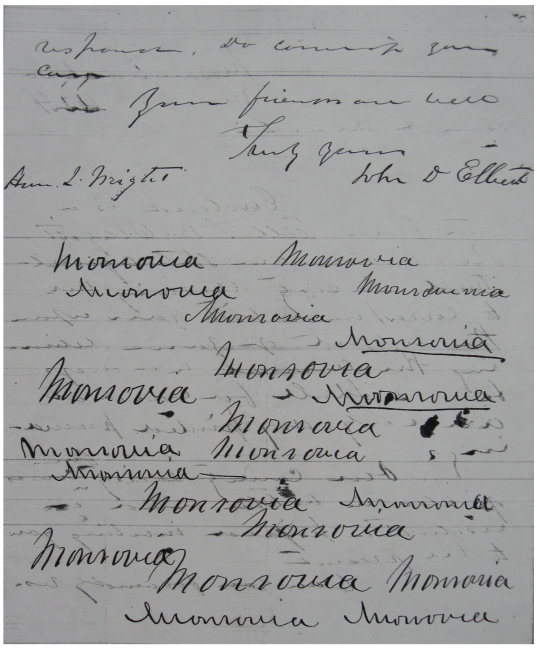
Mitchell's understanding of domestic race relations was no less difficult to fathom. On the one hand, he cultivated contacts with African Americans, took an interest in black education, and was known to state that blacks should not be forced out of their homes by harsh means. Though Mitchell frequently pointed to the lopsided majority in the Indiana referendum for its ringing endorsement of colonization, many years later he confessed not to have voted for the adoption of Article XIII because of his distaste for the exclusion rider that his 'opponents had strength to tack on to it'. The Civil War found him open to exerting discriminatory pressures, however, and even to considering deportation as a last resort if those did not work. 'Mitchell stood for systematic exclusion and not for vague white Christian charity', writes Mark Neely, though one might reasonably wonder whether the assumptions of the day saw much contradiction between the two. Suffusing all of Mitchell's writings, moreover, was the vague, sweeping, and bombastic tone of a preacher convinced that colonization was the means of rearranging the peoples of the world in accordance with the original intent of the divine.[18]

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[17] For the fullest expressions of Mitchell's views, see *Answer of the Agent* and *Letter on the Relation of the White and African Races in the United States* (Washington, 1862).

[18] M.E. Neely, Jr., 'Colonization and the Myth That Lincoln Prepared the People for Emancipation', in W.A. Blair and K.F. Younger (eds.), *Lincoln's Proclamation: Emancipation Reconsidered* (Chapel Hill, 2009), 60. Mitchell's rejection of harsh means and exclusionary impulse: J. Mitchell, *Report on Colonization for 1860* (Indianapolis, 1861), 8; *Circular to the Friends of African Colonization* (Indianapolis, 1855), 1; *Report of the Secretary of the State Board of Colonization* (Indianapolis, 1853), 9. Refusal to vote for Article XIII: J. Mitchell, *The Educational Claims of the Children of the Non-Slave-Holding Whites of the South* (Atlanta, 1891), 11. Contemplation of deportation: J. Mitchell, *Letter on the Relation,* 25. In the *Report* for 1860, Mitchell put a positive spin on the low





Left: *James Mitchell, shown much later in life.* Right: *colonization on the brain – repeated doodling of the word 'Monrovia', the capital of Liberia, in the hand of Gov. Joseph Wright. (Courtesy of Jack Dorsey, Mt Zion Community Center, Mt Zion, Ga.; J.D. Elbert to Wright, 7 Mar. 1854, Joseph A. Wright Papers, Indiana State Library.)*

We need to be careful in tackling the one-man interpretive problem that is James Mitchell, especially where so much of the evidence about his character derives from a wartime dispute in which his antagonist John Usher not only managed to pull rank but also to leave more of an impact than Mitchell on the official sources that history has bequeathed us. 'Most "systematic" thinkers about race in the middle of the nineteenth century are bound to appear as crackpots today, and Mitchell is no exception', warns Neely with shrewd insight, though ultimately he joins a minor historiographical

number of black Indianans who had gone to Liberia by crediting it to the humanitarianism of the white population, and to its purported unwillingness to employ severe measures to stimulate emigration. Since Mitchell was making a virtue out of necessity, and always stood to alienate more people than he could win over by hinting at deportation where that was not actually achievable, it is possible that he *did* support the idea – as suggested in *Letter on the Relation* – when the war made it look like it might become feasible.

tradition in deeming the minister 'dangerously impractical' and somewhat unlikely company for Lincoln. What Mitchell mostly left behind were publications concerning his ideas, which bring out his obliquely prophetic, intellectually hidebound, and conspiracy-theorizing side more than they do anything else. But he managed to secure jobs with both the state of Indiana and the United States government, and won long-term allies – arguably even friends – such as Wright and Lincoln. We should be wary of second-guessing the judgment of those who actually encountered Mitchell and took to him. Though colonization and its advocates might well perplex us, it is not much use expressing our incredulity that Lincoln ever appointed someone like Mitchell when that is precisely what he did, and with a personal endorsement to boot.[19]

It might be more accurate to say that Mitchell's forthright and overbearing behaviour alienated some to a greater degree than it endeared him to others. 'I dislike him', confided Indianapolis colonizationist Calvin Fletcher to his diary. 'He always approaches me as if I was in the field to buy good opinions of others as if I were intending to shape my sails for the popular breeze … such men are most detestible and tricky.' Mitchell's grandiloquent and unrealistic inflation of the wider political merits of colonization, such as treating it as a diplomatic expedient to win over British opinion during the Civil War, for example, was a trait that undoubtedly showed up in his interactions with supporters as well. Yet they did not have to agree with everything he said, and they could admire his obvious commitment to a cause that was still music to their ears. We must also acknowledge that Mitchell was a thoroughly disinterested judge of the various locations available for colonization, a policy that attracted so much corruption – once backed by substantial wartime appropriations – as to bring about a major shift in Lincoln's approach thereto. Whilst Usher became vested in the Chiriquí scheme, possibly to its ruin and certainly to the detriment of the rival Île à Vache venture, Mitchell was content to incur unrefunded personal expense in the cause of

[19] Neely, 60, 63.

colonization during both his Indianan and Washington careers. Though he left no personal assessment of the relative merits of the two men, it may be telling that Lincoln apparently excluded Usher from the later colonization schemes even as he continued to use the services of Mitchell.[20]

Moreover, it is important for the historian using sources left to us by Mitchell to recognize the paradoxical merits of an obsessive. There is actually something curiously credible about the handful of Lincoln remarks that he recorded. A more detached, dispassionate man looking to resume a wartime office – as Mitchell was, by 1865 – might have fabricated reams of conversations with the late president in which the latter spoke up for colonization, especially near his death. Mitchell did nothing of the sort: he recalled brief sketches of three or four encounters with Lincoln, which clearly fell very short of detailing all their dealings over the years. Though they do not sit well with the leanings of the literature, none of them are actually game-changing with respect to the reputation of a president who had only ever gone on the record in support of colonization. Indeed, that Lincoln said some favourable things was little more than the icing on the cake for Mitchell, who always preferred to stress the self-evident truth of his own racial propositions.

Before dismissing Mitchell on the strength of his ideas, we must also acknowledge his political deftness; he may have been rather more flexible and complex when it came to means, as compared to his rather unlikely ends of bringing about mass racial separation. Like Wright, he was a Democrat, but bemoaned such strict construction of the state's colonization appropriations as would stop the board investing in a good settlement in Liberia as well as merely paying for setters' passage and land grants. On one occasion, he even chided the Massachusetts Colonization Society for declaring colonization by the general government impracticable, reminding it that the east was more fertile ground for private philanthropy, and that the interior states might

[20] G. Thornbrough, *Diary of Calvin Fletcher*, v, 236.

appreciate federal dollars. Mitchell also had no compunction about appealing to Whigs – not that the support base of the policy left him much choice in the matter – or in enumerating them amongst the worthies who had lent their support to colonization. He placed policy above party, and on at least one occasion, told the electorate to vote above all for supporters of the cause, 'for we have good men in both parties who are sound and active colonizationists.'[21]

Despite such aspirations to national policymaking, it was his job with the government of Indiana and his ACS agency for parts of the Midwest that drew on Mitchell's efforts during the 1850s. He was keen on independent state action, but it was actually the parent organization of the Colonization Society from which he tried to keep his distance, not the federal government. In 1849 Mitchell had entered into correspondence with the president of Liberia for a separate territorial concession for emigrants from Indiana, and continued to do so under the auspices of the state government. President Joseph J. Roberts politely refused on the grounds that it was hard to defend outlying settlements from native attacks, and because such privileges might engender jealousy on the part of emigrants from other states. The Board was disappointed, explaining that '[w]e desire a location for a settlement for the benefit of our colored people, that we may give a tangible form to our doings in this enterprise.' Public opinion impatiently demanded visible results, they felt, and the appropriations were at risk unless the state could deliver them. In the meantime, McKay visited Liberia to try to negotiate, and filed a positive report of the country in order to encourage black emigration, but he could not resolve the differences between Indiana and Monrovia.[22]

Although sending a mission across the Atlantic to treat on behalf of just one state inherently tempered an international outlook with a certain parochialism, Mitchell did

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[21] J. Mitchell, *Report of the Agent of the Colonization Society of the State of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1855), 716-17, *Report of the Secretary of the State Board of Colonization* (Indianapolis, 1853), 12, *Letters on the Relation of the White and African Races* (N.B. earlier publication with similar title, Springfield, 1860), 27-9, 'To the Friends of Colonization' (Springfield, 1853).
[22] J. Mitchell, *Report* (Indianapolis, 1853), 6-8; J. McKay, *Report of Rev John McKay* (Indianapolis, 1854), 5-10, 13-15, 39-40.

look to inter-state co-operation within the Old Northwest because of its kindred sentiments on colonization, and especially to Illinois. 'The idea of bringing the Indiana system to Illinois was in the air', according to Neely, and Mitchell introduced himself to his neighbours as early as 1851. It was two years later, when the Illinois legislature made good on its newfound ability to introduce black laws, that the minister made a special effort to forge alliances in Springfield. 'The state of Illinois has always been regarded as sound and liberal on this subject – her public opinion being correct', explained Mitchell, 'but owing to the want of agencies to move the public, the enterprise has been at a stand for a year or two past.' He asked Rev. Dodge of the Second Presbyterian Church if there was anyone who could help him in Illinois as had Wright back home. Dodge pointed him to Lincoln, whom Mitchell did not rate on first sight:

> My friend had previously eulogized the attorney very highly, yet when I saw his great, gaunt and angular figure, loosely if not carelessly dressed, I was not favourably impressed and said to myself: 'If that is Illinois' great man, Illinois is not much.' But when I had been introduced and subjected to his close searching inquiries about the policy of our society, and our action in Indiana, I quickly changed my opinion of the man, and from that hour we were friends.[23]

It is no surprise that they hit it off. Whilst there are good reasons to speculate that Lincoln had been involved in a typically short-lived local colonization society during the 1840s, he had uttered his first recorded words on the matter the previous year in a eulogy for Henry Clay delivered in the Illinois Hall of Representatives. Quoting a speech from the Great Compromiser in favour of colonization, Lincoln opined that '[t]his suggestion of the possible ultimate redemption of the African race and African continent, was made twenty-five years ago. Every succeeding year has added strength to the hope of its realization. May it indeed be realized!' In private, Lincoln was more ambivalent about Clay and his record on colonization than he let on. He had gone to Lexington a few years earlier to hear him speak on the topic, and had returned to Springfield profoundly

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[23] Neely, 58; J. Mitchell, 'To the Friends of Colonization'; 'Lincoln and the Negro', *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, 26 Aug. 1894.

disappointed at a cold, passionless speech, and the haughty attitude that Clay had evinced on meeting him. Yet it made political sense for an ambitious Whig to lay claim to Clay's mantle, and Lincoln genuinely agreed with the statesman's conservative strain of antislavery. Thus it was that he found himself listening to Mitchell preach in Dodge's church the following Sunday. Lincoln handed over $3 to help make Rev. Smith of the First Presbyterian Church – his regular place of worship, and the venue for a colonization address of his own later that summer – a life member of the Colonization Society. By late September 1853, Mitchell could report to the Indiana Board that he had founded colonization societies in Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, each 'under favorable circumstances'.[24]

Indeed the minister's sense of regionalism gained additional momentum the next year. Holding the position of ACS agent for several of the midwestern states as well as for Indiana, he went to Washington to enlist the help of southern and south-western representatives. Such an exercise may well have reflected a growing bias against the northeast, and especially the immoderation on slavery that he perceived on its part. Whilst there, Mitchell satisfied himself that recent talk of abrogating the eighth clause of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, which provided for an American naval squadron off the coast of Africa to intercept slavers, was not typical of southern opinion. Years later, he recalled that his visit had offered prospects of even better results, for Mitchell also 'pressed [colonization] on the attention of Mr. Pierce, who, with his full cabinet, as I was given to understand, including Jefferson Davis, was willing to grant national colonization as America's means of suppressing the African slave trade.'[25]

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[24] M. Lind, *What Lincoln Believed* (New York, 2005), 105; *CW*, ii, 132; N. Brooks, *Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1901), 68-9; M.R. Cain, 'Lincoln's Views on Slavery and the Negro: A Suggestion', *Historian*, 26 (Aug. 1964), 503-4; 'Lincoln and the Negro', *Globe-Democrat*; [http://www.thelincolnlog.org/view/1853/8/30] (29 Mar. 2012); Record of the Proceedings of the Indiana State Board of Colonization, 27 Sept. 1853, General Assembly Miscellaneous Records, Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis.

[25] J. Mitchell, *Report* (1855), 717. Note also his resolution to correspond with the western and southern colonization societies only. (18 Aug. 1854, Record of the Proceedings of the Indiana State Board; *Report* (1855), 717.)

Frustratingly, Mitchell did not spell out precisely what had transpired. True to form, his anecdote is all too brief, and perhaps rather more cryptic than unbelievable. The events that he described occurred barely a month after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and given the sudden shattering of the post-1850 calm, it is not inconceivable that an administration once again instinctively reached for colonization. Certainly Mitchell exerted *some* influence on this visit, for one of Indiana's senators, Democrat John Pettit, stood up to amend a slave trade bill by offering a Mitchell-drafted $250,000 appropriation for the ACS to establish an armed mail steamer line to Liberia. This hinted at additional colonizationist purposes in its provision for the steamers to call at the major ports of the South, the obvious points of black embarkation, in rotation. John Clayton (W-Del.) replied that whilst he was amenable to the idea in principle, he had it on good authority that the ACS had asked for no such help. Pettit accordingly withdrew the amendment with an explanation that it had been Mitchell's idea.[26]

Under somewhat cryptic circumstances, the minister spent the rest of his life blaming William Seward and Clayton for what had happened, especially the latter, whom he understood to be a friend of the executive committee of the ACS. He alleged that the duo had called together extraordinary meetings of the committee to get the Society to disavow Mitchell's efforts, as they 'regarded "colonization as a strong card that the Democracy must not play at this time."' Perhaps we should not doubt that prominent Whigs were reeling from the Kansas-Nebraska Act in mid-1854, and were desperately trying to shore up their position by any means. Whatever the full story, the minister soured on the ACS for its 'treacherous act'. Mitchell severed his official connection with the Society, though he continued to turn up to its annual meetings, and successfully moved for greater autonomy for its state auxiliaries in 1857.[27]

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[26] *CG* 33:1, 1604.
[27] J. Mitchell, *Educational Claims* (Atlanta, 1891), 11; Proceedings of the Board of Managers, 22 Jan. 1857, ACS 290.

Under somewhat unclear circumstances, Mitchell resigned the Indiana secretaryship with effect from 1 August 1854, shortly after his disappointment on Capitol Hill, in favour of an Indianapolis clergyman, Thornton Mills. He instead assumed the unpaid position of corresponding secretary, one that he ranked highly. 'The corresponding secretary is the ligament that binds the members to the head; and is the channel of information through which we would stimulate the remote members', Mitchell had advised Illinoisans the previous year. Maybe he was thinking of the colonization movement's chronic problems in channelling broad amateur support and approbation into something more substantial and useable. His new role saw him counsel the Illinois legislature once more in 1855 when Gov. Joel Matteson called on it to raise funds to 'separate the blacks from the whites, and send them to the land of their fathers.' Mitchell again appealed to midwestern unity: if the five or six thousand African American inhabitants of Illinois 'in connection with the colored people of Indiana, would remove to Liberia, they are sufficiently strong to lay the foundation of a new state of respectable size'. Nothing came of such a call, however.[28]

In fact, even in Indiana, the colonization movement was running into problems. On the one hand, the state remained devoted to black exclusion, with an 1855 attempt in the lower house to strike out the law handily defeated, along with efforts in both 1857 and 1859 to reduce some of its penalties. Yet the proactive drive for black resettlement encountered ever more difficulties. The dream of a separate Indianan colony died hard, and Mitchell quickly came to regret the lack of scope for spending money on improvements above and beyond the basic land grants and emigrants' passage. Legally, the state could not meet Liberia's suggested compromise either, that Indiana pay for the defences of a settlement otherwise founded on the normal terms. Mitchell contemplated a loan to secure a Hoosier exclave, an idea that the Board quashed. He even went so far as to deny that McKay had held an official commission on his diplomatic trip to Liberia,

[28] J. Mitchell, *Report* (1855), 715, 'To the Friends of Colonization', *Letter from the Rev. J. Mitchell, Relative to Colonization* (Springfield, 1855), 11; Lind, *What Lincoln Believed*, 106.

in order to keep open the possibility of negotiating for more control over the projected Indiana settlement.[29]

Mitchell was impatient, as he feared that inactivity could beget only failure. He had drawn up a bill for the 1855 legislative session allowing the Board greater control over its existing funds and making a further appropriation, but the house rejected the latter provision, as there was still unexpended colonization money from the previous session. Strikingly for a cleric, Mitchell rejected the idea of financial appeals to the churches on the grounds of their poor yield, and because 'colonization is a political measure' – as he had always insisted, he added. Sensing that retrenchment was afoot, and that the legislature might repeal even the existing appropriations, he 'feared that the thousands who went with us for the revised constitution, will wake up to the conviction that in Colonization they have been defrauded, and in their bitter disappointment, may turn on the movers of the measure of Colonization.' Desperate for visible results to forestall such cuts, Mitchell argued that 'an ever quickening march will be found the *best* and safest policy.'[30]

Yet the state's inability to found a settlement on its desired terms was only the tip of the iceberg. Fundamentally, the greatest problem was that of obtaining emigrants, and it is doubtful that improved investment in the colony would have changed that. Matters had started promisingly: 33 had left in 1853, 14 in 1854, and more than 50 were engaged to go in 1855. In what was an all too familiar experience for colonizationists, the last expedition fell through, with all dropping out bar a sickly and destitute family that it was deemed better not to send. Mills explained that 'influences … were exerted on a number of the emigrants to dissuade them from going', whilst pressure from the same quarter also induced McKay's summary resignation. Mills had only ever taken the

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[29] E.L. Thornbrough, *Negro in Indiana*, 69; McKay, *Report* (1854), 40; J. Mitchell, *Report* (1855), 716-17.

[30] J. Mitchell, *Circular to the Friends of African Colonization* (Indianapolis, 1855), 5-7. Mitchell might have been contemplating a project related to colonization when he vainly asked Calvin Fletcher for a $4,000 loan in 1852. (G. Thornbrough, *Diary of Calvin Fletcher*, iv, 400.)

position on condition of working with McKay and giving him two-thirds of his own salary, and even refused to draw his wages for the fifteen months between McKay's resignation and his own. Thus it was that the Board handed the secretaryship back to Mitchell in early 1857. Since would-be emigrants needed to hear the colonization pitch from 'one of their own number', efforts to solicit settlers had hit a wall.[31]

Mitchell kept up the fight, addressing a newly inaugurated President Buchanan to suggest a steamer line to Liberia under the joint control of the New York, Maryland, and Louisiana colonization societies. This proposal once again reflected a characteristic, rather abstract geographical determinism in its aim of triangulating different sectional sentiments on the moderate solution of colonization. Mitchell also spent the end of the 1850s engaged in a typically acrimonious tussle with senior members of the south-eastern Indiana conference of the Methodist Church. He accused them of trying to foist an appointment on him inappropriate to the state of his health, and the dispute even descended into shouting matches on the streets of Indianapolis. By 1858, Calvin Fletcher was probably justified in writing off the minister's colonization efforts and the state's with them:

> One Revd. Mitchell undertook the matter and made a failure. He from the first was hostile to the American colonization society and undertook to use the $8000 by purchase in Liberia independent of the parent society which had planted the colony had its sympathies. The prohibition by the state constitution and the provisions to carry those who were here placed the colored man in opposition to the attempt to get people to go to L[iberia].[32]

Fletcher could not have known that events would take the turn that they subsequently did, and bring together Mitchell and an old ally from Illinois to work on what had, by then, become an official policy of the United States government. Yet that development can be credited, at least indirectly, to the very same streak of persistence and proselytization that had characterized Mitchell's colonization ventures in Indiana and

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[31] 10 Jan., 31 Jan. 1857, Record of the Proceedings of the Indiana State Board; T.A. Mills, *Report of the Secretary of the State Board of Colonization* (Indianapolis, 1857), 333-4.
[32] J. Mitchell, *Report* (1861), 9, *An Appeal to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Jeffersonville, 1860); G. Thornbrough, *Diary of Calvin Fletcher*, vi, 229.

the Midwest. As in so many ways, the man defies easy summary and the instinctive dismissal that his views would seem to invite.

Moreover, it would be wrong to lay the blame for policy disappointments on Mitchell individually. Colonization societies in other parts of the Midwest did no better; indeed, they fared rather worse. Though the region's racial sentiments ought to have made it thoroughly conducive to the idea, its modest wealth and shallowly rooted culture of philanthropy, as compared to the eastern states, always made it an uphill struggle for the movement. This was especially true given colonizationists' own ambivalence towards black exclusion, and their preference for drawing attention to the 'safe' missionary aspects of their work over its domestic implications. One invariably encounters local and state societies that announced their founding in a brief burst of publicity, only to disappear from the record. Despite vigorous lobbying of the Ohio legislature and the constitutional convention of 1850-1, which in turn preoccupied itself with debate over free blacks, the Buckeye State ultimately yielded nothing. As early as 1853, a local auxiliary found itself having to check with the national society whether the committee of correspondence planned for the state just a few years previously had ever materialized. A Wisconsin state colonization society passed a few policy resolutions, and its Iowan counterpart agitated only for the recognition of Liberia before breaking down in 1857 after a speaker attacked the 'wild and deluded fanaticism' of efforts at racial equality. In Illinois, Abraham Lincoln had to withdraw as speaker at the state society's 1854 meeting due to illness in the family, but stepped up to the plate a year later with a speech whose rough outline has survived. He was elected one of its managers in 1857, being listed first out of eleven the next year. Yet in all likelihood, the state colonization society was already going the way of so many others, and coming to exist more on paper than in reality: in 1865, Lincoln's friend James Conkling would offer his estimate to the ACS that there had not been an effective Illinois chapter for eight or ten years. The Midwest was as keen as ever on black exclusion, the outbreak of war producing thirty to

forty thousand signatures on petitions to reintroduce black laws to Ohio. But through lack of support on the part of both blacks and whites, active colonization efforts proved to be a shaky corollary of that impetus.[33]

Indeed, the divergence between proscriptive racial legislation and the interests of the colonization movement became starkly apparent at the end of the 1850s. Proslavery measures suddenly started to sweep southern statehouses, inspired by years of unapologetic thinking about the institution and by sectional polarization in national politics. Their rationale was a curious one, mixing brash 'King Cotton' confidence with powerful fears that economic trends might also see the upper South become free soil, or at least that the region might head that way enough to fall into the northern column in future controversies, in turn upsetting the delicate sectional balance in federal politics. Accordingly, a movement arose for reopening the slave trade, for banning manumission in all cases, and for the expulsion, even enslavement, of free blacks. All of this was supposed to unite the South around the peculiar institution and to address points of internal weakness, be they a 'dangerous' free African American population or white waverers on slavery.

From the point of view of the colonization movement, the drive to recommence slave imports to the US marked an absolutely antithetical challenge to its vision of reducing America's black population, though it inspired no less in the way of sincere humanitarian disgust. This 'rival' cause was predictably centred in South Carolina and Georgia, and its challenge to half a century of federal law limited its appeal amongst southerners, including other states' rightists who saw how it would counterproductively divide the section rather than unite it. Yet despite that movement's lack of success, the slave trade was still a source of ongoing anxiety for the Society during the antebellum years. Although, on occasion, colonizationists pluckily suggested that settling the west

[33] Berwanger, 53-5; Neely, 59-60; Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York, 2010), 127; *CW*, ii, 298-9; J.C. Conkling to W. Coppinger, 21 Mar. 1865, ACS 97; D.E. Weiner, 'Racial Radicals: Antislavery Activism in the Old Northwest, 1830-1861' (Northwestern Univ. Ph.D., 2007), 369.

coast of Africa was the only effective means of stopping the traffic, largely destined for Cuba, any suggestion of reducing US naval enforcement on the high seas always caused the ACS great distress. Whether it wanted it or not, the Society was also thrust into the spotlight when it had to 'return' to Liberia those recaptives rescued from a spate of slaver interceptions on the eve of war. On the one hand, this development gave the ACS plenty of work and reminded officialdom of its existence; indeed, Congress would sign a blank cheque for five years' worth of recaptives in June 1860. On the other, such publicity brought its drawbacks. Though President Buchanan's default recourse to the ACS was in line with four decades of federal policy, it raised the hackles of a lower South that had already started to criticize colonization after years of deeming it unworthy of comment. In particular, opponents could point to the strain under which increased African American emigration had placed Liberia during the 1850s, to say nothing of the further influx of recaptives, and to the ever shocking settler mortality from unfamiliar diseases. Proslavery thinkers also took pleasure in reports of pronounced social stratification in Liberia, between the lighter-skinned, earlier immigrants who dominated government, and the excluded majority of darker, later settlers who were more likely to be ex-slaves. Combined with questionable 'apprenticeships' for the recaptives, the ACS increasingly found itself fending off allegations of Liberia's inadequacy and hypocrisy, as well as fire-eaters' sense of vindication that racism and slavery were indeed universal phenomena.[34]

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[34] Slave trade: H. Wish, 'The Revival of the African Slave Trade in the United States, 1856-1860', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 27 (Mar. 1941), 569-88; W.D. Boyd, 'The American Colonization Society and the Slave Recaptives of 1860-1861: An Early Example of United States-African Relations', *Journal of Negro History*, 47 (Apr. 1962), 108-26; B.J. Bernstein, 'Southern Politics and Attempts to Reopen the African Slave Trade', *Journal of Negro History*, 51 (Jan. 1966), 16-35; R.T. Takaki, *A Pro-Slavery Crusade: The Agitation to Reopen the African Slave Trade* (New York, 1971); D.E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York, 2001), cap. 6; Younger, 'Liberia and the Last Slave Ships', *Civil War History*, 54 (Dec. 2008), 424-42. Mortality: A. McDaniel, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot: The Mortality Cost of Colonizing Liberia in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1995). Mortality was also a point of division between Liberia and the ACS, and even amongst the officers of the latter. Liberian independence (1847) saw Monrovia and the Society reach an agreement the next year on their respective duties in providing for African American resettlement. The ACS ceded all public land to Liberia – provided that the traditional provisions for emigrants remain in

Expulsion and enslavement – the two were always offered together, to give free blacks a 'choice' of sorts, and thereby make the idea more palatable to white opinion – enjoyed better prospects than reopening the Atlantic slave trade, as such moves were a matter for state law alone. Although these proposals ended up sweeping the entire South, they had the most traction in the Chesapeake, where the higher numbers of free blacks and the inexorable leaching of slavery amplified a debate about where the region was heading in the long term. The idea of forced removal came up in Virginia as early as 1848, with outgoing governor William Smith suggesting that the matter of black expulsion be submitted to county referendums. The ACS made no bones about an idea 'utterly repugnant to every generous sentiment of philanthropy, and destitute of every quality and ingredient of humanity, and … heartless and wicked in its conception.' Taking note of the state colonization legislation's poor performance, Democratic assemblyman John Rutherfoord floated a bill in 1852 to add an element of compulsion, with re-enslavement a last resort for the uncooperative. As such, it stood about halfway between traditional ideas of voluntary emigration and the enslavement mania of a few years later, though it was still an extraordinary development. It circulated for roughly a year before encountering a handy defeat in spring 1853, and the general assembly decided to renew the colonization law instead. The proposal came up again in 1858, and despite failing once more, did rather better this time; tellingly, the appropriations for colonization were not renewed.[35]

Things really got moving that same year, as almost every slaveholding state started to wrestle with the question of how to force free blacks from its borders. The

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force – but both parties were to agree on locating new settlements, and Liberia was to continue to take recaptives. By the mid-1850s, elements of the ACS fixed on higher altitude settlements, away from the coast, as an answer to disease. Monrovia opposed the policy, as expansion into the interior risked stretching defensive lines. The Liberian government also balked at the ACS's presumption in speaking for it *vis-à-vis* the recaptives, and in December 1860, the Society transferred its contract with the US government to Monrovia. (Journal of the Executive Committee, 19 June 1855, 10 Oct. 1856, 18 Oct. 1860, ACS 292; *African Repository*, 24 (Sept. 1848), 257-9, 33 (June 1857), 183.) Social divisions in Liberia: A.J. Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State* (Lanham, 1991); E. Ruffin, *African Colonization Unveiled* (Washington, 1859).

[35] *African Repository*, 23 (Feb. 1850), 45.

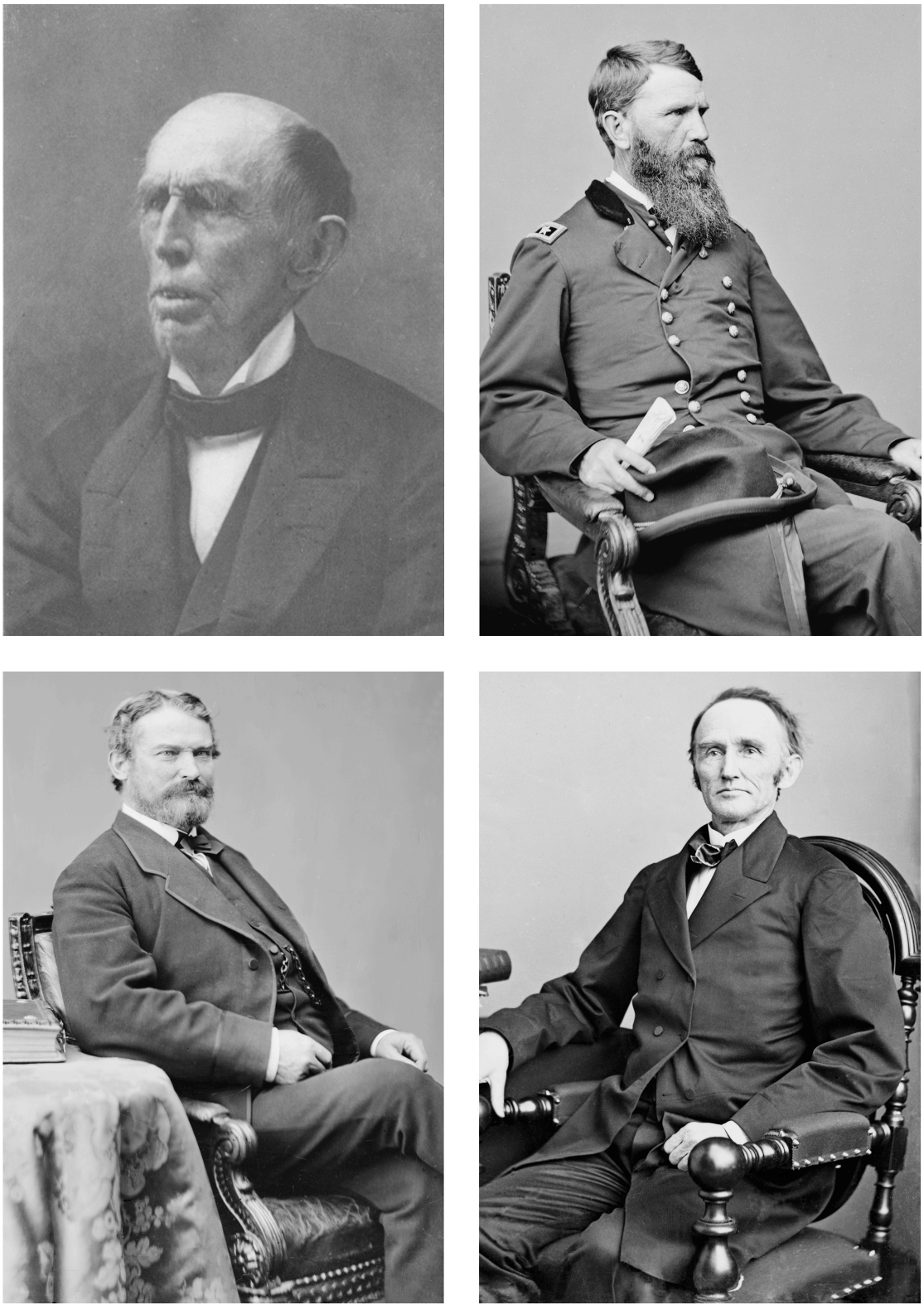
most protracted and interesting debate was that of Maryland, the one state that had sponsored colonization continuously since the 1830s. It was on the cusp of parity between slaves and free blacks, and, even more so than Virginia, was acutely conscious that it stood at a geographical, economic, and demographic crossroads between free and slave status. The Eastern Shore was especially in favour of propping up slavery, and held a convention in late 1858 calling for a statewide meeting of slaveholders the next year. That second convention and the regular legislative session of 1860 both reasserted the traditional middle ground, one of the merits of gradual emancipation, and rejected enslavement, whilst also establishing more stringent assessments of whether free blacks were working hard enough. In essence, and with striking patterns of geographical and slaveholding versus non-slaveholding divisions within the state, voters decided that their economic system should keep looking both ways. The state slashed its colonization appropriation in 1858, however, and eliminated it altogether in 1860. In the meantime, the cause of re-enslavement spread like wildfire to the rest of the South, with the Harper's Ferry raid raising the stakes yet further. For a while the matter looked like a shoo-in in several states, only for a diffuse opposition to latterly find its voice and succeed in checking the impetus somewhere along the line. In the end, the direct toll of expulsion efforts on the 250,000 free blacks of the South was one thousand from Charleston, South Carolina, which had exerted municipal pressures on its African American residents, and five hundred from Arkansas. That was the one state to press ahead with a removal deadline, though it too ultimately relented for the handful who were left. The indirect, psychological toll on free black Americans, who could not know that the impetus was soon to die out, defies quantification.[36]

The American Colonization Society was by now in little position to benefit from the foregoing developments. Whilst it despatched its travelling secretary to find the Arkansas expellees and alert them to the option of Liberia, it expressed neither

[36] W.W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion* (2 vols., New York, 1990-2007), ii, 185-200; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 360-80.

approbation of that state's actions, nor optimism that its own offer would produce any results. In a Union breaking apart, where the personal safety of outsiders could no longer be guaranteed in the South, the Society was running out of operations that it could realistically maintain on the domestic front. Its unofficial involvement in private manumissions had long been contested, with southern states gradually clamping down on individual owners' rights to free their chattel and thus potentially destabilize the institution. 'In general, the more southern the state, the later the date, and the greater the slave agency, the harsher the governmental response to ACS emancipations', writes Burin. The Society had until recently tended to reap the rewards of laws tying manumission to departure from the state, especially in the upper South, but the end of the 1850s witnessed such powerful sectional concerns about free blacks as to virtually close the door on its work. Georgia declared post-mortem liberations illegal in 1859, as did North Carolina in 1861. Mississippi and Louisiana outlawed all manumissions in 1857, Arkansas in 1859, and Alabama and Maryland in 1860. By January 1860, the executive committee was forced to conclude that 'such obstacles now exist in the way of emancipation in the southern states, that our supply of emigrants from that source is almost entirely cut off.' Their numbers would not recover until after the Civil War.[37]

[37] Journal of the Executive Committee, 3 Jan. 1860, ACS 292, and reference thereto, Annual and Special Reports, 17 Jan. 1860, ACS 286; Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 121, 129-30.



The Republican colonizationists. Clockwise from top left: *Francis P. Blair, Francis P. Blair, Jr., Montgomery Blair, James R. Doolittle. (C. Schurz,* Life of Henry Clay *(2 vols., Boston, 1899), i, facing 236; Prints and Photographs Division, LC.)*

Political colonization: the Republican Party

Between the presidential elections of 1856 and 1860, the idea of colonization came to enjoy the most enthusiastic and significant support that it would ever receive from a political party, though even then, it managed to elude official endorsement in a national platform. As Eric Foner identified in *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, the movers and shakers of the Republican colonization plan were Francis Blair and his sons, Frank (Francis, Jr.) and Montgomery. Like many other 'political' colonizationists, most notably Sen. James Doolittle (Wisc.), they were former Democrats. Significantly, the Blairs were also based in Maryland and Missouri, the two border states where slavery was most obviously in danger. They were antislavery slaveholders who started to free some of their own bondspeople during this period, and their key argument was that, North and South, most objections to emancipation were rooted in race rather than the merits of slavery itself.

Thus it was that they frequently resorted to the claim that the offer to remove African Americans would counter Democratic race baiting, the Republicans' greatest political weakness in the free states. After all, colonization could provide a practical means of guaranteeing that the western territories were indeed to be reserved for whites by directing black Americans to a frontier of their own elsewhere. 'The exclusion of slavery from the territories is only an incidental part of a general policy of which colonization is the corner stone', one supporter explained. The Blairs were equally certain that the policy would rally the non-slaveholding, poorer whites of the South to the cause of emancipation, and set them against the planter minority. In view of the policy that was to emerge during the Civil War, it was also significant that they rejected the 'utter hopelessness' of African colonization, and looked exclusively to the Americas as a destination for black resettlement.[38]

[38] [?] to Trumbull, 11 Dec. 1859, Lyman Trumbull Papers, LC; Foner, *Free Soil*, 268-70; F.P. Blair to Smith, 9 Apr. 1858, roll 2, Gerrit Smith Papers, LC.

In fact, Francis P. Blair, a veteran of Andrew Jackson's 'Kitchen Cabinet', first raised the idea briefly in his 'Letter to My Neighbors', an influential newspaper article of the 1856 campaign. At the same time, Frank became the first ever US representative from a slave state (Missouri) to be elected on an emancipationist platform, making him the toast of the North. Early in 1857, his father advised him to 'make your maiden speech the exponent of some system which shall deliver the country from this sectional quarrel', and offered to help him research the geography of Central America and of other powers' methods of overseas colonization in the holdings of the Library of Congress. Frank was unsure at first, qualifying his personal support for the plan with doubts that a moderate scheme could be heard amongst loud sectional voices. He wondered if it might be better to tell northern men to simply stand firm, avoid propagandizing over slavery, and await the next census in anticipation of reapportionment that would confirm the evident ascendancy of the free states. With strikingly mixed powers of prediction, Frank speculated that slavery would soon 'cease to be the issue upon which the Presidency will be disposed of and all elections turn … then and not until your colonization scheme will have a fair hearing'. He was also averse to discussing emancipation in Congress, considering it a state matter. Sure enough, his cousin and fellow emancipationist B. Gratz Brown broached emancipation in the Missouri statehouse the same month, giving the topic its first legislative hearing that decade.[39]

Just ten days later, however, the younger Blair had warmed to the notion. 'I have been ruminating a great deal over your colonization idea', he told Francis. 'The more I think of it, the better I like it.' In the meantime, he had met the leading Republicans of Springfield, Lincoln almost certainly among them, and urged them 'to drop the negro and go the whole hog for the white man'. Although nothing survives of what transpired between them, Frank Blair and Lincoln appear to have conferred several times during

[39] 'Letter from Francis P. Blair, to My Neighbors', *New York Times*, 22 Sept. 1856; F.P. Blair to F.P. Blair, Jr., 14 Feb., 5 Mar. 1857, BF 1; F.P. Blair, Jr., to F.P. Blair, 12 Feb. 1857, BF 2; W.E. Parrish, *Frank Blair: Lincoln's Conservative* (Columbia, 1998), 66-7.

these early, embryonic days of Republican colonization policy. In April, Lincoln and his law partner William Herndon met with 'one of the leading emancipationists of Missouri', in all likelihood Blair again. Tellingly, two months later, Lincoln spoke in Springfield for the cause of colonization. Quite apart from what he might have said to the state society on the occasions noted above, Lincoln had pled its case to a wider public in his 1852 eulogy for Henry Clay, and then once more in his Peoria speech of 1854. In the latter address, Lincoln's appeal had taken the form of a rambling tangent that tempered his 'high hope' for Liberian colonization with a frank admission of the logistical impossibility of its 'sudden execution'. Now that he had met Blair and presumably discussed the partisan possibilities of colonization, his vision started to assume more shape, though it remained nebulous. 'I have said that the separation of the races is the only perfect preventive of amalgamation', Lincoln explained. He added that whilst he could not speak for other Republicans' attitudes, their shared opposition to the spread of slavery embodied an underlying racial separatism conducive to support for colonization. 'Party operations at present only favor or retard colonization incidentally … but "when there is a will there is a way"', he suggested. Republican thinking was more likely to foster that public will, Lincoln added, since it admitted of the moral injustice of bondage and of the need to find acceptable solutions thereto, whilst Democrats' willingness to expand slavery and to profit from the sale of slaves made it hard for them to see that self-interest did not actually clash with the right thing to do. Having delivered this speech, Lincoln met Blair yet again in December 1857, and the congressman would be back in Illinois the next summer, canvassing for his ally. 'These encounters seem to have affected both men', writes Foner. For his part, Blair looked at neighbouring Illinois and came away redoubled in his conviction of the superiority of free labour. In return, Lincoln may have owed his more confident understanding of colonization by the Civil War to his interactions with Blair.[40]

[40] F.P. Blair, Jr., to F.P. Blair, 18 Feb., 22 Feb. 1857, BF 2; Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 128-9; *CW*, ii, 255-6,

Meanwhile, the namesake father and son spent 1857 putting together a proposal that would capture the attention of the whole Union when put forward on Capitol Hill. 'Your plan should be to sketch in one leading comprehensive speech all the features of the great plan you have of putting the slave quarrel at rest by gradual emancipation, colonization, and by providing free homesteads for the white race in our territories', Francis told Frank. The younger Blair suggested a bill to grant the state of Missouri all fifteen million acres of public lands within its boundaries, with the proceeds going to the purchase, liberation, and colonization of its slaves. He hoped that it would open people's eyes to a method of disposing of slavery 'without taxing them to death … which is the great stumbling block', for there could be no question of failing to compensate owners. Blair added that if proslavery men tried to reverse the donation, 'we can beat them to death on that issue because no people on earth can be got to regret such a gift.' They presumably discussed the bill when they met at the family estate in Silver Spring, near Washington, in April. Frank's idea was not unlike Henry Clay's Distribution Bill of 1836, an attempt to outfox states' rightists by offering federal land revenues to the states for various Whiggish improvements, colonization among them. As recently as 1852, a southern Whig had tried to rekindle Clay's plan, and to tie payment of the fourth instalment of the Jackson-era surplus to states' implementation of the policy.[41]

Indeed, that the new version of colonization was not to share significant Democratic support might have become apparent from early on, when Francis quietly sounded out potential allies. He approached Missouri's pre-eminent statesman, five-time US senator Thomas Hart Benton, a moderate Democrat who had started to lose his all-powerful grip from the early 1850s as the state party cleaved into pro- and anti-slavery factions. Benton 'repudiated the idea saying that the transportation of all that would be possible to Liberia would not take off one-hundredth per c of the annual increase … and

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[41] F.P. Blair to F.P. Blair, Jr., 19 Mar. 1857, BF 2; F.P. Blair, Jr., to F.P. Blair, 25 Mar. 1857, B-L; Parrish, 69; F. Bancroft, 'The Early Antislavery Movement and African Colonization', in J.E. Cooke, *Frederic Bancroft, Historian* (Norman, 1957), 187-8.

seemed to turn a deaf ear'. On Benton's death in the spring of 1858, however, Francis assured his son that 'he was in reality with you', but that he had felt unable to risk his considerable reputation by openly embracing a free soil movement. Avowed Republicans were another matter. From the outset, Sen. Preston King (N.Y.) 'was entirely satisfied that it would meet the wishes of the whole Republican party', whilst Rep. Nathaniel Banks (Mass.) invited Frank Blair to speak at Faneuil Hall that October. He declined for the time being, for fear of pre-empting his Washington debut and getting sucked into Massachusetts Republicans' factionalism. At such a time of realignment, upheaval, and jockeying for power, the partisan risks associated with introducing a significant new policy were not purely external in provenance.[42]

Against a backdrop of the debate over the Lecompton constitution, on 14 January 1858, Frank Blair went public with his plan. He proposed the appointment of a select committee to look into acquiring parts of Central and South America for the purpose of colonizing those African Americans who were already free, or who might yet become so. Such an acquisition was to be a dependency of the United States, with 'ample guarantees' of settlers' personal and political rights. Blair explicitly framed the measure as an alternative and positive check to filibustering on behalf of slavery, which he saw as a movement that sought to place a fundamentally different kind of black population, the victims of a reopened African slave trade, in the American tropics. Pointing to the black laws of the North and to the common formula of manumission dependent on removal, Blair asked where black Americans were to go, and alerted the House to the dangers of denying them a proper outlet. Current provision in that respect was inadequate, and imposed a stark choice: '[a] few rich masters provide the means to return their bondsmen to Africa; and recently some small parties embarked to Mexico, to throw themselves upon the humanity of its semi-barbarous people. There is no alternative but to submit to expulsion, or to refuse the boon of freedom.' If the federal government

[42] F.P. Blair to F.P. Blair, Jr., 5 Mar. 1857, 20 May 1858, BF 1; Parrish, 69-70.

would just take charge of 'deportation' and make it a credible venture, he argued, 'a gradual and voluntary emancipation by individuals, if not by States, would thus in time be accomplished.' Blair's speech offered a sweeping vision and betrayed many details of the previous year's research. He had not yet finished when the chairman had to cut him short for reaching his allotted time. Over the next few months, Doolittle, King, and Henry Wilson (R-Mass.) were to proclaim themselves in favour of the idea on the floor of the Senate.[43]

Though the Blairs and their followers were to tweak aspects of the plan over the next three years, its fundamentals were already in place, especially the connection that they made between domestic racial problems and foreign expansion. 'It was highly ironic that Negroes were considered capable of becoming the agents of American empire in the Caribbean while they were being viewed at the same time as an undesirable population at home', argues Foner. Frank Blair felt completely at ease describing African Americans as 'a class of men who are worse than useless to us', whilst rhetorically demanding whether anyone could 'doubt that the American-born and American-instructed African[s] … would fail to carry success with them to their new abodes?' For Foner, this is the 'crowning irony of the colonization enterprise': whilst Liberian colonizationists continued to see blacks as Africans transported to America, the Blairs saw them as American, even as they prepared to send them on their way.[44]

The distinction is well taken, though it may need some qualification. The ACS and its adherents *also* saw would-be settlers as propagators of American institutions, and shared the assumptions of Republican colonizationists that different races were suited to different parts of the world. Only, whilst the latter went for an argument based on latitude alone, and thus saw tropical America as conducive to blacks more than to any other group, African colonizationists stated that the climate throughout the Americas

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[43] *CG* 35:1, 293-8, 2207, 3034, Appendix, 172-3; H.K. Beale (ed.), *The Diary of Edward Bates* (Washington, 1933), 40.
[44] Foner, *Free Soil*, 273-4; *CG* 35:1, 293; F.P. Blair, Jr., *The Destiny of the Races of this Continent* (Washington, 1859), 23.

was sufficiently temperate that whites would dominate the entire western hemisphere. Nevertheless, lacking an explanation as simple as that of 'returning the African to his native land', Republican colonizationists had to perform some fancy footwork around racial justification. They described black Americans as superior not only to Indians, which the pseudo-scientific classification of the day would have surely contested, but also to the Latin American and mixed races of the lands under consideration. In their celebration of the effect of US institutions on African Americans, however, they had to beware espousing such environmentalism and belief in innate equality as to undermine their own case.[45]

Linked to such concerns was uncertainty about the status of such a colony, the terms under which emigrants would go, and the kind of foothold that the US should seek. Ostensibly, the Blairs' offer to African Americans was one of voluntary removal, with the financial and logistical support of the US government, to an area that should come under the control of the same at some unspecified point in the future. Francis assured the New York abolitionist Gerrit Smith that there was no question of involuntary exile, '[n]or would I incapacitate the Dependencies of our country whether composed of blacks or whites from becoming states of the Union'. He added, however, that raising such a controversial possibility, which evoked black congressmen in the halls of Washington, could only doom the policy from the outset. On this point Sen. Andrew Johnson (D-Tenn.) cornered Lyman Trumbull, an Illinoisan whose opposition to the spread of slavery found its match in his own willingness to defend the racial order. On the floor of the Senate, a few days after Trumbull called for colonization, Johnson asked him if he considered the free black in Illinois his equal. In the abstract, yes, Trumbull replied – but no society was perfect, and a populace could legitimately infringe on natural rights when organizing a government. But, asked Johnson, what if a wholly black US territory were formed, its government (unsurprisingly) placed the races on a

[45] F.P Blair, Jr., *Destiny of the Races*, 23; *CG* 35:1, 296, 36:1, 1632.

perfectly equal footing, and it then applied for admission to the Union? Trumbull confessed that he would not admit a state where it endangered the peace of the nation, and added that nothing less than divinely ordained differences made him an advocate of racial separation. A vindicated Johnson quipped that 'we are traveling in converging lines … to pretty much the same conclusion.' 'What a pity you hadn't manliness enough to have said yes … How free would a race be, that must be driven out of the country?', demanded an angry correspondent of Trumbull.[46]

In fact, the Blairs and their supporters do not seem to have ever brought up coercion proper, but as always with colonization, there were unanswered questions hanging over the issue. Republican colonizationists praised the industriousness of unspecified but seemingly northern free blacks. When it came to southern slaves, they apparently treated emancipation as contingent upon removal, but the only time that the Blairs provided elaboration on this point was when Frank spoke at the Cooper Union, a month before Lincoln did, to present a curious proposal for the acquisition of tropical areas for owners who emigrated with their slaves and promised them eventual freedom. Fundamentally, the Blairs and their acolytes did not address the same ambiguities that colonization had always raised for the ACS with any greater clarity than that organization did. On the one hand, their suggestion of relocation in the Americas, and under US jurisdiction, genuinely won the plan a degree of African American approval to which the African colonization movement could only aspire. This was perhaps because it envisaged resettlement happening closer to home, and pre-empted the charge of 'expatriation' by leaving open the possibility that settlers might retain the basic national citizenship upon which the Republican Party could agree for blacks. Yet the Blairs still staked the proposition on its own attractiveness as *they* perceived it, and by extension,

[46] F.P. Blair to Smith, 9 Apr. 1858, roll 2, Smith Papers; *CG* 36:1, 60-1, 102; C. Taintor, Jr., to Trumbull, Dec. 1859, Trumbull Family Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

on black willingness to go. Given their idea's grand debut, its appeal to its would-be beneficiaries could only wear off with time.[47]

Having presented the scheme in Washington, Frank Blair took to the road, both to disseminate it to a wider public and to badger influential figures behind closed doors. During the midterm campaign summer of 1858, he travelled to Buffalo and secured a promise from William Dorsheimer to editorialize in its favour, and then went on a tour of the Midwest, covering Rep. Schuyler Colfax's district in Indiana and Rep. John Potter's in Wisconsin, following appeals that the administration was turning up the heat in their contests, as well as parts of Illinois. In the process, Blair marginally lost his own seat in a murky race with a National Democrat where a third candidate, a Know-Nothing, probably drew off more of Blair's votes than the winner's. President Buchanan and Washington officialdom were happy at the result, though from the point of view of the Republican colonization movement, it hardly mattered. Blair had made his name, and he had allies in Congress who could continue the work, if it even had any real prospects before the 1860 election – which he rightly suspected it did not.[48]

Indeed, Blair was now even freer to devote his time to the cause. The Boston Mercantile Library Association renewed its invitation, and Frank told his father that he was 'absolutely nervous about that matter – I think I shall have to fall back upon you and get you to make it for me, these Boston people are all such critics that I fear I cannot make a lecture worthy to be delivered before them'. Suspecting that he essentially had 'the whole nation for an audience', the younger Blair wanted to avoid sounding partisan notes and to demonstrate that the whole Union needed to expand to the Pacific. The other half of that walnut was that it should impose a stabilizing influence on the 'colored races to the south of us', short of incorporating them into the United States. Having originally thought that a discussion of Missouri ought to be his starting-point, Blair wondered about framing the talk in terms of the West in general, and how whites should

[47] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 125; B.S. Hunt, *Remarks on Hayti and the Mulatto* (Philadelphia, 1860), 25-6.
[48] F.P. Blair, Jr., to F.P. Blair, 5 Aug. 1858, undated [summer] 1858, B-L; Parrish, 73-4.

be willing to surrender the 'beautiful country' of Central America to blacks so that they would channel their own migratory efforts in the right direction. Given the audience of Boston merchants, he added that it would make sense to show that 'every settlement and improvement of the west tended directly to the wealth and aggrandisement of the eastern cities and states'. Slightly later than a year after delivering his speech in Congress, Frank Blair boldly proclaimed to his Boston audience that 'it is only by the joint action of the State and National Governments that emancipation can be effected.' His two-hour address was published as *The Destiny of the Races of this Continent*, and an appendix reprinted supportive letters from a crowd as diverse as Theodore Parker, Kentuckian slaveholder Robert Wickliffe, and the black emigrationists Martin Delany, John Harris, James Holly, and James Whitfield. Later in 1859, Frank delivered an address to a similar organization, the Young Men's Mercantile Library Association of Cincinnati. It begged him to remove absolutely any political allusion; the resulting speech was printed and distributed as *Colonization and Commerce*.[49]

On the face of it, the Blairs' equation of emancipation at home with territorial gains abroad seems to have been essentially driven by the former consideration rather than the latter. It is perhaps tempting to view Frank's challenge to proslavery filibustering as a clever, tactical adoption of a patriotic goal of expansion, one in which the destination of Central America was really chosen for its logistically convenient proximity, its greater appeal to African Americans, or simply as an obvious pin on the map. In fact, the Blairs had high hopes for US penetration of the region; on Capitol Hill, Frank was in some ways a man without party during his first term, as he voted with the Democrats on abrogating the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, the mutual 'hands off' pact with Britain of 1850. It truly pained the Blairs that the administration's diplomacy seemed to prostitute expansion and the satisfactory resolution of outstanding disputes with Britain to the demands of the slave power. 'It is sad that the Senate has given the Dallas Treaty

[49] F.P. Blair, Jr., to F.P. Blair, undated [summer], 10 Sept., 22 Oct. 1858, 25 Oct. 1859, B-L; F.P. Blair, Jr., *Destiny of the Races*, 22, 31-8.

the Go-by', rued Francis when that body balked at London's offer to withdraw from the Mosquito Coast on condition that slavery never come to exist therein. The Blairs watched British moves keenly for other precedents that might help to tighten the US grip, short of formal arrangements that would invite trouble. 'The position which things are taking on the shores of Central America indicates a rivalry between England and the United States, as to the Power which is to exert the command over that region', announced Frank in his speech of January 1858.[50]

Not altogether unlike James Mitchell's paradoxical attitudes towards Britain, the Blairs' sense of competition was inextricably bound up with admiration at London's supposedly effortless acquisition of influence in the region; how, as they viewed it, sending just a few thousand Jamaican woodcutters had secured her an isthmian foothold, and now a protectorate over the Bay Islands. The free blacks of the United States, similarly steeped in Anglo-American institutions, were presumably at least as qualified to bring stability to the region and win over its populace. Only, the administration's willingness to back illiberal regimes and parties, in those cases where they offered better prospects for introducing slavery, had sapped Central America's instinctive republican allegiances and pushed it towards a benign monarchical power. '[T]he encroachments of our transatlantic brethren would never have been attempted', promised Frank, 'but for the departures manifested in late movements from the principles of the founders of our Government.' Although being in opposition prevented the Blairs and their allies from acting on their interest in the isthmus, Doolittle kept a close eye on the McLane-Ocampo Treaty, a transit agreement with Mexico signed in late 1859, but never ratified by the Senate. Some of its proponents pictured it hemming in the South as Frank Blair had suggested, and opening up the area to northern commercial

[50] W.E. Smith, *The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics* (2 vols., New York, 1933), i, 405-6; F.P. Blair to F.P. Blair, Jr., 14 Feb., 27 Aug. 1857, BF 1.

interests, which would force the slave states to consider how to dispose of their African American population absent the prospect of territorial expansion.[51]

Meanwhile, the colonization faction had to decide how to push the programme at home. Certainly it attracted support from parts of the entire antislavery spectrum. Hinton Rowan Helper asked the elder Blair for his endorsement of a new edition of *The Impending Crisis,* one of the more racist expressions of upper southern 'economic' antislavery. Soon-to-be presidential candidate John Bell agreed that colonization could act as a 'concordat' between North and South, its details hammered out within a day, if only there were a credible conservative party in the free states to sustain it. But the Blairs and Doolittle also engaged with figures on the abolitionist end of the spectrum, who were far from their natural bedfellows. 'You were disposed to take a larger view of the topics discussed in my address than our party controversies had yet extended to', admitted Frank of his Boston address to Richard Henry Dana, Jr.; he added that he hoped it would provoke wide-ranging questions of that ilk, and praised Massachusetts for its proud heritage whilst subtly reminding Dana of colonization's Revolutionary antecedents.[52]

Nevertheless, it was easier than not to secure at least token approval from such quarters. For their part, many Republican politicians felt hopeful, even vindicated that there seemed to be a native antislavery element in the upper South, and – with the entire party's racial image to consider, as well as individual presidential aspirations in certain cases – they sometimes praised the Blairs to an unlikely degree. Sen. Charles Sumner (R-Mass.) admitted that the colonization plan did not violate 'any principle of justice' as long as it remained voluntary, whilst Charles Francis Adams qualified his

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[51] *CG* 35:1, 297; E.E. Dunbar to Doolittle, 5 Jan. 1859, J.D. Andrews to Doolittle, 5 Jan. 1860, James R. Doolittle Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society.

[52] H.R. Helper to F.P. Blair, 4 Nov. 1858, B-L; D. Mowry (ed.), 'Interesting Letter of Hon. John Bell, of Tennessee, to the Hon. James R. Doolittle, of Wisconsin', *American Historical Magazine*, 9 (1904), 275-6; F.P. Blair, Jr., to R.H. Dana, Jr., 1 Mar. 1859, Dana Family Papers I, Massachusetts Historical Society. Helper proposed a stiff tax on all slaves, with the revenues to be used to subsidize the removal of freedmen to Africa, Central America, or a 'Comfortable Settlement' within the boundaries of the United States. (Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 317-18.)

doubts as to its viability with the private observation that 'we must respect it as coming from an earnest and sincere emancipationist in a slave state.' John Andrew told Montgomery Blair that he had taken to the idea, but recommended the offer of the Haitian government to take emigrants rather than a separate American venture. Gerrit Smith, who despite his radical proclivities had never fully dispensed with an interest in racial separation, lent his support, whilst Theodore Parker proclaimed that '[i]t is a good sign, when the member from Missouri can say such things.' Possibly following up on some favourable interactions between Doolittle and Thurlow Weed, Republican favourite Sen. William Seward (N.Y.) detained Montgomery Blair two hours in conversation in early 1860. Blair reported that 'he said among other things that he rejoices in the Colonization Scheme coming as it does from Missouri – it was the one thing needed etc. etc. I think he begins to see day light.'[53]

Once more, pro-expatriation forces found themselves on the fertile ground of the Midwest in autumn 1859, Frank Blair and Doolittle both visiting Minnesota, though their paths did not cross, and Doolittle on his own, Iowa. Blair received cheers from his audiences, a congratulatory letter from Lincoln, and assurances from friends that he had 'relieved them of the slang about negro equality'. He also felt that he had wrong-footed any Democratic naysayers that he had encountered, who 'would generally concede that it was a good thing if it could be done, but that it was visionary and impracticable … in answer to them I showed clearly its feasibility'. Indeed, early the next year Francis Blair hoped to score an even greater bipartisan coup when Amos Kendall, postmaster general under Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, revealed to a third party that Old Hickory had once proposed acquiring territory in Central America or Mexico for the colonization of African Americans from both sections, including manumittees. The elder Blair sought

[53] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 126, *Free Soil*, 271; J.A. Andrew to M. Blair, 24 Nov. 1860, M. Blair to F.P. Blair, Jr., 17 Jan. 1860, B-L; F.P. Blair, Jr., *Destiny of the Races*, 32-3; Doolittle to Weed, 23 Aug. 1859, 23 Jan. 1860, Thurlow Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

verification from Van Buren, who whether by neglect or intention seems to have denied him a reply.[54]

Still, the Blair faction looked to more than mere accolades, however gratifying their source, and aimed to have colonization written into the Republican platform in 1860. For all the warm support that the policy seemed to enjoy, this would not be an easy feat, as adopting a new plank at the national level was never a thing to be done lightly. It might bring forth opponents who had hitherto remained silent, and in this case it chafed with a desire, born of regret at some of the hyperbolic wording of 1856, to make the manifesto acceptable to as many people as possible. Moreover, even if colonization offered an answer to Democratic taunts over race, such goading still proved powerful enough to make their opponents think twice before choosing to meet them on that ground. If some border state Republican conventions endorsed colonization in the late 1850s, that of Illinois chose not to; Trumbull reckoned that 'the less new resolutions our friends adopt probably the best … It will not do, of course to get mixed up with the free negro question'. In a similar vein, Doolittle wanted to put the party on the alert for such attempts to shift the dynamic of the debate, even where they represented nothing more than a reframing of the same sort of question about the 'problem' of America's black population. 'Let our battle cry in 1860 be Down with the slave trade, down with filibustering, down with amalgamation, we are for a separation of the races', he told Sen. Hannibal Hamlin (R-Maine); '[w]ith such a programme … we can make sure of Illinois, Indiana and Pa.' But, he rather paradoxically added, 'so long as we do not answer the questions What are you Republicans going to do with the negroes when free … [or] we shall be beaten again by these propagandists.'[55]

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[54] Mowry (ed.), 'Letters … From the Private Papers and Correspondence of Senator James Rood Doolittle of Wisconsin', *Missouri Historical Review*, 11 (Jan. 1917), 133-4; F.P. Blair, Jr., to F.P. Blair, 6 Oct., 2 Nov. 1859, B-L; F.P. Blair, Jr., to M. Blair, 20 Oct. 1859, BF 2; F.P. Blair to Van Buren, 13 Feb. 1860, Martin Van Buren Papers, LC.

[55] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 125, 128; W. Kitchell to Lincoln, 14 June, Trumbull to Lincoln, 12 June 1858, AL; Doolittle to H. Hamlin, 20 Aug. 1859, Hannibal Hamlin Papers, LC.

Nevertheless, on balance it was safer to pre-empt such tactics with a clear, official statement of the party's colonizationist intent. The Blairs identified state resolutions as the best means of spurring on federal politicians, and over the winter of 1859-60, made moves to secure them by approaching several governors. 'You know that party workers are the most timid of men & will never risk themselves beyond the broken path of a platform until they are pressed by the impatient masses behind them', Frank Blair told Doolittle. 'We can never get the members of Congress at Washington to go forward in this business until the Legislatures at home impose backbone into them by declaring in favor of the measure, & then they will go ahead & swear they have been for it from the start.' Wisconsin governor Alexander Randall proclaimed himself a supporter in his annual message of 1860. Although he had missed out on meeting Doolittle in person, the newly elected governor of Iowa, Samuel Kirkwood, followed up the senator's visit by also asking his legislature to memorialize Congress in favour of colonization.[56]

There seems to have been an expectation on the part of the colonization contingent that Edwin Morgan, governor of New York and chairman of the Republican National Committee, would do likewise. A correspondent in Albany was surprised that Morgan failed to bring up the matter in his address; '[w]hat were his reasons for omitting to allude to the subject I am unable to conjecture unless it was that he considered it premature.' Doolittle got on the case, asking Morgan if the Empire State could set an example, and putting forward the rather contrived point that John Brown's recent raid had made the mistake of aiming at 'emancipation remaining upon the soil side by side with the whites.' In Ohio, Gov. William Dennison endorsed colonization in his inaugural address and received the unlikely support of the state's radical US senator, Benjamin Wade. Dennison could barely contain his gratitude, and told Wade that his intervention had helped to counteract '[s]ome very shallow criticism … made on that

[56] Mowry, 'Correspondence of Senator James Rood Doolittle', 135; Foner, *Free Soil*, 276; F.P. Blair, Jr., to Kirkwood, 3 Nov., Doolittle to Kirkwood, 9 Nov. 1859, Samuel J. Kirkwood Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa; F.P. Blair, Jr., to F.P. Blair, 2 Nov. 1859, B-L; B.F. Shambaugh, *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa* (6 vols., Iowa City, 1903-?), ii, 244-5.

front by some of our own party'. A cynical, perceptive constituent confessed to Wade that 'I like this new touch of colonizing the niggers. I believe practically it is a d-n humbug. But it will take with the people.' On Capitol Hill, Sen. James Harlan (R-Iowa) and Reps. Cadwallader Washburn (R-Wisc.) and James Ashley (R-Ohio) came out for colonization in early 1860, whilst Doolittle spoke once more at length on the matter.[57]

Yet this final push ultimately yielded nothing. Although the Blairs and their allies managed to get colonization written into the Maryland and Missouri Republican platforms, for reasons unclear it did not materialize in the national manifesto. Such an outcome was not for want of planning – though perhaps tellingly, it was even less for want of confidence. As early as March 1859, Frank Blair had told Dana that his plan was 'likely to be adopted as the programme of the Republican Party in the contest of 1860 and to become the guide of its policy in case it obtains control in the Govt', whilst Trumbull proclaimed much the same, unchallenged, in the Senate that December. Doolittle left party boss Thurlow Weed in little doubt of 'my position on the negro question, and the vast importance I attach to our friends having their attention brought up to it so that they will be prepared to act at Chicago.' Dennison told Francis Blair that he hoped to meet him at the convention, and 'there co-operate with our friends in having a distinct plank in the Republican platform favoring the scheme.' Eric Foner alone has addressed the mystery of colonization's 'disappearance', and points out that it could hardly have been an oversight, as all three Blair men were at Chicago. Their close associate, Iowan John Kasson, was also one of five delegates charged with merging competing resolutions into the finished document. Francis Blair explained shortly afterwards that it 'was too large a scheme & involved too many details to be introduced into a party platform', which is conceivable given the number of technical issues that colonization raised, such as that of a putative colony's territorial status, and which the

[57] W. J. Hilton to F.P. Blair, 3 Jan. 1860, BF 10; Doolittle to E.D. Morgan, 29 Jan. 1860, Weed Papers; *CG* 36:1, 1632-3, Appendix, 57, 154, 265, 373; W. Dennison to Wade, 7 Feb., 21 Feb., 12 Mar., D. Silden to Wade, 27 Mar. 1860, Benjamin F. Wade Papers, LC.

Blairs had perhaps deliberately failed to address up to this point. Indeed, Foner wonders if it was more the case that the Blairs feared a floor fight over the plank, which would obviate its intended unifying effect, and if they did not even try to press it that hard at all. As one of Trumbull's Illinoisan correspondents explained just days before the convention was due to meet, 'it is highly important that the adoption of the principle should be without objections'.[58]

In fact, it looks as though the Blairs did not surrender that easily at the Wigwam. The platform committee was apparently not hostile in principle so much as fixated on countering the Democratic opposition, whose convention at Charleston had met before the Republicans', on the terms that it had already laid down. In a letter marred by his characteristically tight handwriting, Montgomery Blair told Andrew in early 1861:

> My father being [indecipherable] in Chicago [indecipherable] to sit up all night with the platform committee failed to get it into that instrument altho all the committee agreed to it. The difficulty was as I said above [?] that they let the enemy make our spears [?] and their mind was so full of fight on Jeff Davis and Douglass's [sic] platform that they did not appreciate the importance of the measure [?] recommended to sustain their own.[59]

Despite this setback, the colonization cabal picked itself up and wasted no time in approaching the new presidential candidate. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Blairs had been for Edward Bates of Missouri, the most conservative figure on offer, but they were perfectly happy at the moderate, sound choice of Lincoln. 'I find … all Republicans rejoicing in the Chicago nomination, and all content with the platform', Francis told the nominee, adding that '[t]he great point however … is not developed in it … I have thought that a glance at this topic in your Reply to the Committees' Letter announcing your nomination might have a good effect'. Lincoln would return the compliment to the

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[58] Foner, *Free Soil*, 270, 277; F.P. Blair, Jr., to Dana, 1 Mar. 1859, Dana Family Papers; *CG* 36:1, 60; Doolittle to Weed, 23 Jan. 1860, Weed Papers; Dennison to F.P. Blair, 17 Mar. 1860, BF 10; F.P. Blair to Lincoln, 26 May 1860, AL; H. Wing to Trumbull, 4 May 1860, Trumbull Papers.
[59] M. Blair to Andrew, 19 Feb. 1861, John A. Andrew Papers, LC.

Blair clan when Frank was elected to the Thirty Seventh Congress, remarking shortly afterwards that 'I count that day as one of the happiest in my life.'[60]

It was now a matter of wait-and-see for the forces of colonization, as it was for everyone. One of Wisconsin's delegates to the national convention assured Doolittle that 'when the present crisis is happily passed by the election and inauguration of a Republican president and administration … the public mind will settle upon this plan and demand its adoption', predicting that the candidate who came after Lincoln would stand on a colonization platform. Following Lincoln's victory, Doolittle rued that 'we have the President but neither house of Congress. It will require another four years hard work to get the government. All depends upon our successful organization of the Executive Department, and pressing our measures of Republican policy … [such as] a homestead policy for the free blacks in Hayti, Jamaica, Honduras etc. etc.' With the secession of most of the South, the Republicans would acquire a majority and the chance to press their policies a lot sooner than that, but the party's colonizationists could not have known this.[61]

Nearly four years in the making, almost three of them in the public eye, their plan already looked tired. Invited to deliver further lectures at Chicago and Detroit, Frank Blair confessed that 'my colonization scheme is somewhat threadbare and I have almost exhausted my stock of illustration'. This came close to summing up their achievements by 1860: their idea was unoriginal, its prospects under circumstances of peace and union were far poorer than they assumed, and yet – however faint this praise might seem – they *had* put the policy back on the radar at what would turn out to be a most opportune juncture. But even when we acknowledge the dangerous perspective of hindsight, and the profound uncertainties of the immediate pre-war years, the Blairs' understanding of their plan's potential still comes across as rather optimistic for a

[60] F.P. Blair to Lincoln, 26 May 1860, AL; M. Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (2 vols., Baltimore, 2008), 670.
[61] C.C. Sholes to Doolittle, 21 May 1860, Doolittle Papers; Doolittle to Trumbull, 10 Nov. 1860, Trumbull Papers.

family otherwise renowned for its hard-headed political calculation. Most assessments of the colonization scheme that we have come from its supporters, who reinforced and confirmed each other in their views whilst saying little about the objections of those who had not opted to join them, except to occasionally express their perplexity at that fact.[62]

Indeed, the secession crisis found the Republican colonizationists stuck for ideas, and rather too hopeful that their plan might prove the miraculous answer to the Union's woes. Dennison told Francis Blair that Lincoln should touch on colonization in his inaugural, and predicted that if he did, 'I shall be surprised if we do not see prompt movements in nearly all the slave states to organize a Republican party.' 'I really believe', said Francis to his daughter, 'that the So Carolina phrenzy will ultimately give success to Frank's scheme of deliverance, the very instrumentalities of which would bring healing on its wings and close forever the sectional split which threatens the safety of the Union.' As late as February 1861, he at least drafted a letter to a delegate to Virginia's secession convention to assure him that Republican congressmen would back colonization if the border states desired their assistance. For his part, Doolittle hoped that it might not be too late to win over the emancipationists of the upper South, and simply sighed that he had really thought that colonization might have done the trick. Perhaps it is too easy to accuse the Republican colonizationists of miscalculation in this respect. They were not alone, for in late December, none other than Stephen Douglas proposed a constitutional amendment allowing the United States to acquire territory in South America and Africa for the colonization of those free blacks, excluding manumittees, whom the southern states saw fit to remove. And although nothing came of it, the Blairs had indeed put their finger on the upper South's broader dilemma: for example, when Douglas's suggestion was resurrected at the Peace Convention, mixed in

[62] F.P. Blair, Jr., to F.P. Blair, 29 Nov. 1860, B-L.

with the Crittenden compromise, there were still five votes in favour, those of Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.[63]

Furthermore, given the rise and fall of the slave importation, black expulsion, and re-enslavement movements, the entire South had recently sent signals of logical inconsistency on race and slavery of a sort from which colonization had always drawn strength, however inexplicable it may have been to contemporaries and also to the modern historian. Writing in an earlier tradition of blame apportionment, even of wanting the war not to have happened, Frederic Bancroft suggested:

> And it should be remembered that there might have been success, far short of complete success, that would still have been very important. Any scheme that offered prosperous colonization to as many as one-tenth of the colored population, would have sufficed to give the southern border states a strong trend toward compensated emancipation; and the adoption of any system of compensated emancipation might at least have prevented the Civil War from being as serious as it was, by restricting secession to six or eight states. That would have been a great gain.[64]

In recent times, William Freehling has put forward a similar counterfactual, albeit one viewed from a different angle. For Freehling, the question is less one of whether a promising colonization scheme might indeed have averted or mitigated the war. Rather, his point is that disunionists might have worried enough about colonization's appeal in the slave-haemorrhaging upper South that it became *more* likely that they would force the galvanizing issue of secession before time ran out. There are hints that colonization troubled them, though as Freehling acknowledges, there does not seem to be enough evidence to really drive the point home. Although Edmund Ruffin ostensibly directed his

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[63] Dennison to F.P. Blair, 10 Nov., F.P. Blair to E.B. Lee, 14 Nov. 1860, to J. Critcher, 23 Feb. 1861, B-L; Doolittle to Potter, 7 Nov. 1860, John F. Potter Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society; Doolittle to 'Wife', 2 Dec. 1860, Doolittle Papers. Douglas's amendments otherwise echoed the Crittenden compromise. He does not seem to have thought them through carefully, as he also added a section limiting states' legislative remit over African Americans and placing a blanket ban on black suffrage; even a southern friend who protested the 'very objectionable' colonization scheme had to add their condemnation of such a dangerous and uncharacteristic infringement on states' rights. The Republicans on the Committee of Thirteen stood firm against the proposal, and Henry Wilson lambasted Douglas and Crittenden for supporting the perpetuation of slavery, albeit distinguishing it from the voluntary scheme of the Blairs. (R.W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York, 1973), 817; *CG* 36:2, 1093-4; L.E. Chittenden, *A Report of the Debates and Proceedings in the Secret Sessions of the Conference Convention* (New York, 1864), 423-4.)

[64] Bancroft, 'Early Antislavery Movement', 191.

fire at the Liberian movement, the Republican colonizationists must have been on his mind by 1859; it may have been the case that, as existing institutions, the ACS and Liberia simply presented an easier target. Montgomery Blair also felt that his faction had frustrated proslavery forces in Maryland, and that the slaveholders' convention had ended up on the middle ground as moderate Democrats sensed that black expulsion was helping the Blairs' case. Since colonization did not crop up in state ordinances of secession, this all has to remain speculative; clearly, the policy was very far from being a major point of contention for southerners. Yet given the wide array of outwardly pro-colonization sounds that emanated from the North and even the upper South during the years immediately preceding the war, it may not be altogether idle speculation.[65]

The impact of the colonization scheme on politicians of the free states is easier to trace but still defies satisfactory measurement. There is the same issue of the imbalance of the sources in favour of the advocates of the idea. Whatever opposition there was within the party kept a lower profile, and certainly did not try to sabotage a potential vote-winner, or to formally organize itself to counter the Blairs. Editors and abolitionists were somewhat less constrained in that respect, and the *Chicago Press and Tribune* scolded Frank Blair for 'ignoring the moral and religious aspects of the slavery question, and basing all anti-slavery movements on the superior claims of the white race.' Yet it did not seem necessary to exert greater efforts to check the Blairs and their sympathizers. '[I]f critics of colonization chorused more softly than its friends,' writes Richard Sewell, 'it was because they saw no need to do more. Most Republicans recognized that voluntary migration would not work – because of staggering costs and black opposition – and not even conservatives had stomach for forcible repatriation.' Moreover, many of those who were willing to back colonization whilst an election was on the horizon, or who at least let it pass by unchallenged, would prove at least passively

[65] W.W. Freehling, '"Absurd" Issues and the Causes of the Civil War: Colonization as a Test Case', in his *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War* (New York, 1994), 142-6; Mowry, 'Correspondence of Senator James Rood Doolittle', 136.

unhelpful, sometimes proactively unfriendly when the policy resurfaced during the Civil War. Coming up for re-election in 1862, Preston King seems to have dropped out of the movement in the face of radical pressure, and to have cooled on the Blairs at a personal level, whilst Charles Sumner and William Seward would turn out quite hostile when federal colonization schemes became a real possibility.[66]

All of these considerations lay in the future, however. If that future was barely a year away in measured time, in a relative sense it might as well have been decades, given how quickly events pushed forward the cause of both emancipation and its presumed corollaries.

[66] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 125; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 332; V.J. Laas (ed.), *Wartime Washington*: *The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee* (Urbana, Ill., 1991), 134.

3 Chiriquí

'The particular place I have in view is to be a great highway from the Atlantic or Caribbean Sea to the Pacific Ocean', said the speaker, and it 'has all the advantages for a colony'. It contained 'harbors among the finest in the world', as well as other 'great natural resources'. Though the country was 'a very excellent one for any people', he informed his audience, it was especially 'suited to your physical condition' due to the 'similarity of climate with your native land.'[1]

Thus spoke Abraham Lincoln of Chiriquí, a province that was then part of Colombia (now in Panamá), in his notorious August 1862 address to a delegation of black Washingtonians. Though he did not mention it by name at this juncture, Lincoln's allusion to Chiriquí reflected over a year of the administration's interest, albeit of a hitherto fitful nature, in the potential of that part of the Central American isthmus for black colonization. He knew that his own proclamation of general emancipation in the Confederate South was looming and was by now armed with appropriations totalling $600,000 for the voluntary colonization of those African Americans covered by the District of Columbia Emancipation and Second Confiscation Acts. In short, the president finally had the opportunity to make good on what he had offered since the early 1850s as the *quid pro quo* of freedom for American slaves. Though all sorts of suggested locations for black resettlement flooded in, Lincoln's first choice was Chiriquí. It remained so until he suspended the expedition in early October 1862, against a backdrop of regional objections to an influx of black colonists and to the possible threat to the territorial sovereignty of the Central American states. He was never to resume it.

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[1] *CW*, v, 373-4. This chapter draws heavily on S.N. Page, 'Lincoln and Chiriquí Colonization Revisited', *American Nineteenth Century History*, 12 (Sept. 2011), 289-325, to which the reader can turn for further discussion of some of the points contained herein, and for more complete primary source references than space allows.

The Chiriquí project's preeminent place in the history of Lincoln's wartime dealings in colonization has found ample reflection in the historiography. In many biographies of Lincoln and accounts of the Civil War, it garners as much interest as Île à Vache, by dint of its broader political and presidential context. The Chiriquí proposal was the object of Lincoln's policymaking during 1862, a crucial year in which public opinion, congressional legislation, the president's messages, and slaves' own actions on the ground all promoted an inexorable agenda of emancipation. Chiriquí was presumably not only near the front of Lincoln's mind in his earlier endorsements of colonization, such as his first annual message and his appeal to representatives of the border states. It was also – anonymously, yet thoroughly – at the heart of his infamous address to the black delegation, which is where it normally comes up most prominently in any given work. In mid-September, the president signed a contract for black resettlement with Ambrose W. Thompson, the American leaseholder of the tract of Chiriquí under consideration. Thus, the scheme was still in favour when Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation later that month, which in turn reaffirmed the broader place of colonization in the policies that would come into effect on 1 January 1863.

Yet other than a recent contribution of my own, there have only been three articles, sixty or more years old, devoted to the scheme rather than Lincoln's colonization interests in general, namely, Frederic Bancroft's 'Schemes to Colonize Negroes in Central America', Warren Beck's 'Lincoln and Negro Colonization in Central America', and Paul Scheips's 'Lincoln and the Chiriqui Colonization Project', which still appears in footnotes as the closest thing to a definitive account. When it comes to primary sources, most historians stick to well-known entries in the Lincoln papers, the *Collected Works*, the congressional serial sets, and the holdings of the National Archives. But as Scheips explained in the dissertation on which he based his article, there were still descendants in his day blocking access to both parts of what had been the Chiriquí

concern's own manuscript papers. These became available shortly afterwards, and represent a curiously underused resource. They offer even more insight than would be usual for such collections, not merely in light of the dispersal of the official files on colonization, but also because they contain an element of self-incrimination absent from the public documents, which is all the more intriguing in that many contemporaries charged the Chiriquí interest with thoroughgoing corruption.[2]

Furthermore, quite apart from evidentiary issues, the standard account of Chiriquí colonization betrays certain faults when examined more closely. Historians ascribe the project's death to two factors, more or less: the aroma of corruption pervading it and the objections of the Central American states to what looked like filibustering on behalf of an unwanted race of immigrants. (Incorporated within the former consideration is another, generally less prominent argument: that Lincoln's discovery of the poor quality of the coal that the settlers were supposed to mine turned him against the contract.) The diplomatic explanation in particular seems to make sense, as Lincoln put a halt on the expedition in early October 1862, shortly after he began to hear of the panicked response of the Central American isthmus to his mid-August address to the black deputation.

Such a date – and such a note of finality – raises more questions than it answers, however, as the Chiriquí proposal was far from new to Washington. Thompson had fruitlessly offered his holdings to Congress as a naval station a couple of years previously. This meant that there were already red flags over his reputation and the diplomatic complications attached to Chiriquí, a province that was the object of a chronic border dispute between Colombia and Costa Rica. As Benjamin Quarles wrote

[2] F. Bancroft, 'Schemes to Colonize Negroes in Central America', in J.E. Cooke, *Frederic Bancroft, Historian* (Norman, 1957), 192-227; W.A. Beck, 'Lincoln and Negro Colonization in Central America', *Abraham Lincoln Quarterly*, 6 (Sept. 1950), 162-83; P.J. Scheips, 'Lincoln and the Chiriqui Colonization Project', *Journal of Negro History*, 37 (Oct. 1952), 418-53, and his 'Ambrose W. Thompson: A Neglected Isthmian Promoter' (Chicago Univ. Ph.D., 1949), 36, 191-2. The two collections are the Ambrose W. Thompson Papers at the Library of Congress and the Richard W. Thompson Papers at the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio.

half a century ago and Bancroft nearly another half century before him, the real mystery is not why Lincoln dropped the Chiriquí project, but rather how it had ever got that far. Part of the answer is that the president was *not* unaware of the problems that it entailed, which complements the expanded timeline that the history of the Chiriquí scheme merits. Lincoln expressed both earlier misgivings and later hopes about the venture than the standard account would suggest, a fact that allows us to paint a more complex, but more realistic picture than that of a naïf caught off-guard by the Central American assault of September and early October 1862.[3]

Indeed the argument for the primacy of isthmian protest demands probing in another respect. For Central American objections may not have been as monolithic and unyielding as they can appear in the literature. It is worth noting the dissonant voice of Thomas Schoonover, whose 'Misconstrued Mission' (1980), the only study of colonization based on Central American as well as US archival holdings, rather qualifies the normal account of that region's grievances. 'In explaining why the Central American republics rejected black colonization, historians have overemphasized the fears of africanization', he suggests. Though US ministers in the area and their opposite numbers in Washington stressed that those countries would consider mass African American immigration undesirable, Schoonover reckons that this was less to do with simple racism, and more about a fear that the introduction of a large culturally foreign element would cause instability, invite US intervention on such groups' behalf, and consequently threaten Central American political independence.[4]

Although the governments of that region could be perfectly forthright in admitting that they viewed black settlers as the least desirable group, they also took consistent pride in informing Americans that they did not share the full force of their racism, and that their social attitudes admitted of a smoother spectrum of colour than

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[3] B. Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro* (New York, 1962), 111-12; Bancroft, 226-7.
[4] T. Schoonover, 'Misconstrued Mission: Expansionism and Black Colonization in Mexico and Central America During the Civil War', *Pacific Historical Review*, 49 (Nov. 1980), 620.

the stark black-white distinction more familiar to Anglo-Americans. Lincoln's speech to the black Washingtonians spoke grandiloquently of African Americans' eternal resettlement in that part of the world, as well as worryingly *vaguely* about the exact location that he had in mind, to a wider public that did not know he meant Chiriquí. This stifled earlier, tentative Central American interest in obtaining a share of the anticipated influx of black labour. But at the very least, Schoonover asserts, 'the US colonization scheme posed a dilemma for those Middle American officials who also believed that immigration would mean growth and development.' Assuaged by the suspension of the scheme, Costa Rica, at the forefront of opposition, would soon concede that it was happy to take individual immigrants who made no claim to coming under the protection of the American flag. Though jealous of an independence won by revolutionary withdrawal from another empire, and mindful of the expansionist noises that had rumbled from the United States for much of the 1840s and 1850s, the Central American countries were not necessarily averse to immigration arrangements that did not seek to prise sovereignty from them.[5]

Neither of the foregoing considerations is intended to dismiss the place of diplomatic concerns in the Lincoln administration's policymaking. After all, the president *did* suspend the scheme once it became clear that the deluge of protest would not stop until he did. Yet the gesture was more one of temporary appeasement whilst the White House stepped back and reviewed its policy. Indeed, throughout its life the Chiriquí project suffered several ups and downs, of which this was just one. Lincoln was essentially aware by mid-1862 that there were serious diplomatic obstacles in the way of the venture's success, though these were founded as much in divisions internal to Colombia as in the dispute with Costa Rica. Thereafter, there seem to have been three key phases in Lincoln's pursuit of the scheme, as much as one can draw such arbitrary lines.

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[5] Schoonover, 618.

During the first phase, the president grew concerned at the project's apparent corruption and the revelation of an embarrassing link to him personally. At least once, around late June or early July, then again in the month or so between Lincoln meeting with the black deputation and signing the contract, such anxiety came within an inch of finishing off the project. A cautiously framed agreement between Ambrose Thompson and the Interior Department kept it alive.

The second stage witnessed a shift towards concerns of a diplomatic nature, as Costa Rica and the isthmian countries sounded objections. More pressingly, Lincoln also came to doubt that there was any representative who could even speak for Colombia in the Chiriquí matter, since that country was wracked by a civil war of its own. As it became clearer that the business entailed several points of potential diplomatic entanglement, the president moved away from dealings with Thompson and the Chiriquí interest, and turned to consult other parts of government as to the value of a tailor-made treaty for black emigration. Lincoln called on the advice of the executive offices – most notably, a reluctant State Department – and asked Congress in his second annual message to shore up colonization policy with amendments to the US Constitution.

The outcome of that appeal was pending, though not hopeful, when in early 1863, there was a third major development, one that brought corruption back into sharp focus. It appears that Lincoln belatedly discovered that the Chiriquí lobby reached all the way to the cabinet. Though there is no evidence that he ever rejected the Chiriquí scheme, the record goes quiet on its further progress. Given the existence of other, more attractive colonization proposals by this point, it may be reasonable to infer that the revelation tipped the balance irreversibly against Chiriquí.

Whilst an investigation of the appropriate manuscript collections yields the lengthier and more complex story outlined above, it does not answer everything. As readers will know, sources simply dry up when a project ceases to be viable or starts to

stagnate. This denies us a precise time of death for the Chiriquí proposal in Lincoln's eyes – assuming there even *was* one, rather than something closer to an uncertain, indefinite move away from it. The scheme's advocates were indefatigable, but most of what they left behind was material intended to appeal for support from all sorts of quarters, which unsurprisingly conveys little sense of what their prospects realistically were from New Year 1863.

There are other frustrating ambiguities in the evidence, too. Perhaps most importantly, the Chiriquí project raised burgeoning questions about whether it was simply a domestic arrangement with an American concessionaire, and thus fine to remain within the purview of the Interior Department, or a proposal whose implications for foreign relations brought it more into the orbit of the State Department. Beneath the surface of that consideration may have been an even more significant one: whether, as per the ambiguities of black 'colonization', the United States was looking to plant settlers under its flag or simply to assist emigrants going to a contiguous, private land grant under Colombian jurisdiction. Though the objections of Colombian and other Central American diplomats made it clear from early on that the US government could not acquire sovereignty over any part of the isthmus, the question *did* arise. And the Lincoln administration was presumably not unaware that history had shown that gaining an informal foothold might lead to eventual annexation. Unfortunately, neither the president nor his cabinet colleagues left much clear evidence as to how they understood the colony working, or as to its planned sovereign status. This being the case, the 'what if?' question of the expedition's prospects had it gone ahead – and especially Central American acceptance thereof – remains firmly rooted in the distant world of counterfactuals.

Yet it is a tangential and distracting question to start with. The real significance of the complications and uncertainty permeating the Chiriquí scheme may be twofold.

First, Lincoln's persistent pursuit of the venture in the face of difficulties betrays not only a sincere commitment to colonization, but also – in what is arguably a related point – the fact that he did not have a definite vision of how the policy might succeed. We should not assume that we have missed something just because we cannot find clear and consistent answers from Lincoln to the questions that his policy raised. Nor should we doubt, necessarily, that he might have been a little desperate as emancipation loomed with no colonization scheme securely in place. It is important to avoid the temptation to discern a rigid or even a particularly logical progression in the evolution of the Chiriquí project, a proposal about which the president apparently vacillated over a period of several months. It may be truer to Lincoln's thinking, as well as less mentally strenuous, to simply appreciate that there were always question marks hanging over the integrity of the Chiriquí interest and the diplomatic requirements of the project.

Second, the prolonged unfolding and the eventual unravelling of the Chiriquí scheme likely contributed to the shift in colonization policymaking outlined in the introduction of this study. Having been officially charged with the policy in Congress's Second Confiscation Act of July 1862, the president found himself asking for the advice of the executive secretaries by late September, and then resubmitting colonization to Capitol Hill's consideration in December. By that point, Lincoln wanted nothing less than a constitutional amendment for funding colonization and for making the kind of emigration treaty for which the Chiriquí affair had so abundantly illustrated the need. When congressional help turned out to be unforthcoming, the president would demonstrate his flexibility once more and fall back on his personal initiative in the pursuit of new schemes. Yet the lessons of the Chiriquí project had contributed to a more permanent change by mid-1863. Thereafter, the administration would deal with colonization as a primarily State Department affair and try to bypass shady private contractors altogether. As the very fact of the Île à Vache expedition would demonstrate, such a change was far from immediate, but it may nevertheless represent the Chiriquí

business's most significant political legacy, even if in a contributory rather than a unique role.

Cautious optimism: events down to the meeting with the 'Deputation of Negroes', August 1862

The name of Chiriquí was already well known in Washington before Lincoln had even taken office. Ambrose W. Thompson, a Philadelphian shipbuilder who sat atop the Chiriqui Improvement Company (CIC), had approached the Buchanan administration in 1858 to highlight the deposits of coal and natural harbours that his territorial concession might offer to the US navy. Impressed by the prospect of gaining a foothold in an area of such geostrategic importance, Buchanan put a contract for coal and transit rights for the American military before Congress, which entered into some ill-tempered and tediously circular debates in June 1860.

Opponents alleged that it was a swindle, one based on poor title that had lapsed for either non-fulfilment of its conditions, a hostile judicial ruling, or both. Moreover, Thompson's right to lay a railroad was questionable, both by the terms of his own grant and owing to the monopoly previously awarded to the Panama Railroad Company; the coal deposits were superficial and of poor quality; the ownership of the area was contested with Costa Rica; and, as a private contractor, he simply could not have the right to alienate elements of another country's sovereignty to the United States. With plenty of accusations of fraud flying about, and counter-accusations alleging the undue influence of the Panama Railroad Company in opposition to the Chiriquí site, a divided Congress settled on commissioning an official expedition to the area. It reported in early 1861, by which time Capitol Hill had to surreally resume its debate over expansionist pipedreams amidst the fracture of the United States. In the end, House opposition saw

the whole project dropped from the general deficiency bill whose passage it jeopardized.[6]

The Chiriquí interest picked itself up, however, and immediately started working on the new administration. Thompson's approach was a timely one: before hostilities had even broken out, Lincoln and the Blairs – who provided the president with an official adviser in Montgomery, the new postmaster general, and an unofficial but highly influential one in Francis, Sr. – had already instructed the new minister to Guatemala to try to make arrangements for a colonization scheme so as to win over southern slaveholders, and thus pre-empt or mitigate the impending conflict. Thompson met Lincoln shortly before the Confederacy started to bombard Fort Sumter, and was pestering Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles for a coal contract possibly as early as May 1861, and certainly by August. Lincoln had his wife's brother-in-law, Ninian Edwards, compile a written report on the CIC's proposition at that point, which briefly introduced the idea of colonization, an ultimate fate for the 'contrabands' that the president had already discussed with his friend Sen. Orville Browning (R-Ill.). Lincoln had already made a connection between colonization and the Chiriquí proposal by October, and wondered too if the recaptives liberated at sea from the illegal international slave trade could be directed there to save on the costs of their transportation to Liberia. He also decided to transfer the task of researching Chiriquí from the sceptical Welles to the enthusiastic secretary of the interior, Caleb Smith. In a burst of activity the next month, the president directed Thompson to confer with Francis Blair; their plans developed the colonizationist aspect of the project, linking black emigrants to the mining of coal. Barely a fortnight later, Lincoln firmly endorsed colonization in his first annual message, advising Congress to make generous provision for the resettlement of those slaves freed by the Confiscation Act and those whom the individual states might see fit to emancipate: '[o]n this whole proposition, – including

[6] Scheips, 'Buchanan and the Chiriqui Naval Station Sites', *Military Affairs*, 18 (Summer 1954), 64-80.

the appropriation of money with the acquisition of territory, does not the expediency amount to absolute necessity – that, without which the government itself cannot be perpetuated?' Tellingly, it was on the advice of Montgomery Blair that the president also asked legislators to recognize Haiti and Liberia by making an appropriation for a *chargé* to each.[7]

Thereafter, the Chiriquí matter lay somewhat dormant, with the solicitor of the treasury investigating the CIC's title in early 1862. Concurrently, Congress started work on making provision for colonization, although the initial responses to Lincoln's message – namely, bills from James Harlan to acquire territory for free black resettlement, from Rep. John Gurley (R-Ohio) to set aside swathes of Florida for confiscated slaves under terms of apprenticeship, and from Frank Blair for colonization abroad – all went nowhere. Despite the urging of Montgomery Blair, Lincoln did not mention colonization when he asked Congress in March to pledge compensation to any state that enacted gradual abolition; in private, however, the president had stated that it ought to be an adjunct of border state emancipation. Indeed, the policy's other supporters in government openly affirmed that emancipation and colonization were inextricably linked, a claim that Sen. Garrett Davis (Unionist-Ky.) put to the test by demanding deportation as the price of the mooted District of Columbia Emancipation Act. Whilst Doolittle, who had become the preeminent congressional advocate of a policy that had devolved rather more upon the Senate than the House, clarified that he was for voluntary removal, Browning admitted that 'the time possibly will come, when compulsory colonization may be found necessary for the good of both races; and if it does come, I apprehend I for one shall be found ready to … take my share of the responsibility of enforcing it.' In mid-April, Congress passed the bill with $100,000 of appropriations for the voluntary colonization of the freedmen of Washington, which, in

[7] Page, 317 n. 10-14; C.A. Barker (ed.), *Memoirs of Elisha Oscar Crosby* (San Marino, Calif., 1945), 87-91; T.C Pease and J.G. Randall (eds.), *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning* (2 vols., Springfield, Ill., 1925-33), i, 478; H.K. Beale (ed.), *Diary of Gideon Welles* (3 vols., New York, 1960), i, 150; G. Welles, 'The History of Emancipation', *Galaxy*, 14 (1872), 849.

conjunction with slaveholder compensation, 'gratified' a president otherwise rather uncomfortable at key aspects of the legislation. (Debate then moved on to the bill for Haitian and Liberian recognition, whose sponsor, Charles Sumner of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, had held it back until emancipation in the District had passed, so that the latter would draw out colonizationist sentiment and the most visceral racial concerns; although Doolittle attempted, behind the scenes, to overlay recognition with colonization, the bill succeeded with no such proviso, and Lincoln appointed a commissioner to Haiti that July.) With funding now in place, and the task of colonization delegated to the president, Thompson's son, Ambrose, Jr., brought Chiriquí to Lincoln's attention once more in late April. The very next day, Smith asked Thompson, Sr., for his terms, a move that revealed his eagerness in its departure from the Interior Department's normal expectation that colonization contractors come forward at their own initiative to present their pitch. Taking a bird's-eye view of all the colonization offers as at early May, Smith reported glowingly on Chiriquí and recommended that the contract be made.[8]

Yet there is little reason to doubt that Lincoln was already looking into the matter with more circumspection than his ebullient colleague, and especially with respect to its diplomatic implications. As such, it becomes harder to accept the traditional account of a president caught wholly unawares by some kind of belated realization that there was a Central American dimension to his plans, even if he maybe did not predict the full passion of the subsequent isthmian protest. Indeed, US relations with Colombia and the wider region likely weighed heavily on the administration's mind already. For colonization in Chiriquí faced another complicating factor, additional to the dispute between Colombia and Costa Rica: the former had just undergone a revolution

[8] Page, 317 n. 15-16; J.M. McPherson, 'Abolitionist and Negro Opposition to Colonization During the Civil War', *Phylon*, 26 (4th Qtr., 1965), 393-4; H. Belz, *Abraham Lincoln, Constitutionalism, and Equal Rights* (New York, 1998), 106; Pease, i, 512; *CG* 37:2, 36, 1157-8, 1191-2, 1333-4, 1520-3, Appendix, 94-101; B.W. Palmer (ed.), *The Selected Letters of Charles Sumner* (2 vols., Boston, 1990), ii, 109-10; *SED 55*, 6-9.

and had two sets of representatives in the United States. 'Since 1860, Colombia had been engaged in its own civil war', writes Foner, seemingly alone in noting this problem, 'making it uncertain who possessed the authority to sign an agreement to settle emancipated slaves in Chiriqui.' Former liberal president Tomás de Mosquera had risen in 1860 against a conservative central government, and captured Bogotá in June 1861. He proclaimed the 'United States of Colombia', a change confirmed by constitutional convention in 1863, once the opposition had given up; having resigned his dictatorship into the hands of that body, Mosquera was elected the new republic's first president. The USC thereby succeeded the short-lived 'Granadine Confederation', a designation that itself had barely started to displace the country's previous name of New Granada.[9]

As matters stood in 1862, however, the Lincoln administration refused to recognize the new regime, understandably wary of giving its blessing to the claims of an insurrectionary government, and probably viewing with some scorn what looked like stereotypical Latin American instability. Just to liven things up, the *de jure* minister to the United States, Pedro Herrán, was actually the son-in-law of the *de facto* president Mosquera, and had initially been his appointee. On the other side, one of the agents of the new regime's mission to the United States, Francisco Párraga, was in the pay of the Chiriqui Improvement Company, as well as quite close to Thompson personally. Though preoccupied with his own country's internal strife, Secretary of State Seward was sufficiently troubled by Central American affairs to try to sound out Britain and France on guaranteeing the neutrality of isthmian transit through Colombia, whilst Párraga reported in early August 1862 that Herrán had invoked that same principle in a meeting with the secretary for his own counter-revolutionary ends.[10]

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[9] E. Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York, 2010), 233; E.T. Parks, *Colombia and the United States, 1765-1934* (Durham, 1935), 241.
[10] S. Randall, *Colombia and the United States: Hegemony and Interdependence* (Athens, Ga., 1992), 41, 47-9; H.S. Sanford to Seward, 5 Sept. 1862, WHS; F. Párraga to A.W. Thompson, 2 Aug. 1862, AWT.

Furthermore, the administration's dealings with Colombia and Central America were hardly limited to matters of recognition or to the remote prospect of intervention. They fully broached many of the issues surrounding colonization, too. The question of whether the United States could seek sovereign holdings in Central America, which would prove an important element of the later wave of protest, was certainly not a new one by the autumn of 1862. Not only had many in Congress acknowledged the impossibility of obtaining such title when Capitol Hill had debated Thompson's contract in its previous incarnation, but some of the representatives of those nations had long made their stance clear. Costa Rican minister Luis Molina approached Seward in June, on hearing rumours that Chiriquí colonization was in the offing. Molina exacted an acknowledgment that the US would not try to establish independent colonies without permission, as well as using the meeting to flag up the border dispute with Colombia.[11]

The president's own research only confirmed that it would be most unwise to sound the slightest annexationist or expansionist note. At first, Secretary Smith had called for the US to obtain possession of Chiriquí in his colonization survey of 9 May. Thompson replied that this would not be possible, though he pointed to the example of the British East India Company to suggest that the presence of a private concern might one day bring about formal empire. On 16 May, Smith reported to Lincoln that it would not be possible to plant a sovereign colony, but added that in any case, nobody was demanding this of other potential colonization sites like Haiti and Liberia. In early June, the representatives of New Granada, as the old regime continued to consider Colombia, met Lincoln at least once. The president pointed to a map showing the CIC's tract coloured in red, and asked, less ambitiously, if New Granada and Costa Rica would object to a mining operation that did not make any pretensions to territorial sovereignty. Receiving a clear 'yes', Lincoln's dealings to date had already anticipated the substance of the diplomatic objections that would befall him when he went public with his plans

[11] *FRUS*, 899-902.

for Chiriquí, though perhaps not their intensity and breadth. If he later made some insensitive sounds that grated Central American ears – or indeed could not help but make such sounds, given the nature of the policy – it was not for lack of warning. In turn, this would suggest that he was always keen to carry through with the scheme, and perhaps even deliberately intended to dip his toes into the water to gauge just how bad the reaction was.[12]

Indeed, mid-1862 represented a time of great uncertainty and flux for colonization. The administration was in danger of outpacing congressional action, whilst American diplomats and concessionaires with interests abroad, acting from a murky mixture of patriotic and financial motives, in turn outpaced the administration in their eager attempts to make black resettlement arrangements with their various host states. The vast majority of suggestions flooding into the Departments of State and Interior pertained to the American tropics or to Liberia, although at the more outlandish end, one contractor suggested Australia, and a young American 'enthusiast' whom US minister Cassius Clay encountered at the Russian court, Poland. The administration expressed a polite, often genuine, though effectively non-committal interest in most of the credible proposals, although any diplomat who overreached himself promptly received a slap on the wrist, notably Robert Shufeldt, the US consul in Havana, who tried to insert colonization into the Corwin-Doblado negotiations for American financial support of Mexico. Nevertheless, the Chiriquí site remained the administration's goal, even if military campaigns and other policies often distracted the president for significant stretches of time. Despite the recommendation of a House committee dominated by border state and lower northern representatives, including Frank Blair, that Congress pass a bill for $20,000,000 for the colonization of the slaves of any emancipation-minded loyal slave states, the $500,000 that Congress appropriated to accompany the Second Confiscation Act of July hinted at what the political

[12] Page, 137 n. 25-7.

colonizationists could more realistically expect. (As per most colonizationists' understanding of how the policy would sustain itself in the long term, though, that amount was certainly enough to get the ball rolling.) But the majority of another committee, comprising purely border state representatives, rebuffed a reiterated personal appeal from the president for gradual emancipation with colonization. According to a government official who encountered the president frequently, 'Mr. Lincoln took its failure quite to heart, and declared that it still remained true that, whom the gods wished to destroy they first made mad.' Shortly afterwards, Lincoln also dropped cabinet discussion of a draft military order for colonization in light of the evident lack of support emanating from his executive heads. An exasperated Seward, none too happy in his own right at being the obvious recipient of any suggested foreign resettlement scheme, explained to the American minister to Brazil in mid-July that, whilst the public mind was likely to settle upon clearer notions at some point in the near-future, colonization currently raised far more questions than it answered:

> [W]hether the slaves emancipated shall be removed or be suffered to remain in their native homes, how removed, and at whose cost; whether their consent shall be required or waived; whither they shall be removed and colonized; whether they shall be colonized within our own jurisdiction, and on what terms, or in some region to be purchased for the purpose, and over which the federal authority shall be extended for their protection, making them an outpost and support of the republic, and, possibly, a burden; or whether in some central or South American country, with the consent of their government, and relinquishing to such government the benefits and the charges of the colony, what country or countries, in either case, shall be preferred? All these questions remain a subject of earnest but as yet very confused discussion.[13]

That the president was also aware of Chiriquí colonization's weak points and ambiguities becomes perfectly clear from studying his 14 August address to the

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[13] *SED 55*, 5-7, 11-12, 18, 21; C.M Clay, *The Life of Cassius Marcellus Clay* (2 vols., Cincinnati, 1886), i, 440; R.B. Hilger, 'Seward's Man in Havana: Robert W. Shufeldt, Cuba, and the Civil War, 1861-1863' (Louisiana Tech University, M.A., 1994), 65-7; 37th Congress 2nd Session, House Report No. 148, *Emancipation and Colonization*, (Washington, 1862), 32; *CW*, v, 318; L.E. Chittenden, *Recollections of President Lincoln and His Administration* (New York, 1891), 336; S.P. Chase and D. Donald (ed.), *Inside Lincoln's Cabinet: The Civil War Diaries of Salmon P. Chase* (New York, 1954), 95-6, 98-9; *FRUS*, 714.

delegation of black Washingtonians. The meeting was organized by none other than James Mitchell, who, being a Democrat, had lost his agency with the state of Indiana after the 1860 election, but who was certainly involved in government colonization work by May 1862, and apparently in Washington and on Lincoln's personal radar even by late 1861. The president granted him a rather anomalous, *ad hoc* colonization agency just before the meeting with the black deputation; indeed, in a glaring example of Lincoln's curious ability to parcel out the task of colonization selectively and inconsistently, Mitchell's formal involvement in the Chiriquí scheme was to be curiously limited hereafter. Scholars frequently refer to the notorious address for Lincoln's sentiments on race, and for the broader political appeal to white Americans that the lullaby thesis posits, especially since arguments in that vein allow us to take the edge off an episode that many historians would not hesitate to describe as the nadir of Lincoln's presidency. One need not disagree with them, exactly, to appreciate that what he expressed was actually rather typical of the social pessimism regarding race relations that tended to motivate most adherents of colonization, however vividly and frankly he put the matter to the delegation: '[s]ee our present condition – the country engaged in war! – our white men cutting one another's throats, none knowing how far it will extend … I repeat, without the institution of Slavery and the colored race as a basis, the war could not have an existence.' Certainly, we should avoid confusing a low moment with an aberration; Lincoln's words here accurately embodied his known beliefs.[14]

Although one might question whether anyone could parse the address more than historians already have, it is noteworthy that scholars pay surprisingly little attention to Lincoln's revealing assessment therein of the actual Chiriquí scheme. 'The political affairs in Central America are not in quite as satisfactory condition as I wish', admitted the president. Alluding to the civil war in Colombia, he put a slightly optimistic gloss on current affairs when he added that '[t]here are contending factions in that

[14] P.W. Magness and S.N. Page, *Colonization after Emancipation* (Columbia, 2011), 14, 132-3 n. 6, 147 n. 3; *CW*, v, 372.

quarter; but it is true that all the factions are agreed alike on the subject of colonization, and want it, and are more generous than we are here.' Lincoln was also perfectly frank in admitting that the CIC was a commercial concern, 'a speculation … by gentlemen, who have an interest in the country, including the coal mines'. With even-handedness, he continued '[w]e have been mistaken all our lives if we do not know whites as well as blacks look to their self-interest', and suggested that the company's thirst for profits hardly prevented the settlers also doing well for themselves. 'I am not sure you will succeed … but we cannot succeed unless we try; but we think, with care, we can succeed.' Thus, Lincoln had gone on the record to acknowledge the Chiriquí scheme's mixed prospects, its scope for diplomatic difficulties, and the naked self-interest of its proponents. Over the next month, behind closed doors, the last of these worries would come close to destroying it.[15]

Reckoning with corruption: mid-August to mid-September

Whilst historians have never failed to note the murky aura of graft surrounding the Chiriquí proposal, it has always proven hard to place that consideration in the overall story. By its very nature, corruption was presumably an ongoing concern. In the apparent absence of evidence respecting the point at which Lincoln became aware of it, the issue has never quite seemed to fit into the timeline or a causal sequence in the same manner that, for instance, Central American protest appears to have led to the

[15] *CW*, v, 374. Kate Masur has recently written a brilliant reappraisal of the back-story of this delegation. Though the meeting was an ostensibly well-known episode, scholars had viewed it solely through the Lincoln lens. Masur shows that, far from being the recently freed slaves of many accounts, and chosen for their supposed pliability, the delegates were all free Washingtonians who had come from a background of opposition to resettlement. She also describes the crisis of representative legitimacy that was then engendered when the head of the deputation unexpectedly accepted Lincoln's offer of a new home in a foreign land. This was an act that raised the stakes and the bitterness of District African Americans' debates over emigration. (K. Masur, 'The African American Delegation to Abraham Lincoln: A Reappraisal', *Civil War History*, 56 (June 2010), 117-44.)

suspension of the expedition. Yet the extensive political reach of the Chiriquí interest was ultimately crucial to the scheme's demise, and came very close to claiming it on at least two discrete occasions over the summer of 1862, as well.

Scholars naturally gravitate towards the figure of Ambrose Thompson, and not without good reason. His name was not a reputable one – and yet that very fact also made it clear that he was to be treated cautiously and kept at arm's length where necessary. Indeed, by choosing to offer a significant, politically sensitive contract to the US government in time of war, Thompson inevitably placed himself under an intrusive level of scrutiny. Some unidentified members of the authorities, acting on an accusation of disloyalty made by a US consul, went so far as to trick him into leaving his hotel room so that they could rifle through his baggage for incriminating evidence. In early November, Lincoln would reveal that the source was a Mr Ruggles of the State Department, presumably Francis Ruggles, who claimed that he had met Thompson on the isthmus on the eve of the president's election, and that Thompson had spoken most abusively of Lincoln. The figure to whom the president revealed this, Sen. Samuel Pomeroy (R-Kan.), even came away with the impression that the expedition would have sailed already had it not involved Thompson. Yet the businessman claimed never to have actually been to Central America – though the date tallies with the official exploration made by his son Ambrose, Jr. – and in any case, Lincoln then expressed his satisfaction with him. As with other facets of the Chiriquí business, it was more a case of the president weighing up risk and reward, and undergoing occasional fluctuations in his opinion of Thompson, than dropping the whole project on the strength of some kind of devastating, one-time revelation.[16]

In terms of the potential to embarrass Lincoln personally, the real liability was a trio of Indianan ex-Whigs, all of whom were linked to the CIC. The first may not have actually held a stake, and there is no evidence that he caused the president concern. The

[16] Page, 318 n. 30-1.

second did have a vested interest, which forced Lincoln to think very hard during late August and early September before committing to the Chiriquí contract. The third almost certainly stood to gain something, though his share is unclear. Significantly, Lincoln appears not to have discovered the identity of this last party until just into 1863, when it likely tipped the scales against going through with the arrangement.

The first was Caleb Smith, who, whenever given the opportunity, tried to push the Chiriquí business forward with gusto. Inspired by the observations of cabinet diarist Gideon Welles, scholars have not been slow to place question marks over his enthusiasm, though they have avoided committing an opinion either way. Welles would record in late September 1862 that Smith had been the only consistent supporter of Chiriquí other than the president, and that the interior secretary had been 'importunate' in pressing the original naval coal contract on his department. At the time, Welles felt that his colleague was 'perhaps' honest, 'yet I have not been favorably impressed with his zeal in behalf of the Chiriqui association.' By the 1870s, though, he flatly remembered Smith as 'a friend of the scheme and the parties.' The interior secretary's personal papers for the war years are thin, and do not reveal that he held a stake. It may be that Smith simply had an uncomfortably close relationship with those who did stand to gain from the Chiriquí contract. There is also no evidence as to how Lincoln privately regarded his actions and motives, which leaves the paramount analytical question unanswered.[17]

The second was Richard Thompson (no relation to Ambrose), the CIC's attorney, a figure completely invisible in the official sources but prominent behind the scenes. His name did not completely escape contemporaries' notice, though. In late August, Rep. Thaddeus Stevens (R-Penn.) reminded Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase of Ambrose Thompson's brazen efforts under the last administration: '[t]he House had been canvassed for a year by his agent – Dick Thompson among them in its favor – I will

[17] Beale, *Diary of Welles*, i, 150-1; Welles, 'The History of Emancipation', 849.

not say how many people were bribed.' One columnist evidently thought that he could treat him as notorious: 'reports in the newspapers, mixing up the name of Richard W. Thompson in the [Chiriquí] business, induce us to advise our colored friends not to be in a hurry to join that enterprise.'[18]

The third was John Usher, who as assistant secretary of the interior stood in for an ailing Smith for much of late 1862, succeeding him in the top job from the New Year. Historians' oversight of Usher's connection to the Chiriquí interest is surprising, as James Mitchell made such an allegation to Lincoln, whilst a perusal of Usher's personal papers reveals a suspiciously regular correspondence with his wife and Richard Thompson as to the scheme's prospects. Two factors may have distracted scholars from what was in plain sight. The first is that Smith and Usher ultimately pursued colonization as part of their departmental duties. This consideration still comes back round to their personal enthusiasm, though, for Lincoln tasked the Interior Department with the Chiriquí business following Smith's markedly greater show of interest compared to the other secretaries. The second is that Smith and Usher were both from Indiana, a populous swing state – hence the guaranteed cabinet place – which was racially conservative and keener on colonization than any other part of the Union. Michael Burlingame has therefore suggested that Lincoln was thinking primarily of the 'lullaby' again:

> His [Usher's] appointment may have been designed in part to alleviate anxiety about the results of the impending Emancipation Proclamation ... Naming Usher might reassure skeptics that plans to colonize the freedmen would be pursued. Usher had helped plot strategy to win approval for the Chiriqui plan, emphasizing that colonization would help "show that there will be no danger of an influx" of blacks northward.[19]

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[18] Palmer (ed.), *The Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens* (2 vols., Pittsburgh, 1997), i, 319-20; 'New Granada, or Colombia', *The Independent*, 9 Oct. 1862.

[19] M. Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (2 vols., Baltimore, 2008), ii, 459; J. Mitchell to Lincoln, [undated] June, 2 Sept. 1864, AL; Page, 318 n. 36. Usher's involvement imbues one of Mitchell's other allegations, that Usher had allowed the Chiriquí project's files out of the office, with a meaning of conspiracy rather than mere bad practice. (Burlingame et al., *Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay* (Carbondale, 1997), 217.)

Usher's biographers got excruciatingly close to the truth, writing at length on his keen interest in the project, but ascribing it to personal conviction founded on an awareness of his home state's prejudices. 'As was characteristic of his professional attitude', they wrote, 'Usher became personally involved in several departmental problems beyond the point of purely official interest. One of these was Negro colonization.'[20]

It is not altogether clear how Usher got involved with the CIC, since unlike Richard Thompson, he seems to have played no official role in it. Unless the assistant secretary simply got to know easterner Ambrose Thompson through departmental colonization business, it is possible that Richard Thompson introduced them to each other. The latter was always Usher's primary correspondent in the Chiriquí matter rather than Ambrose Thompson, and appears to have shared an interest with him in another speculative project, the Pacific Railroad. That was the real Indianan connection, and thus a far more contingent, mercenary link than one might expect. In a lengthy communication attempting to pre-empt all of Lincoln's conceivable objections to the Chiriquí contract, Usher did, however, frame his concerns in terms of the broad racial sentiments of a Midwest that they both called home. Knowing that Lincoln regarded the War Democrat Joseph Wright, now a US senator, as a barometer of political opinion, Usher also got him to write to the president in order to bolster his own advocacy of colonization.[21]

Still, the CIC could not succeed in hiding *all* its interested parties. Whilst it is difficult to reconstruct a precise sequence of events, it looks as though murmurs of corruption brought the projected agreement to the brink of destruction by late August, though the problem of graft was not new and the diplomatic complications hanging over the project were likewise ever-present. As early as the tenth of that month, before the

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[20] A.W. Farley and E.R. Richardson, *John Palmer Usher, Lincoln's Secretary of the Interior* (Lawrence, 1960), 21. In fairness, as at 1862, Usher genuinely believed in racial separation above and beyond his support for the Chiriquí scheme, arguing even in private that the government should create an internal black reservation in the South. (Usher to R.W. Thompson, 17 Sept. 1862, RWT-ACPL.)

[21] Page, 318 n. 39.

president had even spoken to the black delegation, Usher reported that Lincoln had become 'very apprehensive that it is a scheme to enrich political hacks and won't make a contract which will make it possible for them to get any thing out of it', though he added that this 'seems to please Ambrose Thompson very much as he says it will relieve him of a parcel of leeches who are bleeding him to death.' Usher then reported on 22 and 24 August that the signing of the contract was imminent, only to declare it as good as lost by the very beginning of September. A supporter of a rival scheme who enjoyed thorough access to Washington's political circles also declared the venture 'at an end' on 30 August, and opined that 'the whole thing has been worked by adroit speculators, who for five years have sought to force this property on the government under, I have credibly enquired, a fraudulent contract.' We know that around this time, Chase, an opponent of colonization, read Stevens's denunciation of Richard Thompson and the overall proposal to Lincoln, who promised to delay the scheme until the Chiriquí site had been investigated. Indeed, the president had already offered a thorough explanation to Ambrose Thompson as to the liability represented by his namesake attorney, around what had probably been the very end of June or the beginning of July, and which had seemed to mark the project's death even at that juncture:

> He said frankly that he had intended to go into the matter, but that representations had been made to him, that the whole matter was a speculation, a job, that the money required to be paid was not intended to be used in the developing of the property, but in the payment of old debts, judgements, mortgages & c. … that it had been said that his "friend" Dick Thompson was to get money which was to be applied to such purposes and that while he (Mr L) was willing to do anything personal to serve him, to risk a vast deal life &c. – yet he could not go before the people, admitting that he had so applied public money on a contract that it was to be appropriated to paying private debts.[22]

[22] Usher to 'Madam', 10 Aug., 24 Aug., to 'Wife', [undated] Sept. 1862, JPU; Usher to R.W. Thompson, 22 Aug. 1862, RWT-ACPL; A.E. Carroll to Burr, 30 Aug., 13 Sept. 1862, Aaron C. Burr Papers, Yale University; Palmer, *Papers of Thaddeus Stevens*, i, 320; A.W. Thompson to R.W. Thompson, 6 Oct. 1862, CIC files, AWT. For consideration of the latest possible date for Lincoln's discovery of Richard Thompson's involvement, see Page, 318-19 n. 41, 43.

It was true that the Richard Thompson connection might cause the president great embarrassment. They were old colleagues from the Thirtieth Congress and had remained on friendly terms even as Thompson's more conservative streak saw him resist the call of the Republican Party during the 1850s. It was a serious concern for Lincoln, as already there were opponents of colonization – or grudging, nominal supporters at best – who had Richard Thompson on their radar screens.[23]

Since the Chiriquí proposal was in so many other ways an attractive one, what it needed was for someone to validate the CIC's claims and to move leadership of the project away from interested parties. And at this point, an unlikely saviour appeared. The president asked Pomeroy to assume an agency to oversee the preparations for the expedition and accompany it. Supposedly, it was also Pomeroy who was to undertake the preliminary scouting mission that Lincoln promised in Chase's presence, though it is ambiguous what exactly this was supposed to entail. One of the unclear aspects of Lincoln's plans is whether he understood there to be a difference between an exploratory mission and the first wave of actual settlers. He may have been genuinely unsure himself at this stage. But in light of later instructions from the Interior Department that apparently treated them as the same thing, it seems more likely that he was fudging on the issue to appease those with concerns about sending out emigrants prematurely. Certainly, Pomeroy promptly went on to issue an address calling for the free blacks of the United States to apply to join him for a projected 1 October sailing, which represented a rather generous interpretation of appropriations intended only for southern 'contrabands' and for those slaves who had been emancipated in the District.[24]

Most have focussed on Pomeroy as the most incongruous participant in the whole Chiriquí affair. '[A]t least one genuine antislavery activist allowed himself to be compromised by Lincoln's colonization enterprise', writes Mark Neely; 'Lincoln

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[23] C. Roll, *Colonel Dick Thompson: The Persistent Whig* (Indianapolis, 1948), 90-1, 151-3.
[24] 'Late News', *Circular*, 28 Aug. 1862; 'Colonization of Free Negroes – An Address by Senator Pomeroy', *The Weekly Milwaukee News*, 2 Sept. 1862.

somehow managed to get Senator Samuel Pomeroy … to head up the proposed colonization experiment.' It appears that the senator, an abolitionist from the radical wing of the party, had sincerely offered his help following an encounter with Lincoln that had convinced him that the president would ordain emancipation once a viable colonization scheme was underway:

> Pomeroy, with whom I had a long conversation, gave me [Adams Hill] to understand that the President would emancipate so soon as he was assured that his colonization project would succeed, and he is going to devote himself with his whole energies to put it through, although not inclined to it himself originally. It seems to me that it may be necessary to ride this hobby in order to achieve the great result. Pomeroy says that the President is always quoting to him the Garrett Davis remark that the loyal men of Kentucky would not resist his emancipation scheme if he would only conjoin it with his colonization plan.[25]

Yet the hindsight conferred by the disgraceful end of Pomeroy's political career in 1873, the suspicions that Welles confided to his diary, the fact that the senator took years to officially account for a presumably unused, sizable advance from the colonization fund, and his unlikely conversion to the policy – all look bad. 'No matter how sincere Pomeroy appeared', states Michael Vorenberg, 'Lincoln should have been suspicious of a man who had opposed appropriations for colonization in April of that year and who in June had mocked the idea of colonization by proposing in its place a measure to colonize freed slaves together with their former masters.' Vorenberg has echoed others in suggesting that Lincoln chose him to go out with the expedition because of his experience in settling the Kansan frontier in the 1850s, and wonders if the president also hoped to reconcile Chase to the scheme with the appointment of a friend. Scheips speculated that Lincoln simply took any offer of help that was going at a time when Confederate military victory

[25] M.E. Neely, Jr., 'Colonization and the Myth That Lincoln Prepared the People for Emancipation', in W.A. Blair and K.F. Younger (eds.), *Lincoln's Proclamation: Emancipation Reconsidered* (Chapel Hill, 2009), 63-4; A.S. Hill to Gay, 25 Aug. 1862, Sydney H. Gay Papers, Columbia University.

and European recognition of the South loomed large. All in all, it looks rather mysterious.[26]

A fair assessment of the senator would be a middling one. Pomeroy genuinely did not know Thompson at the time that Lincoln appointed him, and he subsequently claimed to more than one person that he had broken with radical friends over colonization. Yet he then maintained at least a business acquaintanceship, arguably a personal friendship, with Thompson for two decades. This would come to an end when Pomeroy tried to swindle Thompson shortly before the latter's death in 1882. The very fact of their relationship is where the scales have to weigh against the senator, for the larger part of the $25,000 advance that Pomeroy drew for the Chiriquí expedition, which in turn would represent almost two-thirds of total government expenditure on wartime colonization, comprised large transfers made to Thompson. Though ultimately made on Lincoln's order, or at least purportedly so in the case of the final instalment, such drafts were issued at Pomeroy's recommendation, conveyed via his hands, and confirmed by nothing more than receipts issued by a newfound friend.[27]

It seems that Pomeroy may have acted with some degree of integrity at first, haggling down the $20,000 advance that Thompson requested immediately after signing the contract to a more modest suggestion of $15,000, which the president granted. Yet at Smith's instigation, Pomeroy added another $10,000 for expedition supplies, and thus had already drawn $25,000 by late September. He actually made only $14,000 worth of corresponding transfers to Thompson – themselves never itemized or satisfactorily explained – at this juncture, and was therefore saddled with a considerable amount of money in his own right for an expedition that was never to go ahead. Moreover, the

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[26] Beale, *Diary of Welles*, i, 123; M. Vorenberg, 'Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization', *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 14 (Summer 1993), 34-5, 38; Scheips, 'Lincoln and the Chiriqui Colonization Project', 436.

[27] A.W. Thompson to Párraga, 30 Aug. 1862, RWT-RBH; A.W. Thompson to S.C. Pomeroy, 22 Mar. 1864, letter-books, AWT; Pease, i, 577; D. Mowry (ed.), 'Negro Colonization, from Doolittle Correspondence', *Publications of the Southern History Association*, 9 (Nov. 1905), 402; Scheips, 'Ambrose W. Thompson', 162.

indefinite term of Pomeroy's agency allowed his moral backbone plenty of time to start bending. The senator himself would later become keen to highlight the uncertain lifespan of the project, justifying an aversion to settling his final accounts by citing disputes with suppliers whose goods had degraded during what had looked like a merely temporary suspension. Historians' doubts over such an explanation might not provide adequate grounds for a guilty verdict, but Pomeroy also faced well-placed accusations from within the executive branch. Mitchell alleged that Usher allowed the senator to take the Chiriquí files out of the Interior Department in order to cook the books. This accusation seems valid, for by early 1864 Thompson was writing to Pomeroy to say that he was happy to issue a voucher declaring that he had received from him whatever amount would add up to the original $25,000 advance.[28]

Yet questions about Pomeroy's motives are above all a red herring, for he was a newcomer to the Chiriquí business, and so cannot be held answerable for the sordid reputation that the CIC already enjoyed. Indeed, it seems that his involvement really did rescue the project late that summer because, as the foregoing discussion has made clear, Lincoln proceeded to close the contract. The president approved its form on 11 September, and the following day officially charged the Interior Department with enacting the recent legislative provisions for colonization, something that he had not yet done despite Smith's longstanding interest and assistance. The secretary of the interior and Ambrose Thompson signed the actual agreement. As Usher had anticipated, the president consciously drew it up in such a way as to limit the Thompsons' ability to make a large profit, and by extension its capacity for scandal. Accordingly, an optimistic draft in the Lincoln papers, suggesting that the US government pay $200,000 upfront to construct the facilities that the settlers would need, came to nothing. The final version of 12 September allowed advances of no more than $10,000 at a time, to be released as waves of settlers gradually moved into the CIC's lands. It also provided for a loan of

[28] For a more thorough exploration of Pomeroy's accounting, see Page, 319 n. 56-9.

$50,000 to open up the coalmines, conditional on Pomeroy's satisfactory report and the actual settlement of the first colonists. This precluded immediate fortunes for the Chiriquí stakeholders. Although Lincoln relented to some degree, evidently allowing Ambrose Thompson a larger and rather more premature advance than was provided for, he had essentially written the agreement 'in such form as to prevent [Thompson's] friends from deriving any present advantage.' Richard Thompson would have to satisfy himself with the promise of a share of any future gains rather than an immediate cash payment.[29]

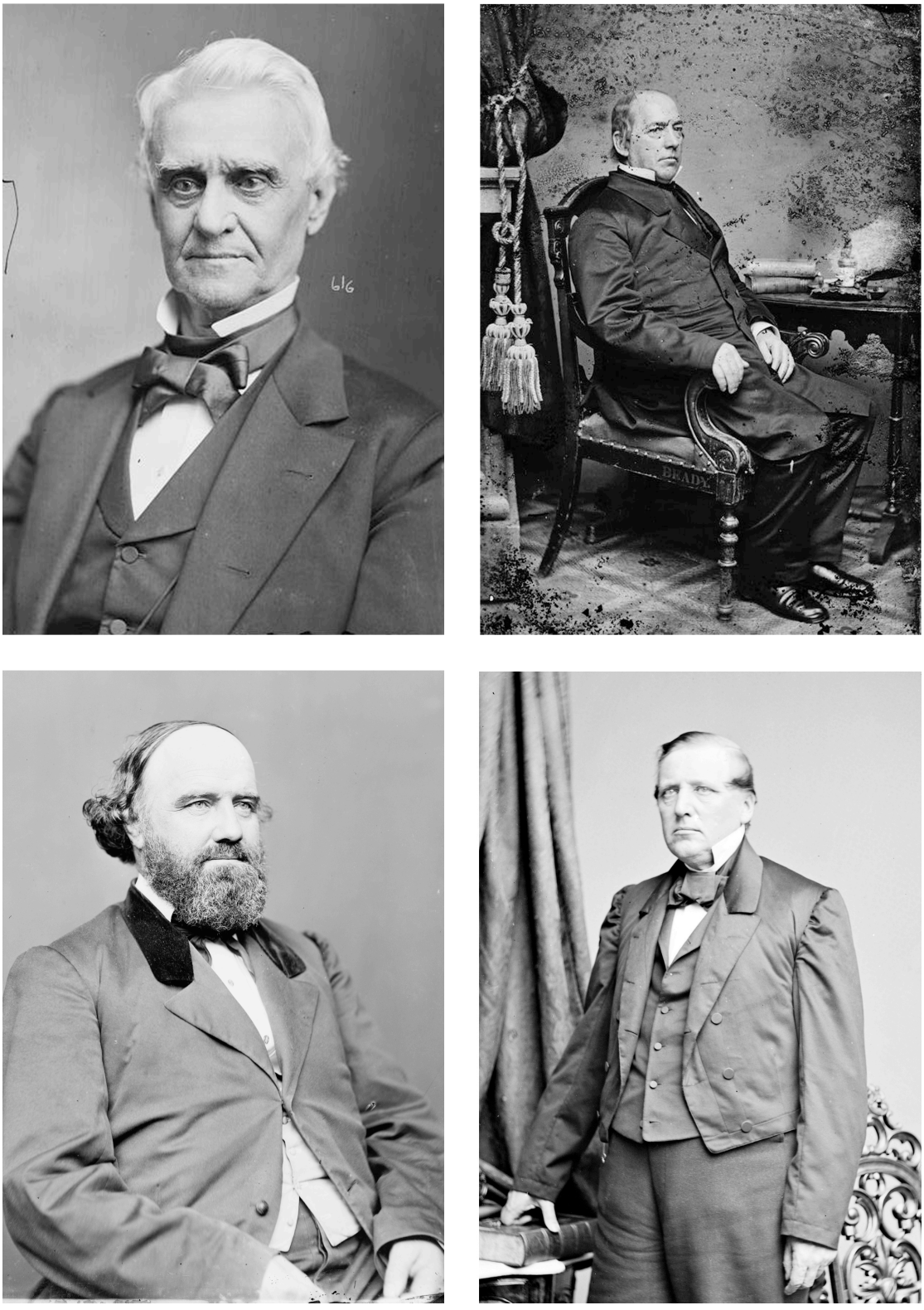
Other than by inference from the various drafts of the contract, there are not many details about what seem to have been a thorough set of negotiations. Years later, Ambrose Thompson claimed that the president had drawn up the final arrangement himself, and that he had earlier grilled the concessionaire as to the duration of the journey and how emigrants could subsist until they raised their first crops. What is most striking is an issue that was apparently *not* that compelling for Lincoln, even if the conditional nature of the contract did provide some protection on this count: the poor quality of Chiriquí coal. Whilst most historians do not rank the issue that highly, some argue that it was a major consideration in the suspension of the expedition. Such assertions stem from one letter in the Lincoln papers, a 5 September missive from Joseph Henry, secretary of the Smithsonian. Finding Chiriquí coal to be a near-worthless tertiary era deposit, Henry's report added that it had slacked down to dirt whilst in transit to the laboratory, and warned that it might spontaneously catch fire once taken aboard ship. Yet one must note not only the lapse of a week before the administration went ahead and signed the contract anyway, but that of a whole month before it put the venture on hold. Despite the scheme's genesis as a naval coal contract, there is little evidence that Lincoln privately set much store by that aspect of it. The closest that he had come in public was his avowed emphasis on coal in his address to the black

[29] Page, 319-20, n. 60-4.

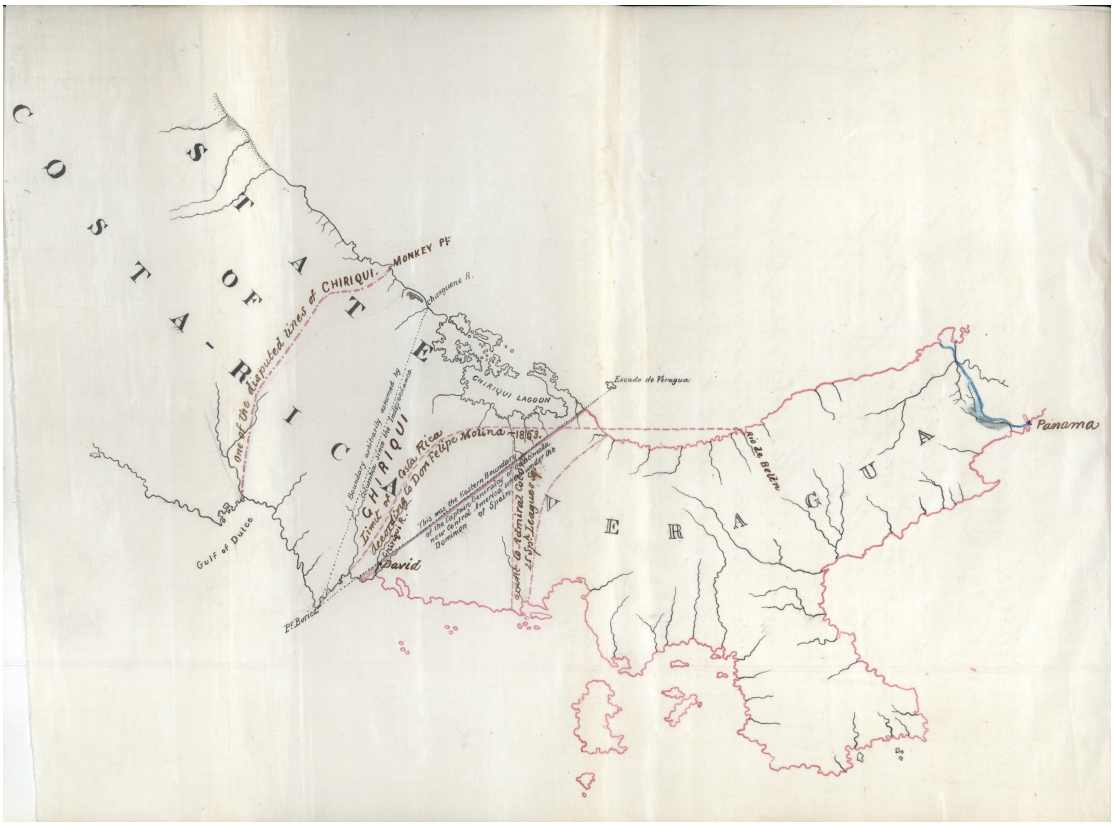
delegation, but even then, he seemed to view it more as a conveniently immediate source of employment and not necessarily as the long-term basis of the settlement's success, as Thompson's brief note also suggested. The speed with which Chiriquí had become more of a colonization arrangement over the previous year hints at Lincoln's real priorities.[30]

The president was about to find that Central America did not share his enthusiasm, however. More importantly, Lincoln would come to appreciate that in his haste, he risked stumbling on the as yet unresolved issue of who could speak for Colombia.

[30] Scheips, 'Lincoln and the Chiriqui Colonization Project', 433, 451; 'c. Ag 21 1875', CIC files, AWT; P.A. Shulman, 'Empire of Energy: Environment, Geopolitics, and American Technology Before the Age of Oil' (MIT, Ph.D., 2007), 65; unknown to J. Henry, 5 Sept., in Henry to F.W. Seward, 5 Sept. 1862, AL. It even appears that the administration chose to overlook warnings about the quality of the coal dating from several months earlier, presumably demoting the issue's importance even more. (Page, 320 n. 67.)



Supporters of the Chiriquí project. Clockwise from top left*: Richard W. Thompson (shown later in life), Caleb B. Smith, John P. Usher, Samuel C. Pomeroy. (Prints and Photographs Division, LC.)*



In his only major input into the Chiriquí project other than assembling the black delegation, James Mitchell filed a report in mid-October on the boundary dispute. His map refers to the old Spanish imperial province of Veragua, by then part of Colombia. Mitchell had been in contact with Luis Molina, whose brother had published a book laying out the Costa Rican case a decade earlier. Mitchell argued that it 'would not be just to our people of color' to send them to contested lands. In fact, he had investigated the holdings of the Baltimore-based Chiriqui Real Estate Company, whose representative had almost certainly met Lincoln on 20 August. Though an apparently sympathetic venture that hoped to profit from holding lands adjacent to those of the Chiriqui Improvement Company, it was technically distinct from the latter, as an anonymous annotation on Mitchell's report seems to protest.

(M.T. Gosnell's commission, 27 Aug., Mitchell to Smith, 14 Oct. 1862, RWT-RBH; Gosnell to Lincoln, to Mitchell, 16 Aug. 1862, AL; FRUS*, 901.)*

Map reprinted by kind permission of the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio.

Diplomatic concerns come to the fore: mid-September to the end of the year

Whilst scholars almost universally explain the early October suspension of the Chiriquí expedition in terms of the outcry that emanated from the isthmus, they do not answer the troublesome question: why did it not happen sooner? Viewed from a different angle, the official sources point just as much to the administration's persistence with the scheme until the diplomatic pressure became unbearable, as to a quick surrender at the first signs of trouble. What *is* unclear is how Lincoln envisaged the United States getting past such objections or cooling Central American passions. Yet we may be asking for too much to imagine that he had a definite answer, or even that he was not flailing a little as he thought of the draft proclamation of emancipation, which made reference to colonization, that he had sitting in a desk drawer, ready for imminent deployment.

Whatever the case, a second look at the timeline lends itself to some fairly striking observations. Though Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, and Honduran protest readily earned Seward's guarantee that the US would not contemplate colonization in those locations, he acted evasively towards the one country whose concerns really mattered: Costa Rica, Colombia's neighbour and border disputant. By 19 September its minister, Luis Molina, could already cite meetings earlier that summer with Seward and his son, the assistant secretary of state, in which he had spelled out his country's concerns in full; a promised meeting with Lincoln that had never materialized; repeated, empty suggestions on the part of the State Department that nothing would be done without consulting him; and now, the publicity that Pomeroy had recently disseminated calling for 500 settlers, which belied a verbal assurance that his expedition was to be merely exploratory. Invoking Monroe's declaration of '1822', Molina laid down his most solemn protest.[31]

[31] *FRUS*, 883-6, 892, 898-902.

Eric Foner has dated the Chiriquí voyage's suspension to Seward's reply of five days later, rather than to Usher's notice to Pomeroy of 7 October that the expedition would be formally suspended the next day. Yet the former was a circumlocutory communication, one thoroughly pervaded with ambiguity. Molina had described Chiriquí as a land divided into a clearly Costa Rican area and a contested portion, but when Seward summarized the minister's representations as he claimed to understand them, he twisted Molina's description of the province to add a third, indisputably Colombian part. In light of this, and the nineteenth century's erratic use of commas, there may well have been a double meaning to Seward's promise not to settle 'even any part of Chiriqui, which is included within the region … in dispute.' Certainly, logic would dictate that it should have been redundant for a conciliatory Seward to add that Thompson had represented Chiriquí as falling partly within the boundaries of Colombia, and that Pomeroy would not land without seeking the latter government's permission. Four days later, an incredulous Molina reported that Pomeroy had held a recruitment drive on 27 September at a meeting of African Americans on the outskirts of Washington. Constrained by the formulations of polite diplomacy, he had to suppose that the senator simply had not heard the news. This would be the last note passed between Seward and Molina prior to the suspension order, but it still does much to cast doubt on the idea of the administration's deference to Costa Rica's claims. In any case, efforts to obtain a ship for the venture continued all the way down to 7 October, and were in fact at their height when Lincoln put a hold on the expedition.[32]

Mutually exclusive explanations are rarely satisfying in history, and it would be foolish to suggest that Costa Rican protest and the general isthmian panic was not a key part of why the administration put its preparations on ice. Yet Smith's instructions to Pomeroy, issued the day that he finalized the contract, were in some ways up to date on that count. They listed those countries that had protested as forbidden points of

[32] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 233; *SED 55*, 20-1; *FRUS*, 903-05; L.C. Challis to Usher, 4 Oct., 8 Oct., Pomeroy to Usher, 7 Oct. 1862, JPU.

disembarkation for the roving expedition that the senator was to attempt if Colombia refused him landing. The very idea of such an expedition, which merged what probably ought to have been separate phases of exploration and subsequently of settlement, appears ill thought-out. It smacks of either desperation or inadequate supervision of an overly eager Smith. Yet the secretary could claim recent consultation with the president, which would seem to point to the former explanation. Consideration of where Pomeroy could not land also betrayed the fact of Smith and Lincoln's consultation with Seward. In turn, this reflected a burgeoning realization on the part of the administration that the Chiriquí colony was going to be an international matter as well as a domestic one. Diplomatic imperatives are also in evidence in another of Smith's enjoinders to Pomeroy, though historians have not picked up on it: to proceed to Chiriquí with the permission of both the *de jure* and *de facto* regimes of Colombia. This interpretive oversight is easily explained in terms of looking backwards from the ostensible, public reasons for the CIC's troubles by early October. But the Thompsons' private papers suggest that the main obstacle was always the question of who, if anyone, could convincingly grant permission on behalf of Colombia.[33]

For all that such developments clamoured for the services of the State Department, Lincoln may well have regarded Seward with caution because of his well-attested opposition to colonization. Despite his conservative views and a longstanding interest in compensated emancipation, the secretary of state was no colonizationist. '"I am always for bringing men and States *into* the Union"', he explained, '"never for taking any *out*."' Though Seward was loyal enough to play the president's stalling game *vis-à-vis* Molina, the policy was a serious point of difference between the two. Yet whatever

[33] In fact, the US minister to Nicaragua had gone so far as to send a special messenger to Washington to warn against the projected colonization. The agent expected to set off with reassuring despatches for the Central American governments by 21 October, which may have placed even more of an effective deadline on the administration to back down. (W. McLain to J. Hall, 10 Oct., McLain to J.B. Pinney, 11 Oct. 1862, ACS 204; *SED 55*, 16-17.) For Seward and the administration's awareness from early September that the expedition was diplomatically touch-and-go, see J.J. Barnes and P.P. Barnes, *The American Civil War Through British Eyes* (3 vols., Kent, Ohio, 2003-05), ii, 169, 175, 212-13.

Lincoln's private assessment of his secretary's reliability, the diplomatic dimensions of the Chiriquí project were beginning to appear as writing on the wall. What might put colonization on a firmer foundation were treaties for black emigration, so as to provide protection against the kind of political instability from which Colombia was suffering. A further potential diplomatic advantage arising from treaties – namely, tying other countries to support of the Union – likely occurred to Lincoln around this time, when the British legation started to ask about the possibility of obtaining black labour. On 22 September, the president publicly announced the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, which promised, among other things, that he would again address Congress, when it reassembled, on the merits of compensated emancipation, and also 'that the effort to colonize persons of African descent, with their consent, upon this continent, or elsewhere, with the previously obtained consent of the Governments existing there, will be continued'; unsurprisingly, it was at Seward's behest that he inserted the foreign consent proviso. Lincoln also asked the cabinet for its opinion on entering into treaties for African American emigration, a debate that continued at two further meetings over that week. Quite apart from the self-evident wisdom of taking broad advice, he may have hoped to sound out new sources of internal support.[34]

What the president heard from each head of department was actually rather predictable. An opponent of colonization like Chase thought it better to have no treaties, though Congress might legislate for simple arrangements to secure settlers in the rights that other states offered them. Seward, though no friend of colonization either, did deem formal agreements desirable. Perhaps he knew that any difficulties arising from their absence would rebound on his State Department, or merely discerned a way of checking colonization's progress. Attorney General Bates was a longstanding colonizationist and now even stumped for deportation, but '[t]he President objected unequivocally to compulsion. Their emigration must be voluntary and without expense to themselves.'

[34] Bancroft, *The Life of William H. Seward* (2 vols., New York, 1900), ii, 346; Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 16-17; *CW*, v, 434.

Bates presented a paper favourable to treaties, calling for narrowly framed agreements with as many states as possible, so as to engender friendly intercourse with Washington, and for the insertion of a clause against abrogation in the event of future wars. He could not, however, think of any other countries that banned black immigration, and felt that settlers should go as private emigrants and not American colonists. Welles, a racial conservative uncomfortable with emancipation outside of military necessity and scathing of the corruption that seemed to inhere in colonization, saw no need for treaties for the same reason as Bates. Blair was strongly for colonization, 'but yet seems to have matured no system which he can recommend', according to Welles. Unsurprisingly, the Chiriquí enthusiast Smith strongly opposed making treaties, reckoning that the Senate would never ratify one conferring the sorts of powers under consideration. He opined that the government should just go ahead and execute the contract.[35]

Yet the man whose opinion counted above all, Lincoln, was still in favour of them. At his behest, Seward sent a circular on 30 September to the US missions to Britain, the Netherlands, France, and Denmark, laying down minimum expectations respecting the treatment of black settlers, should those governments want to make an emigration treaty for the benefit of their tropical American colonies. Lincoln would continue to press for an official arrangement with Britain well into 1863, falling back on informal methods when it became clear that London would not make one. The US minister to the Netherlands actually signed one by the end of that year, though the administration then chose not to submit it to the Senate as its active pursuit of colonization wound down. Historians' unawareness of the imperial schemes has

[35] Beale (ed.), *The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866* (Washington, 1933), 262-4; Donald, *Inside Lincoln's Cabinet*, 156-7, 160; Beale, *Diary of Welles*, i, 152-3. Although some accounts based on Welles's diary describe Blair as supporting coercion in this instance, the navy secretary seemingly made a distinction between Blair's support for 'deportation' and that of Bates for 'compulsory deportation'; as with Lincoln's references to 'deportation' in the *Collected Works*, the word does not seem to have strictly implied compulsion in the same way that it would for the modern reader.

hitherto made the cabinet's discussion of treaties look like an isolated episode that went nowhere. Yet they actually became an important element of colonization policymaking, even if not – as the Île à Vache venture would show – its *sine qua non*. Lincoln saw no further need to discuss the subject with the cabinet after late September, however. It looks as though colonization came up for the last time on 7 October, when there was an apparent disinclination to press the Chiriquí business against the wishes of Central America. Such appearances were deceptive, for Lincoln was to carry on with the scheme, albeit on something closer to a need-to-know basis for the time being.[36]

If the president was looking for a way out of the Colombian problem during the later part of September and early October, Ambrose Thompson and the CIC were doing their best to help him. Though they could hardly address such questions of foreign policy as entering into international negotiations, they still did all they could to secure permission from both sets of Colombia's representatives. Such an achievement was far from a foregone conclusion, however, given the important racial and political concerns that the rival diplomats had to consider. Accordingly, Thompson managed to clear it with one side before Lincoln suspended the expedition, but not the other.

It was always going to be easier for the Chiriquí venture to receive the approval of the representatives of the unacknowledged new regime, Manuel Murillo and CIC agent Francisco Párraga. 'Our cause is your cause', the latter told Thompson, hoping that his patron's enviable access to the administration would secure the interview that Seward would conventionally be obliged to deny to an unaccredited mission. Co-operation did not necessarily mean rubberstamping the colonization scheme, however, and Párraga was shocked at the content of Pomeroy's late August address to would-be pioneers, not to say mystified that the administration could think that Colombia would ever accept this development. 'We have no hatred or prejudice against the negro race already existing amongst us', he explained to the senator, 'but an increase of African

[36] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 18, 30, 76-7; Beale, *Diary of Welles*, i, 162.

population by immigration is not permitted in the country.' An unchecked influx would irrevocably tip the racial balance of the sparsely populated isthmus towards blacks, and would go down especially poorly in Chiriquí, which was about the whitest part of the country. In that sense, Lincoln's goal of finding a better home for a group that faced widespread prejudice in the US was doomed, as settlers would encounter worse prejudice than they had ever known. There was a recent history to this resentment, Párraga added, which was that Colombians blamed the Jamaican workers who had stayed in the country after completing the Panama Railroad for stoking the tensions that had flared up in the 'Watermelon War' of 1856. This was a riot that had left many American travellers dead and an adjustment of compensation to the US still outstanding in 1862. All too familiar with the 'torrents of abuse' poured on him for those events, Párraga would 'always bear in mind that it was caused by the importation of persons of African descent.' That said, he felt that Colombia would accept a few emigrants under strictly white control.[37]

Thompson rushed to distance himself from Pomeroy's words, having not met the senator at that point, and told Párraga that, although he had been distracted of late by his son's near-fatal bout of typhus, he was satisfied that federal colonization plans were still 'crude'. His proposal to the president would only involve settling as many African Americans as he could provide jobs for, and they would be forced to defend Colombia with military service and swear fealty to its laws. Párraga's response was thoroughly in the Schoonover mould: dropping his objections, and much of his racialized language with them, he simply asked that the contract oblige Thompson to remove settlers for bad behaviour. Arriving too late for addition to the original agreement with the US government, the request became the subject of an additional article signed a few days later. Párraga stated his approval more firmly later in the month, and even suggested that, whilst he could not officially speak for Bogotá without further instructions,

[37] Page, 321 n. 85-6.

Thompson could also land 50,000 settlers on the shores of the Magdalena River. As he explained, the key issue was the basis on which emigrants came:

> The principle "where a Roman is, there is Rome" which Europe has pretended to make prevail in its intercourse with the growing states of Spanish America … has been very expensive and therefore it is intended to establish another principle in the intercourse with the nations of this continent, to wit, that the individual … must go as an individual without privilege or exemption equal in right and equal in obligations.[38]

A delay in this letter's translation meant that Thompson only had it ready to show the president after the Chiriquí expedition's suspension, and he wasted no time in transmitting its contents to the administration. Párraga's superior, Manuel Murillo, also wrote to the Colombian government in early October to state his support. The minister expressed his confidence that either whites would retain the upper hand, or the consequent racial mixing would lessen the prejudice of colour anyway.[39]

Bizarrely, the expedition had not looked quite so alive in some time as immediately after its postponement. For the representatives of the old regime, the state of 'New Granada', then also gave their approval to black colonization in at least some form, even if they were not on board with Thompson's claims. In fact, the manager of the CIC had already tried his luck with a 24 September feeler to Herrán, having heard from Lincoln himself that the minister had spoken well in his presence of emigration to certain parts of Colombia. But the president felt it inappropriate to venture his opinion to Thompson, or indeed to anyone save the New Granadan minister, as to whether the projected influx of African Americans would breach any current treaty obligations between that country and the United States. Yet as it turned out, the answer was forthcoming without further prodding. On 12 October, Herrán's colleague, J. Marcelino

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[38] A.W. Thompson to Párraga, 30 Aug., Párraga to A.W. Thompson, 12 Sept. 1862, RWT-RBH; *SED 55*, 14-15; Párraga to A.W. Thompson, 26 Sept. 1862, CIC files, AWT; 'Negro Colonization', *New York Times*, 1 Oct. 1862. A draft in the Interior Department's manuscript records shows the obligation to remove unruly settlers initially placed on the US government, subsequently modified to Thompson instead. (Annotation and Lincoln's signature thereto, 15 Sept. 1862, Pomeroy communications, STNC.)

[39] A.W. Thompson to Párraga, 9 Oct., Párraga to A.W. Thompson, 11 Oct. 1862, RWT-RBH; Randall, *Colombia and the United States*, 53.

Hurtado, called on Usher at the Interior Department to say that he was sorry to see that the scheme had been abandoned. As *intendente* of Panamá, of which Chiriquí was a part, he offered the opinion that there would be no difficulty in obtaining the assent of his government, and stated that he could officially speak for the same. He linked this offer to American recognition of his party, 'or something to that effect', and left the impression that he would make an unconditional grant in return for a small consideration. Whilst personally dismissive of Thompson's title, Hurtado suggested founding a colony on the south (Pacific) coast, near the Darién River. This would place it further away from the combative Costa Ricans, who notoriously considered themselves whiter than their neighbours; in any case, he claimed to have had a constructive conversation with Molina about the border dispute.[40]

The next day, Usher saw Seward, who conceded that the assent of both sides removed the obstacle to emigration, and said that he would write a paper accordingly, then send it to his colleague. The secretary of state had expressed doubts the previous winter as to the validity of Thompson's right to establish the contemplated coalmines, and had added that he would be far happier dealing with New Granada directly. Now that Chiriquí came his way again as a colonization project, he warned that he would not be able to advise the outlay of government money for a scheme based on poor title, especially when other countries were offering to take black settlers for free. Seward was 'incredulous about the coal', and doubted that there was any in Chiriquí of commercial value. He also rebuffed Hurtado's pathetic attempt to tie the fate of the scheme to that of the old regime.[41]

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[40] A.W. Thompson to Herrán, 24 Sept. 1862, RWT-RBH; Usher to R.W. Thompson, 12 Oct. 1862, JPU. Glimmers of the Chiriquí project's survival reached the press: 'Senator Pomeroy's negro colonization scheme is temporarily suspended…', *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 13 Oct. 1862; 'Colonization in New Granada', *New York Times*, 23 Oct. 1862. An intending emigrant of mid-October spoke to the ACS, and expected to set off in two weeks' time. (R.R. Gurley to W. Coppinger, 16 Oct. 1862, ACS 235.)

[41] Usher to R.W. Thompson, 26 Dec. 1861, RWT-ACPL; Usher to Pomeroy, 13 Oct. 1862, JPU.

At this point, the business started to encounter further delay, though the holdup was swathed in yet more uncertainty and mystery for Thompson and Pomeroy. At first, it did not seem serious, though as the matter dragged itself out, it would become apparent that Lincoln had decided to pause and take stock of his colonization policy. A spy of sorts in the Interior Department, a clerk who was also part of the CIC, was still optimistic on 14 October that Thompson had a strong case and would soon shove aside a foot-dragging Seward. Yet over the next two weeks, Pomeroy expressed his frustration to a couple of fellow senators that the secretary of state was succeeding admirably in stalling things. Having fulfilled Smith's instructions to get the respective permissions of the two warring regimes, the senator was distressed to find Seward claiming that the representatives of a government were not the same thing as the government itself. The secretary of state insisted that 'nothing short of a Treaty will be satisfactory', even though – as Pomeroy lamented – this would take until the next spring and draw in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by the anti-colonization Sumner. Pomeroy was bemused, since the planned emigration broke no law of New Granada. Moreover, the Bidlack-Mallarino Treaty (1846) explicitly guaranteed all settlers coming from the US full citizenship, rendering a further agreement superfluous. Claiming to have received over 13,000 applications to join the initial party of 500, Pomeroy related that the expedition was 'waiting to go – anxious to go', but that Seward had 'some other way of doing it on a larger scale but in a way not sure of success', and that Lincoln had 'acquiesced' in his move to hold off. Caleb Smith tried to apply pressure on Pomeroy's behalf, submitting a Thompson-penned brief to Seward reiterating that both of the regimes purporting to represent Colombia had given their permission. He received the cryptic and curt reply that the secretary of state could not consider it, as it was not accompanied by proof of compliance with the relevant legislation.[42]

[42] Dyer to 'Thompson', 14 Oct., Seward to Smith, 30 Oct. 1862, RWT-RBH; Pomeroy to Browning, 27 Oct., Smith to Seward, 29 Oct., brief, 30 Oct. 1862, Chiriqui Improvement Company Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Pomeroy gave a similar account to James R. Doolittle in

It is well worth pondering Seward's working relationship with Lincoln when it came to colonization. Going by such sources, and by the standard account of a Chiriquí project cancelled in early October, the secretary seems to have held significant influence over his boss. But this may be a misleading impression. Since the public documents have always pointed to the diplomatic spanner thrown into the Chiriquí scheme's works, and because Seward so often acted as middleman between Lincoln and figures such as Pomeroy, and thus as something of an official mouthpiece, the historiography has run the concomitant risk of overemphasizing his role in the affair. Whilst it would make perfect sense for the president to have deferred to his secretary's desire to maintain good relations with Central America, this argument may be more logical than it is accurate, owing to the simple fact that Lincoln persisted with the Chiriquí business. Actually, Seward was the president's mirror image in this respect, in that he too refused to let diplomatic considerations override his feelings on colonization. At such a crucial time, with Britain and France seemingly on the cusp of recognizing the Confederacy, the secretary 'ought' to have enthusiastically tendered black emigration treaties to win their support. Yet he could scarcely disparage colonization's prospects enough over the course of several conversations with British diplomats. In the end, the simplest assumption may be the soundest: that Seward and Lincoln's differences over colonization played out in their diplomatic motivations, though not necessarily – and such was the case at this point – in those motives' outward manifestation.[43]

Moreover, the balance of power between the president and one of his appointees was also exactly what one would expect. That Lincoln was inclined to put his foot down became even clearer the next year, as he accorded an unhappy Seward an enhanced role in the drafting of the Île à Vache and imperial projects. Though the secretary could, and did, try to frustrate colonization with a mixture of go-slows, insinuations to applicants

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Mowry, 'Negro Colonization, from Doolittle Correspondence', 401-02. Browning had encountered Pomeroy in Quincy, Ill., on 11 Oct. 1862; the latter was on his way back to New York to continue arranging the expedition, just days after its ostensible postponement. (Pease, i, 577.)

[43] Barnes, ii, 169, 175, 189, 212-13, 278-81.

that rival colonization schemes were offering better terms, and even earnest attempts to sway Lincoln, he never disobeyed his superior. Nor was the president especially sensitive to his qualms about colonization, at least not in late 1862. In fact, the secretary's recurrent doubts had provided the occasion for a bit of mockery in front of the cabinet at the meeting of 22 September, in the form of one of Lincoln's characteristic 'little stories':

> Mr. Seward proposed the change as stated in the text, and allowed some little time to elapse before proposing that relating to colonization. The President hereupon asked Mr Seward why he had not proposed both changes at once? Mr. Seward made some not very satisfactory answer. Mr. Lincoln then said that Seward "reminded" him of a hired man out West who came to his employer on a certain afternoon, and told him (the employer) that one of a favorite yoke of oxen had fallen down dead. After a pause, the hired man added, "And the other ox is that team is dead too." "Why didn't you tell me at once that both the oxen were dead?" "Because," answered the hired man, "I didn't want to hurt you by telling you too much at one time!"

All in all, it would appear that although Seward and Lincoln were acting in harmony by mid-late October on the Chiriquí project, this likely represented something closer to a dovetailing of their views for the time being, rather than their perfect alignment. It may also reflect a state of flux behind the scenes, for which Seward's recent objections were the only fathomable explanation to the Chiriquí lobbyists, who were temporarily out of the loop.[44]

Indeed, it seems that the venture was truly in a state of limbo at this point, one in which Lincoln was as stuck for ideas as anyone else. The human cost of suspension hit him on 1 November, when a group of the District's would-be emigrants gathered outside the White House, having disposed of their homes and furniture only to find themselves facing a North American winter. Pomeroy had previously told them that it was all in Lincoln's hands, but the president tried to brush them off via one of his private secretaries with remarks that he could only meet them in a few days. He added that it was actually Pomeroy who needed to make the next move, at which point the petitioners

[44] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 15-16, 23, 41, 52, 78-81; J.W. Schuckers, *Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase* (New York, 1874), 454-5 n.

were sorely tempted to call him out by fetching Pomeroy and having the senator demand the order to set off. One of the president's own friends found him quite inscrutable as to what might happen next, whilst Thompson's man on the inside reckoned that Lincoln did not '[know] himself but like Micawber is waiting for something to "turn up".' He would never honour his promise of a meeting with the pioneers, whose fate remains unclear.[45]

Yet colonization policy *was* going somewhere, and the president brought Pomeroy up to speed a little over a week later. Clearly laying out for the first time developments that had been long in the making, Lincoln confirmed that he was set on treaties, and better legal and financial provision for colonization. The senator reported from their conversation that nothing was likely to happen until Congress met, and that it was to be one of Lincoln's 'pet themes' that Capitol Hill should discuss colonization once more, airing all the arguments for and against, and decide the matter 'beyond peradventure that it shall be a success before he starts.' Developing his point, the president said that a hypothetical black colony might have been planted, and be working 'harmoniously', then suddenly be deemed 'obnoxious' if a government opposed to the introduction of further settlers came to power. The Colombian situation was undoubtedly at the front of his mind, where the only regime that the administration would deal with existed more on paper than in reality. Furthermore, neither set of

[45] 'Washington. Nov. 2', *Liberator*, 7 Nov. 1862; Dyer to A.W. Thompson, 1 Nov. 1862, AWT. Painfully little survives of the identities of the pioneers. Since Pomeroy had issued his appeal to northern free blacks, it is safe to say that they went beyond those whom Congress had envisaged in its colonization appropriations, which covered slaves recently freed in the District and those defined in the Second Confiscation Act. The fact that a measly collection of Pomeroy papers does exist at Yale perhaps slightly lowers the chances that his Chiriquí files are still out there. Frederick Douglass mournfully reported one and possibly two of his sons amongst the emigrants' numbers, whilst Dyer reported that a Mr Syphax brought in 'one of the five' to try to present their petition to Lincoln. Masur's research would suggest that the former was William Syphax, an African American who worked in the Interior Department from the 1850s. If Dyer was referring to the original delegation, as seems probable, that 'one of the five' would likely have been Edward Thomas, its apostate member. Incriminatingly, Dyer also took rumours of Usher's imminent promotion, and the possibility of his own ascent to chief clerk in the concomitant internal reshuffle**,** as indicative of the Chiriquí scheme's near-certain success. ('Fred. Douglass' Views of Colonization', Philadelphia *Press*, 5 Sept. 1862; Masur, 'The African American Delegation', 132, 137.)

representatives – whose judgment might be clouded by the heady prospect of acquiring or retaining US recognition – could reliably speak for the feelings of their countrymen, who had presumably joined in a pan-isthmian outcry at Lincoln's plans. The president wanted the sort of emergency powers needed to thwart any such reversal in immigration policy that only a treaty could reliably confer, and 'he wants one made and ratified before starting', noted Pomeroy. Indeed, the senator was so impressed by the force of the president's convictions that he dismissed any suggestion of trying to persuade Lincoln otherwise before Congress met. Lincoln showed Pomeroy the part of his forthcoming annual message related to colonization, and made it clear that it would 'be a main feature in the programme of his future policy.' Though a little jittery as to whether the expedition would indeed go ahead, Pomeroy felt upbeat again by late November, and had a conversation with the president that left him confident that he would know in a few days what was going to happen. The senator then spoke glowingly of Chiriquí at a dinner given in Washington for some 'contrabands', only for an escaped Virginian slave to silence him by condemning the project as a trap for an even worse form of slavery.[46]

As anticipated, the president publicly set the bar higher for colonization in his 1 December message to Congress. Lincoln's vision drew, above all, on several months' contemplation of the pitfalls of the Chiriquí project, though he also brought up the embryonic alternative of the European empires. Claiming that all sorts of parties, at home and abroad, had urged various emigration schemes on him, Lincoln reported that several Central American republics had protested. 'Under these circumstances', he explained, 'I have declined to move any such colony to any state, without first obtaining

[46] Dyer to A.W. Thompson, 11 Nov. 1862, AWT; Dyer to A.W. Thompson, 26 Nov. 1862, RWT-RBH; Shulman, 'Empire of Energy', 120. Foner also cites a late November letter to Chase in which Lincoln expressed hopes of carrying on with the scheme. This is actually a misattribution of a communication of late 1861, referring to what was still just a coal contract in the eyes of those cabinet members not let in on the Thompson-Blair negotiations. As it turns out, however, the president *did* still want to proceed with the business at this point. (Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 234; *CW*, Supplement, 112.) For confirmation that not all Colombians shared Párraga's broadmindedness, see A.A. Burton to Seward, no. 70, 20 Dec. 1862, Despatches from United States Ministers to Colombia, NARA.

the consent of its government, with an agreement on its part to receive and protect such emigrants in all the rights of freemen'. Though a superficial reading might discern Lincoln's appeasement of isthmian opposition, even a move away from all notions of colonization in Central America, all that he had done was to hint at the need to secure meaningful consent from Colombia. He did not offer any consideration of the potential objections of its neighbours, such as Costa Rica. The president also confirmed that the circular sent to the European governments on 30 September was to be considered the model colonization treaty for any state in the American tropics. To the amazement of both contemporaries and historians, Lincoln then spent much of the message promoting three suggested amendments to the Constitution to end slavery peacefully, gradually, and with compensation, and to enable Congress to provide for the 'voluntary emigration' of African Americans. Yet he also tackled head-on the kind of lurid racial fears that sustained the lowest common denominator of colonizationist sentiment, namely, the suggestion that African Americans would 'swarm' all over the country and compete for white jobs, whilst nevertheless reaffirming that the freemen would ultimately depart for more 'congenial climes', and even seeming to hint that the northern states could pass black exclusion laws to check such an influx if they deemed it necessary. Some historians have accordingly read a coded rejection of colonization into what appears to be a thoroughly mixed message, but as Phillip Paludan argued, we should just take it at face value: the president was merely saying that some former slaves would opt for colonization, a policy in which his administration had not lost its interest, but those who did not would pose no significant threat to white society. Indeed, Lincoln asked his audience to appreciate that there was actually very little that was contentious about his suggestions. 'This ought not to be regarded as objectionable', he said of the colonization amendment, 'in so much as it comes to nothing, unless by the

mutual consent of the people to be deported, and the American voters, through their representatives in Congress.'[47]

Legislators' responses ran the narrow gamut of bewilderment to downright hostility. 'I could see the cloud of opposition overshadowing the face of every one – there was the light of battle nowhere – but the depression of gloom and defeat', reported the president's *bête noire*, Rep. Henry Winter Davis (R-Md.). A Massachusetts representative, Henry Dawes, remarked to his wife '[h]ow it makes one's heart bleed for his country to here [sic] its chief magistrate proposing measures to be accomplished in 1900 as a remedy for evils and perils which have thrust us into the very jaws of death … I had rather then see the Republic die in convulsion than faint away.' 'Lincoln himself seems to have no *nerve* or decision in dealing with great issues,' confided an Ohioan congressman to his diary; '[h]e has urged in his message a most impracticable scheme of compensated emancipation nobody likes – nobody will give it cordial support & yet he has loaded his friends down with its odium while probably nothing will be done with it.' Indeed, even Browning, who had always been sympathetic to the conservative principles that Lincoln had expressed, had to dismiss the 'hallucination' involved in trying to write such provisions into the Constitution with haste. Although the New Year would see colonization come up in unsuccessful bills for compensated emancipation in Missouri and Maryland, the message's reception peaked at somewhere below dire. The only immediate response came from a lame duck radical who was determined to see out his term in style by suggesting the establishment of a steamer line to Liberia alongside the raising of a hundred or more black regiments.[48]

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[47] *CW*, v, 520, 534-6; P.S. Paludan, 'Lincoln and Colonization: Policy or Propaganda?', *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 25 (Winter 2004), 29-30. It is not inconceivable that a treaty was also supposed to undermine the idea that a black colony was not welcome anywhere in the region, and to redirect Central American anger from the US to a putative partner like Colombia.

[48] H.W. Davis to Du Pont, 2 Jan. 1863, Samuel F. Du Pont Papers, LC.; H.L. Dawes to E. Dawes, 2 Dec. 1862, Henry L. Dawes Papers, LC; A.G. Bogue, 'William Parker Cutler's Congressional Diary of 1862-63', *Civil War History*, 33 (Dec. 1987), 320; Pease, i, 591; 'Hickman and Negro Regiments', San Francisco *Evening Bulletin*, 10 Jan. 1863.

Met with a deafening silence, Lincoln displayed his adaptiveness. He apparently decided to go it alone once more, as the colonization legislation had always allowed him to do. In fact, he would later confess to the former governor of Maryland that he considered Montgomery Blair his only friend when it came to the suggestions contained in the message. Lincoln swung back towards dealing with private interests on his own initiative, quietly signing a contract with the speculator Bernard Kock for the ill-fated Île à Vache venture on New Year's Eve 1862, just a few hours before his Emancipation Proclamation was due to go into effect.[49]

Whilst the rough period around New Year 1863, especially the month between Lincoln's second annual message and his issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, is conventionally supposed to represent a transformative one as to the place of colonization in his administration's policymaking, the evidentiary record attests neither to a deliberate winding-up of a crafty public relations message that had played its part, nor to a blossoming change in the president's personal convictions. Indeed, the anecdotes of those who encountered him and commented on the matter lean quite the other way, and thus reaffirm the occamist inference that in this case, a politician simply ceased to speak in public, at least for the time being, about a policy that still meant a great deal to him. When Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, 'he wished it distinctly understood that the deportation of the slaves was, in his mind, inseparably connected with the policy', remembered the radical Republican George Julian; '[s]ubsequent developments … proved that [the CIC] was simply an organization for land-stealing and plunder, and [the scheme] was abandoned; but it is by no means certain that if the President had foreseen this fact his preliminary notice to the rebels would have been given.' Strikingly, Gideon Welles, though apparently not privy to the imperial schemes, came away with a very similar impression: '[k]nowing his convictions and earnest solicitude on this branch of his policy, I have sometimes doubted whether

[49] T.H. Hicks to M. Blair, 9 Apr. 1863, Addition II, BF.

he would not have hesitated longer in issuing the decree of emancipation had he been aware that colonization would not be accepted as an accompaniment.' 'Mr. Lincoln, naturally of a conservative cast of mind, was much in earnest … when … he revived the old scheme of colonizing the emancipated negroes outside of the United States', recalled Carl Schurz; '[i]t is characteristic that he continued to adhere to the impracticable colonization plan even after the Emancipation Proclamation had already been issued.' In 1889, Pomeroy, who, despite his later corruption, had apparently been quite sincere in claiming that Lincoln's own commitment to colonization had made a pragmatic convert of him too, reminded a Washington audience that the policy was a 'feature of [Lincoln's] life that was not understood.' The ex-senator may have simplified a real conversation when he recalled Lincoln explaining that '"[w]hen the first ship is ready to sail I will issue an emancipation proclamation"', but it accords with the upshot of contemporary reports of Pomeroy's change of heart. More than quarter of a century later, Pomeroy remained adamant that the president 'had no idea that the negroes were to live among us as freedmen with equal rights.'[50]

Such general recollections of Lincoln's preoccupation with colonization around these pivotal few months are also borne out by more specific, even contemporaneous evidence. An Interior Department official who, at the end of November 1862, enjoyed a rather revealing conversation with the president about his overarching emancipation policy, noted that '[w]hat troubles him is to provide for the blacks – he still thinks that many of them will colonize, and that the South will be compelled to resort to the apprentice system.' Possibly developing ideas planted by Shufeldt's unauthorized negotiations over colonization in Mexico, and by some earlier conversations with the Blairs, a pensive Lincoln approached a Treasury official around the New Year, and asked him to arrange an interview with a contractor to discuss an internal colonization scheme

[50] A.T. Rice, *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1886), 61-2; Welles, 'Administration of Abraham Lincoln', *Galaxy*, 24 (1877), 444; C. Schurz, *Reminiscences* (3 vols., New York, 1907-08), ii, 324, 'Abraham Lincoln', *Atlantic Monthly*, 67 (1891), 734; 'New Stories of Lincoln', *Washington Post*, 14 Apr. 1889.

for Texas, although the president was actually somewhat doubtful and remained unconvinced even after his meeting with said businessman. Nevertheless, Lincoln's continued adherence to the general policy was real enough. Two of the White House secretaries, John Nicolay and William Stoddard, wrote articles for the press strongly suggesting that colonization remained a goal of the administration, one of them attributing delays in its implementation to the distraction of the Seward-Chase cabinet crisis. In January 1863 alone, Lincoln arranged for an African American pastor from the District to receive money in order to scout out a possible location in Liberia for his congregation, approached the British minister to discuss black resettlement, and further investigated, then suspended, the Île à Vache expedition.[51]

Indeed, it appears that amidst this ferment, even the Chiriquí project was also current, though events would soon seal its fate. Whilst we cannot know how Lincoln was thinking of getting past its diplomatic complications, he may not have had much time to ponder that question before the chronic problem of corruption reared its head again.

The last straw: graft reappears, January 1863

One of the easily forgotten aspects of wartime colonization policy is that none of the schemes on offer existed in isolation. Conventional accounts generally posit a sequence of Lincoln pursuing the Chiriquí business alone, followed by the project's collapse, and then a switch to Île à Vache shortly before he supposedly gave up on colonization altogether. In fact, the president had those two projects under consideration concurrently during late 1862 and early 1863, and as discussed, even the 'second wave'

[51] T.J. Barnett to Barlow, 30 Nov. 1862, Samuel L.M. Barlow Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.; F.P Blair to F.P. Blair, Jr., 22 Aug., and arguable allusion in letter to A. Blair, 24 Nov. 1862, BF 2; Chittenden, *Recollections*, 336-40; Burlingame (ed.), *Lincoln's Journalist* (Carbondale, 1998), 280, *With Lincoln in the White House* (Carbondale, 2000), 101, *Dispatches from Lincoln's White House* (Lincoln, Neb., 2002), 128; Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 26-7.

of imperial schemes should be understood more in reference to their longer life than to the date of their initiation. Personally, Lincoln was keen to experiment with several options and to see what worked best. Unsurprisingly, the advocates of rival schemes did not share his broadmindedness.

Thus it was with the Chiriquí and Île à Vache proposals. Shortly after making the contract for the latter, the president ordered Seward to withhold the seal of the United States after the secretary alerted him to the low reputation of Bernard Kock. The frustrated contractor wrote to Francis Blair, Sr., who had supported the new venture:

> I am now convinced, that Mr Usher, secy of the Interior, endeavors to defeat my colonization enterprise, even on my modified proposition to take only 1000 negroes, until government has obtained evidence of the faithfull execution of my part of the contract. In self-defence I shall probably be compelled to lay all the facts of the case before the country and show why Mr Usher opposes a contract and why he favors the Chiriqui scheme *now to be revived*.[52]

Blair sternly warned him to do no such thing: he had passed on this information so that Kock could tell Doolittle, who had helped with the original negotiations for the Île à Vache contract, which Lincoln now 'confounded'. If the senator saw fit, Blair hoped, he would drop this bombshell so that the president might consider it as 'evincing the motives of Mr Usher's intervention to defeat [Kock's] enterprise'. In short, Lincoln likely made an unpleasant, long overdue discovery at this point that fully explained the colonization preferences of his secretary of the interior.[53]

Of no small mystery is the Blairs' desire to sabotage the Chiriquí project, one in which they had invested a great deal of work little more than a year previously. Though its enviable geographic location chimed with all that they had ever said to link the

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[52] *CW*, vi, 41-2; B. Kock to F.P. Blair, 16 Jan. [no year], BF 11 (author's emphasis). Though in a file of undated correspondence, the content of Kock's letter makes it clear that it dates from early 1863. The absence of commas and the irregular syntax of the period might allow that Kock merely meant that Usher himself wanted the Chiriquí scheme revived, and not that the secretary was adding his voice in favour of a proposal that the administration was contemplating anew. Yet the fact that Blair, a recent colonization confidant of the president, saw fit to sabotage the Chiriquí plan with what he evidently deemed news to Lincoln suggests that in any case it was still strong enough to pose a real threat to the Île à Vache alternative.

[53] F.P. Blair to Kock, 18 Jan. 1863, BF 22.

creation of African American colonies to future US expansion, their deportationist inner urges had often gravitated towards the easier solution presented by the established black state of Haiti. Even at the very birth of the 'contraband' problem, Montgomery Blair had pressed Benjamin Butler to sound out escapees on their willingness to remove to Haiti, to say nothing of his contribution later that year to bringing about Haitian recognition. The Blairs had thrown themselves heart and soul into the Île à Vache project whilst, according to Welles, some of the unfolding complications surrounding the Chiriquí arrangement had 'startled' Montgomery Blair, and witnessed him cool in his enthusiasm for it. Forced to choose between the schemes during the crucial period around the Emancipation Proclamation, the Blairs opted for a bird in the hand rather two in the bush.[54]

In the absence of explicit evidence as to Lincoln's place in these dealings, one has to proceed by conjecture. Nevertheless, such speculation is not unreasonable, for we know that Chiriquí's prospects had still looked bright in late 1862, and that the administration's pursuit of colonization continued apace even as the expedition to Colombia did not. Though this latest revelation was probably decisive on its own, there was another factor militating against a rescue attempt. Whilst Lincoln had sounded out Welles, Chase, and Smith in the early days to see who was interested in the Chiriquí project, he had charged the Interior Department in perpetuity with executing the settlers' land conveyances envisaged in the final contract of September 1862. In any case, the scheme found no favour in any other office of the executive branch.[55]

It is frustratingly in the nature of documentary evidence to leave little closure where the historical actors' efforts yielded nothing or where a business simply fizzled out. Ambrose Thompson and his company continued to exert pressure, notably with a

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[54] J.A. Marshall, *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler* (5 vols., Norwood, Mass., 1917), i, 116-17, 130; Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 186; V.J. Laas, *Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee* (Urbana, Ill., 1991), 221, 223; Beale, *Diary of Welles*, i, 151; Welles, 'Administration of Abraham Lincoln', 441.
[55] *SED 55*, 15-16.

flurry of petitions in April 1863, and his son was asking as late as August if the president was about to send him to Chiriquí. Thompson remained on good terms with Usher, sending his children a Dalmatian puppy as a gift that autumn. He also seems to have kept up a correspondence with Henry Stebbins of the House Ways and Means Committee, which focussed on the naval side of Chiriquí once more. In June, Thompson tried to bribe Robert Dale Owen with a stake in the CIC. Owen headed the American Freedmen's Inquiry Committee, which was undertaking research into the future of African Americans in the United States. But it would soon report dismissively as to the prospects of colonization, citing its unpopularity amongst blacks. In fact, little came of any these approaches. The years 1864 and 1865 found Thompson vainly touting his holdings in Britain, by which time Congress had repealed the colonization appropriations in disgust at the Île à Vache disaster.[56]

Conclusions

The Chiriquí business defies any attempt to summarize it briefly. It always mixed domestic and international concerns for the administration, but the pendulum swung towards one more than the other at various times. From the point of the view of the public, it looked like it had died twice. For those on the inside, this also appeared to be the case at least twice, although only one of those occasions coincided with those reported in the press, and even that is to say nothing of further periods of grave uncertainty. Lincoln long appreciated the matter's potential for diplomatic embarrassment, but tried – in sequence – to work past that consideration, to respect it, to legislate to overcome it, and then presumably to somehow work past it again when Congress did not oblige him. In a similar vein, he noted the scheme's corruption with

[56] Page, 323 n. 124-7.

genuine regret and almost cancelled it as a result, but introduced contractual safeguards and carried on until it became apparent that the project's scope for embarrassment extended to the highest levels of government. As to its overall place in federal policymaking, the prosecution of the scheme initially looked like the purely presidential business that Congress had designated colonization, then a matter for the executive branch more generally, then an idea for Capitol Hill to consider again, and finally, something for Lincoln – plus a miserable, drafted Seward – to pursue once more, in greater secrecy than ever.

Evidently we need to issue some caveats about trying to determine a human being's innermost thoughts and leanings from what are still quite sketchy records. Indeed, we need to issue some about the finality and consistency of *any* generalization that we draw from the episode. That said, the Chiriquí project's real significance probably lies in its contribution to the shift in the administration's execution of colonization, away from dubious private contractors to the more reliable partners represented by foreign governments, and concomitantly from the Interior to the State Department. Above all, it was the need to negotiate with other states that demanded Seward's involvement. Yet the fact of Usher's corruption was also instrumental in making the Interior Department increasingly unattractive to Lincoln, and for two reasons. More obviously, whilst the secretary continued to perform his official duties on colonization, he never again treated any proposal with the same enthusiasm that he had shown for that of the CIC. It is unclear whether Usher ever learned of his likely part in the demise of the Chiriquí scheme, but as we shall see, he could scarcely hide his hostility towards the investors who took over the rival Île à Vache expedition and sent it on its way that April. There is also a less direct consideration, though it may have been just as important in its effect. For Usher's questionable ethics proved a running point of

contention with James Mitchell, whose strong ideas and jurisdictional overlap with the interior secretary already disposed him to look at Usher antagonistically.[57]

The shift from private ventures to international diplomacy was far from immediate, as shown by the Île à Vache arrangement. As with the Thompson contract, the initial agreement with Bernard Kock overlooked the diplomatic dimensions of that project by failing to stipulate that Haiti give its formal assent to the settlement. Whilst the administration subsequently came to expect that the emigrants explicitly receive from the Haitian government the exemptions and privileges outlined in Seward's circular, Lincoln ultimately relented and allowed the signatories to the redrafted contract to despatch the expedition in advance of obtaining such guarantees, albeit with the proviso that they would not be paid until they managed to do so. Yet it soon became clear that it would be impossible to obtain such privileges, for like Colombia, Haiti objected to the idea that emigrants should settle on anything other than an even footing with its existing citizens. Combined with the scheme's swift descent into fiasco at the hands of Kock, who despite transferring the contract to other parties had retained his position as the colony's manager, the affair emphatically underlined similar lessons to the Chiriquí business about calling on the services of shady American leaseholders rather than the states that were to receive black emigrants. Intriguingly, there had always been an air of doubt hanging over the Île à Vache project, and Lincoln may well have come to prefer the prospect of colonization negotiations with the European empires quite rapidly indeed. Though it is uncertain whether he was speaking for the president or just for himself, Usher cryptically informed the Île à Vache contractors immediately after the voyagers had set sail that, in light of the competition they faced, they should not expect the government's support in obtaining further settlers.[58]

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[57] C.K. Tuckerman to Usher, 18 Apr. 1864, FTC; Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 33-4, 82-5, 91.

[58] Magness*, Colonization after Emancipation*, 28-30; Bancroft, 'The Ile à Vache Experiment in Colonization', in J.E. Cooke, *Frederic Bancroft, Historian* (Norman, 1957), 237-43; Tuckerman,

Once again, Lincoln's actions and apparent attitudes elude easy explanation. At times patient in his pursuit of colonization, early 1863 may well have found him unnerved to have no credible project on the go, and willing to revamp the regrettable agreement for Île à Vache despite apparent misgivings and the recent warnings of the Chiriquí affair. We must also qualify the apparent shift in his policy by recognizing that he was ever the flexible experimenter and keen to try several options simultaneously. And even though the evolution in Lincoln's methods would be more or less complete by mid-1863, it still raises a critical question as to how he expected emigration treaties to pass – that is to say, with the concurrence of two-thirds of the Senate – given the poor legislative response to his second annual message. If Lincoln was convinced of colonization's merits and of the likelihood of continued racial tension in America, he may have simply hoped that other politicians would come to see sense. Paradoxically, an acknowledgment of these very points of uncertainty allows us to more clearly perceive a real human being who struggled with many troubling questions, and who – like us – did not have all the answers.

'Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln', *Magazine of American History*, 19 (May 1888), 412-13; *SED 55*, 29-30.

4 Île à Vache

The literature has tended to underplay the significance of the one colonization expedition to proceed under the auspices of the United States government, which is surprising, given that it marked the only example of such an undertaking after nearly half a century of widespread political advocacy of the same. On the one hand, in a disembodied, purely factual way, scholars are perfectly aware of the basic story of the Île à Vache (Cow Island) mission: the negotiations between the White House and contractors right up to the moment of sailing in April 1863, the venture's rapid slide into fiasco once the settlers had disembarked, and the awkward truth that a cognizant Lincoln nevertheless only recalled them as late as February 1864. Yet when incorporated into a historiography in thrall to the curious notion that a politician could not have remained truly committed to a policy without continuing to advocate it in public, as well as keen to discern a progressive shift in Lincoln's thinking almost immediately after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, the Île à Vache episode rarely garners more than brief comment, or even the mere acknowledgment that it occurred. Historians normally treat it as an unreflective throwback on Lincoln's part to his policy as it stood the previous year, though since it was only by rushed efforts that he managed to sign the original contract hours before proclaiming the freedom of three million slaves, this argument hardly convinces either. Thus it is that the first and only example of federally sponsored resettlement of African Americans, if one excludes the ACS's particularly broad construction during the 1820s of Congress's anti-slave trade appropriations, singularly and counter-intuitively fails to receive its due.

The Île à Vache episode has been the subject of three published studies. The first is a chapter in Frederic Bancroft's posthumous work on colonization, which despite its

age, still contains a great deal of insightful judgement as to the shortcomings manifest in the arrangement from the outset. (Unlike many later scholars, Bancroft avoided crossing the line from incredulity at some of the Lincoln administration's actions into the sort of literal disbelief that underpins the lullaby thesis and other, more recent minimizations of Lincoln's colonization record.) The second is a 1959 article by Willis Boyd, and the third a 1991 piece by James Lockett that places the affair in a broader context than the other two. All of them draw on the same set of sources, to which I can add a few points of elaboration and new details drawn from State Department files and personal papers. Although there are enormous gaps in the holdings of the National Archives for the Chiriquí and British projects, in this case, as far as one can tell, the relevant documents seem to have escaped the worst consequences of the fight between Usher and Mitchell, perhaps as the latter pulled out of the project from an early date.

That is not to say that it is easy to reconstruct exactly what happened on the island or even in Washington. The administration fitfully considered the proposal for more than six months before sending the expedition, then later, its response to increasingly negative reports from the colony for a similar length of time, to say nothing of a contractual dispute that dragged on for years. But there is still much uncertainty as to what was going on behind closed doors. Furthermore, painfully little of what we know of developments on the island comes from the settlers' own mouths, with most representations of events deriving from more or less interested parties. This consideration is obviously true of the scheme's contractors, but there was also a meddlesome US consul on the Haitian mainland who viewed the investors as rivals to an abortive project of his own, as well as another central figure whose integrity is hard to calibrate precisely. Indeed, the administration itself was far from disinterested either, keen to shirk responsibility for what it rapidly came to see as a terrible mistake, and to keep the whole affair as quiet as possible.

Yet it is still possible to glean a fairly generous picture of events from combining and crosschecking the sources. Although the various parties involved contested early, conflicting reports from the island, it eventually became clear that the affair had been a disaster, and the contractors devoted themselves thereafter to disputing the technicalities and circumstances of their agreement. For its part, the administration argued with none of their accounts of their dealings and conversations with Lincoln and his executive secretaries – in fact, Usher seems to have acknowledged them at one point – which should relieve us in large part of our instinctive wariness about drawing on the contractors' story of occurrences in Washington. After all, there was no point misrepresenting crucial conversations to those who had been party to them, or, even if the level of inter-departmental communication demonstrated over the course of the episode was often poorer than it might have been, lying about what their cabinet colleagues had said, where being rumbled might cost the businessmen their payout.

In a thesis centred on policymaking, the most frustrating aspect of the Île à Vache affair is, perhaps predictably, trying to tease out Lincoln's role beyond his 'bookend' contributions of making the contract and authorizing the rescue mission. It is not just that he delegated most of the work arising from an almost immediately failing scheme to his subordinates, or at least made them the first port of call for those who wanted to discuss the matter. It is also that, as with the Chiriquí business, the project effectively ended up within the purview of the Interior and State Departments as well, with dysfunctional, oftentimes buck-passing consequences.

Yet we should be in no doubt that the scheme was above all of Lincoln's choosing. Although Doolittle and the Blairs helped arrange the original contract of New Year's Eve 1862 with concessionaire Bernard Kock, they disappear from the record by the time that the president negotiated a new arrangement with Kock's backers in April, perhaps as the business got truly underway and clearly started to pertain to particular administrative departments. The same is true of Mitchell, who threw himself into the

scheme, only to register his doubts early in the New Year and subsequently to disavow it. Of the two secretaries who would work on the Île à Vache business to the end, Usher had alternative colonization interests and struggled to hide his hostility to a competitor, whilst for ethically purer reasons, Seward could also barely contain his differences with the president, and subsequently spent several years helping one of the unpaid contractors out of guilt at the latter's treatment.

Whilst the internal fault lines that the venture revealed are fascinating, as well as occasionally significant to developments in the administration's approach to the policy, we do need to recall that they only emerged under pressure from Lincoln to pursue colonization, and that they simply would not have done so had the president not been so inclined. As ever, the existing slant of the literature means that it is tempting to head in the direction of downplaying Lincoln's initiatory contribution, to say nothing of what was likely a significant personal input throughout the affair that has escaped documentation, and to place a diversionary emphasis on cabinet politics and the diplomatic dimensions of the project, as though they were what the scheme was fundamentally 'about'. But asking ourselves a basic, seemingly obvious, yet easily overlooked question about which aspects of the episode really come under 'cause', and which 'effect', may provide a salutary check to such tendencies.

Negotiations

Early in September 1862, one Bernard Kock of New Orleans approached Seward with a twenty-year lease for Île à Vache that he had received from the Haitian government, and expressed a desire to make a contract with the US government. Though the secretary retained the document, he warned him, presumably with no great reluctance, that it would be a 'breach of official etiquette' for his office to entertain a proposition that came

within the remit of the Interior Department. Accordingly, Kock went to Smith and received an extensive list of questions about his offer. Responding the same day, Kock painted a picture of a fertile, uninhabited island, and overstated its size fivefold at about a hundred square miles, even bumping up the product of its length and breadth to factor in – as he explained it – the uneven surface of the hills.[1]

The administration was preoccupied with the Chiriquí contract, so Kock pestered Seward once more, and sent Lincoln a printed appeal quoting a favourable article in the Philadelphia *Press*. The self-styled governor of the island claimed to be concerned at the plight of the contrabands, and asked to take five thousand as soon as possible, to have a cotton crop ready for the next March. He expected to be able to repay the government's outlay within two years, and offered all his property on the island as security. Kock enjoyed the support of Jacob Van Vleet of the Washington *National Republican*, who claimed that '[t]he present condition of the "Contrabands" has excited my warmest sympathise [sic]'. Given his earlier support for the Chiriquí scheme, and his residence in a city that was indeed peppered with contraband camps, it seems that Van Vleet had been a genuinely disinterested supporter of colonization in all its forms. At some point before early November, he had become Kock's agent in the city, however. Still not receiving any expression of interest, Kock wrote to Mitchell on 1 November. The commissioner of emigration was evidently impressed, for following consultation with his Haitian opposite number – President Geffrard's *aide-de-camp* Colonel Ernest Roumain, sent to the United States to bolster Kock's project and to entice African American immigrants – Mitchell recommended a contract to Lincoln in short order. Such input may have been decisive in securing Lincoln's ear: apparently it was on Roumain's 'personal solicitation that President Lincoln first entertained [the] proposition'. Mitchell and Kock hammered out a draft contract and blank indenture for settlers, whilst that other *ad hoc* colonization agent, Samuel Pomeroy, filed a report on Kock's financial

[1] B. Kock to J.P. Usher, 8 Jan. 1863, to C.B. Smith, 6 Sept. 1862, KC.

capabilities. It is impossible to know how much the senator had started to cross the line into unethical support of the Chiriquí project by this point, though there was already at least an offer of kickbacks from Ambrose Thompson. Certainly, Pomeroy was somewhat sceptical of Kock's anticipated generosity to emigrants, though with good reason and following consultation with Van Vleet as to the specifics of Kock's plan. 'The papers submitted for my consideration contain very large promises, and such are rarely if ever offered to the settlers of any new country', he warned. Pomeroy added that he would consider the project favourably if the administration could secure better evidence of Kock's financial means.[2]

Meanwhile, signs were appearing that the concessionaire might be suspect. He had to have Robert Murray, US marshal for the southern district of New York, deny that his office had confirmed a rumour that Kock had been linked to a commercial house involved in the slave trade. He also called on Edward Bates, to ask him to write out a contract whose preliminaries, as he represented, had been agreed upon. The attorney general was deeply suspicious, and having not heard of the matter himself until this point, reported that Kock had 'inveigled Blair, and perhaps 1 or 2 others of the ministry', but that personally he 'did not choose to play *scrivener* in the business'. Bates duly went to the White House to denounce Kock as a 'charlatan adventurer'. Although there is no evidence as to what the president made of Kock's credentials, the references that he obtained were sweeping and confident in their endorsement of the man, but invariably vague as to specifics that the administration might follow up for confirmation. The White House's enquiries also went down some unsatisfactorily circular and distant trails: Lincoln asked Pomeroy, who called on Van Vleet, who asked Roumain, who, whilst he could confirm that the Haitian government wanted to encourage immigration,

[2] W.H. Seward to Kock, 29 Sept. 1862, Domestic Letters of the Department of State, NARA; Kock to Lincoln, 1 Oct., 4 Oct., J.R.S. Van Vleet to Lincoln, 17 Aug., 4 Oct. 1862, AL; *HED 227*, 8; Kock to J. Mitchell, 1 Nov., Mitchell to Lincoln, 6 Nov., report of S.C. Pomeroy, 23 Nov. 1862, Kock to J.P. Usher, 8 Jan. 1863, KC; E. Roumain to Mitchell, 5 Nov. 1862, Mitchell communications, STNC; Pomeroy to Lincoln, 1 Dec. 1862, Pomeroy communications, STNC.

confessed that he had first met Kock in Port-au-Prince in early 1862 carrying letters from London bankers.[3]

Nevertheless, with the Chiriquí project on ice and emancipation imminent, Lincoln, Doolittle, and the Blairs committed themselves to finalizing the contract during the closing days of 1862. 'Father met a Haytien envoyé – whiteish – to talk emigration to the President – who authorized an arrangement for carrying several thousand contrabands off there in a few weeks', reported Elizabeth Blair Lee of Francis, Sr.; 'joy go with them.' Two days later, 'Preston' was at work again, possibly negotiating a request for a convoy in light of the threat that the *Alabama* and similar commerce raiders posed. On New Year's Eve, Lincoln signed a contract with Bernard Kock in the presence of at least Doolittle. It provided for 5,000 voluntary emigrants under the terms of Seward's circular of 30 September. Contrary to what Nicolay and Hay wrote, it did not – in what would later become an ongoing point of contention – demand that Kock secure a guarantee from the Haitian government to that end.[4]

Each family was to receive a comfortably furnished house with garden plot, the use of schools and hospitals, and wages that were to keep rising as per a schedule included in the contract. Kock would have to supply the secretary of the interior with a list of emigrants, and be willing to receive and put up any agent of the United States sent to inspect the site. In return, the president agreed to pay $25 per head when the vessel was chartered and loaded, and the same again once the settlers had actually boarded and were on their way to the Île. Whether deliberately or unwittingly, the negotiations seem to have addressed a point brazenly ignored in the Chiriquí contract, for an

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[3] Van Vleet had reported that the slave trade rumour originated with a Mr Ruggles of Washington, likely Francis Ruggles, the same figure who had accused Ambrose Thompson of disloyalty. R. Murray to Kock, 28 Nov., J. Hoxie to Lincoln, 13 Dec., W.E. Robinson to Lincoln, 13 Dec. 1862, AL; H.K. Beale (ed.), *The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866* (Washington, 1933), 268; Kock to Usher, 8 Jan. 1863, KC; F. Bancroft, 'The Ile à Vache Experiment in Colonization', in J.E. Cooke, *Frederic Bancroft, Historian* (Norman, 1957), 234.

[4] E.B. Lee to S.P. Lee, 28 Dec. 1862, B-L; V.J. Laas, *Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee* (Urbana, Ill., 1991), 221; C.K. Tuckerman, *Statement of Circumstances Attending the Experiment of Colonizing Free Negroes at the Island of A'Vache, Hayti, W.I.* (New York, 1864), 1; Bancroft, 237 n. 5.

additional but anonymous and unsigned note stressed that the emigrants should only be those covered by the District Emancipation and Second Confiscation Acts, and that the president could determine the personal documentation required to attest to the same. It would seem that the overall deal was more than satisfactory to both parties: Lee reported that 'Father ... and Mr Doolittle think it the beginning of the 2nd great Exodus'.[5]

Yet there was much that the contract did not address, which may attest to Lincoln and the cabinet colonizationists' sense of urgency. The only security for loss or failure that Kock offered was his property on the island, rather than something certifiably domestic and more substantial, whilst if the lesson had sunk in from the Chiriquí business about first reaching a treaty with the destination country, Lincoln was willing to forget it here. There was never any mention of studying the precedent of the Redpath emigrants, who were already returning home with stories of mistreatment and cultural incompatibility with the Haitians, nor indeed of the suitability of the little island itself. All of Kock's references pertained to his business reputation, not his familiarity with a location that, as it turned out, he had never set foot on. The government evidently feared fraud more than it did a poor outcome for the settlers, though as events would show, the former was one of the factors that would almost inevitably result in the latter.[6]

Indeed, there were so many faults in the contract, and gaps in the executive's knowledge of Kock's background, that the matter could not even stand up to internal scrutiny. The leaseholder left the contract with the Department of State on 2 January 1863, to have the president's signature certified and to receive the seal of the United States. Greatly to his credit, Seward seized the opportunity to delay matters with a flat refusal to return the contract, whilst requesting a word with Lincoln and Usher. Seward also asked the US commissioner to Haiti, Benjamin Whidden, to find out what he could about Kock from his end. (Whidden's response would be far from reassuring, pointing

[5] Contract with Lincoln's signature and additional note, 31 Dec. 1862, KC; Laas, 223. The note is anonymous, although possibly in Mitchell's hand, and its standing therefore unclear.
[6] Bancroft, 237; Tuckerman, *Statement*, 5.

out that Kock's contractual six months to commence 'l'exploitation de l'île' had expired, and adding that he had heard the businessman described as 'an adventurer'.) The secretary's resistance evidently paid off, because on 6 January, Lincoln told him not to execute the agreement, but instead to keep it under advisement for the time being.[7]

This was all a mystery to Kock, who in conjunction with Van Vleet, presented a written demand to Frederick Seward to get it back, and desperately tried to regain the access to the top that he had so recently enjoyed. Kock approached Lincoln's friend Orville Browning, and was still in favour with the Blairs, who helped him out. 'We had a visit from Fathers deportation man – who is full of energy about his cargos of darkies', recorded Elizabeth Blair Lee; 'Becky is enraged to have anybody come to take "our people away" – she evidently would prefer slavery'. The concessionaire hoped that modifying his proposition from five to one thousand settlers would appease the administration, but Kock and Francis Blair had also decided by the middle of the month to use the nuclear option on Usher and the rival Chiriquí scheme. As noted, they informed Doolittle of the reasons for Usher's preferences, so that the senator might in turn tell Lincoln.[8]

Yet the Blairs' efforts were in vain. Seward showed himself to have been quite prescient when a deluge of negative reports about Kock hit Washington. Overturning his earlier presumption of the businessman's innocence, Robert Murray wired Usher on 13 January to 'prevent the consummation of a fraud upon the Interior Department to the amount of twenty five thousand dollars' – that is to say, the first 500 settlers at $50 per head. In an ironic twist, given the fears that Lee recorded, a detective had alleged that Kock was in correspondence with none other than Raphael Semmes of the *Alabama*, to

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[7] Seward to Usher, 2 Jan., Kock to Usher, 8 Jan. 1863, KC; Seward to Lincoln, 3 Jan. 1863, AL; Seward to B.F. Whidden, no. 14, 5 Jan. 1863, Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, NARA; Whidden to Seward, no. 20, 4 Mar. 1863, Despatches from United States Ministers to Haiti, NARA; *CW*, vi, 41.

[8] Kock to Usher, 8 Jan., Mitchell to Usher, 17 Jan. 1863, KC, the latter of which places the modified contract at 1,500 emigrants; T.C Pease and J.G. Randall (eds.), *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning* (2 vols., Springfield, Ill., 1925-33), i, 612; E.B. Lee to S.P. Lee, 3 Jan. '1862' [1863], B-L; Kock to F.P. Blair, 16 Jan. [no year], BF 11; Blair to Kock , 18 Jan. 1863, BF 22.

sell the voyagers into Cuban slavery. Such rumours re-emerged from different sources a couple of months later, as Kock fitted out the ship that was to pick up emigrants at Fortress Monroe, which may attest to the fertile ground for suspicion created by the administration's low-key approach to black emigration since the preparations for the Chiriquí scheme. But as vivid and detailed as they had been, Interior Department officer George Whiting saw no evidence to support the detective's allegations.[9]

Less excitingly, though perhaps with no fewer implications for Kock's chances of seeing his contract honoured, various parties in New York announced that they were chasing outstanding debts that he had incurred in buying equipment for the scheme, whilst other reputable sources stated that Kock was well known in New Orleans for an international tobacco trading scam. Even Mitchell, who had described Kock as a 'practical businessman' in his colonization report for 1862, and who seems to have helped him out with his less ambitious arrangement for fewer settlers, told Usher that he would no longer like to proceed without conferring with the interior secretary. Kock hoped to lift the cloud of suspicion hanging over him by making an offer to Lincoln to take payment in expedition supplies rather than money, but to no avail. His direct dealings with the administration ceased, though he was far from out of the picture.[10]

Meanwhile, another figure who was to crop up again was planning his own expedition to Haiti. Ohioan James De Long had lately been consul at Tangier, removed shortly after causing a diplomatic incident by having neutral Moroccan authorities arrest two Confederate officers trying to buy coal for the seemingly ubiquitous Semmes and his original ship *Sumter*, moored at Gibraltar. De Long's next posting was to be Aux

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[9] Murray to Usher, 13 Jan., 'In the Matter of the Fraud of Bernard Kock', G.C. Whiting, 19 Mar. 1863, KC.

[10] F.W. Seward to Usher, 15 Jan., Mitchell to Usher, 17 Jan., certificate of power of attorney, 19 Jan., Watts, Given and Co. to R. Atkinson, 2 [no month] 1863, KC; Mitchell, *Report on Colonization and Emigration* (Washington, 1862), 20; Kock to Lincoln, 17 Jan. 1863, AL. Despite withdrawing from the project, Mitchell remained in contact with Roumain, vainly trying to obtain him a copy of the US treaty of navigation and commerce with Liberia in February, and seeking clarification of the settlers' privileges that summer. (Mitchell to F.W. Seward, 5 Mar., to W.H. Seward, 15 July 1863, Miscellaneous Letters of the Department of State, NARA; F.W. Seward to Mitchell, 6 Mar. 1863, Domestic Letters of the Department of State.)

Cayes, a port on the south-western peninsula of the Haitian mainland a few miles across shallow water from the north-western tip of Île à Vache. He was in Washington in early 1863, and pitching an emigration scheme based on a conditional lease for four farms in the vicinity of Aux Cayes, totalling 1,300 acres. De Long clearly had friends in high places, for one of the farms belonged to the president of Haiti and another to his stepbrother**,** the governor of that particular region. The lease was conditional on obtaining 200-300 settlers, though De Long had apparently already scooped up 16 of the discontented Redpath contrabands; he proposed to get 300-500 more, provided that the US government cover the cost of their travel. He had reason for high hopes, as Mitchell, Usher, and even Seward all sounded positive notes. In late February, he asked for the secretary of state's endorsement with a view to securing the same from Lincoln himself. Things still looked up at the beginning of April, for De Long spoke of naming his son Charles in the contract so as not to place the US government in a compromising position. He also claimed the continued support of Mitchell and of John Willis Menard, an African American clerk in the Emigration Office who spent the first half of 1863 making efforts to leave for Liberia, Haiti, Liberia again, then British Honduras. De Long was on the cusp of going to Haiti to get the document signed by that government, as the State Department had requested, when possibly no more than a week later, and certainly three weeks at most, it had somehow all fallen through. Menard wrote of the scheme's apparent failure 'until Mr De Long shall have arranged and furnished the necessary business for its departure'.[11]

It is not clear quite what had happened. Menard was avowedly impatient to leave the United States for the 'limits of a Negro Nationality', and the failure to which he referred was possibly nothing more than the time needed for De Long to go to Haiti and return with permission. If such was the case, Menard's pessimistic assessment may have proved self-fulfilling by depriving the consul of other potential voyagers: the clerk had

[11] Proposition of J. De Long, 25 Feb. 1863, public papers: national affairs, WHS; De Long to F.W. Seward, 20 Feb. 1863, WHS; W.H. Seward to Usher, 9 Feb. 1863, DLC.

recently acted as the main organizer of a would-be expedition to Liberia, a role that he had possibly reprised for De Long's Haitian venture. The more obvious reason is that over the same stretch of April, the administration had modified and finalized a contract with a party of New York investors to whom Kock had transferred his interest. Though Lincoln and Mitchell's willingness to experiment with all sorts of colonization sites should not necessarily have precluded both expeditions from going ahead, perhaps someone at the top had thought better of planting two distinct settlements so close together. Viewed another way, the outcome was that the US consul with jurisdiction over Île à Vache was now to regard colonization efforts on the island with bitter envy.[12]

The project had remained alive thanks to Kock's success in securing additional, private investors, who subsequently went to Washington to have the contract made in their names instead. Kock had appeared in New York in the autumn of 1862, claiming to have been to the recent World's Fair in London, where he had seen Haitian cotton of incredibly long staple that surpassed even the best product of the Sea Islands. Purporting to have tried the experiment himself on the island, and to have brought seed to maturity within a hundred days, he could also offer credible accounts of the labour expended on the crop and the items that he had needed to cultivate it with such success. Asking for $70,000 to help meet his contract with the president, Kock envisaged five investors stepping forward with $14,000 each, and stated that he had found two such stakeholders in Boston, and thus needed to obtain three in New York. Kock described Lincoln as 'entirely captivated by the project', and added that the president had made two private verbal stipulations not committed to paper:

> That his [Kock's] first installment of colonists was to be taken from the contraband camps around Washington, thus relieving to some extent the annoyance and embarrassment of the administration; and that under no

[12] Contract between J.W. Menard and C. De Long, miscellaneous contracts and agreements, STNC; J. De Long to Usher, 3 Apr. 1863, DLC; Menard to Usher, 11 Apr., to Mitchell, 23 Apr., enclosed in Menard to Usher, '14 (13)' May 1863, miscellaneous letters, STNC. In his letter of 11 Apr., Menard merely alluded to several failed attempts to get to Liberia and to Haiti, but in that of 23 Apr., he specified De Long's expedition.

> consideration was he to impart to any members of the Cabinet except Mr. Seward and Judge Blair the existence of his contract.

When it came to his credentials, Kock seemed perfectly convincing. He had forged a duplicate contract with Lincoln, claiming that the original was still with the Department of State. One potential investor who managed to dissuade his friends with a prediction that the scheme 'would break down from some unforeseen cause' nevertheless saw ample documentation over the course of several interviews, and conceded that Kock 'appeared to have answered every objection that I could foresee to it.' The leaseholder moved in respectable circles, and even gave a dinner to eight or ten gentlemen at the Union Club, with Roumain as a guest. In the end, Kock netted Paul Forbes and Charles Tuckerman, the two men named in the new contract and the public face of a syndicate that included Leonard Jerome – Winston Churchill's grandfather – and apparently, Henry Raymond of the *New York Times*. It is unclear whether Kock really had found investors in Boston, but either way, the New York group found itself engaged to the tune of $70,000 as outfitters prepared the *Ocean Ranger*, which was to sail under British colours for safety.[13]

On the eve of its departure, they learned that the administration refused to recognize the contract that they had assumed they were fulfilling with the government's blessing, albeit proffered indirectly, via the original arrangement with Kock. Forbes rushed to Washington and, despite receiving the cold shoulder from Seward on first meeting him, established that official policy had not changed, that Kock's reputation alone had induced the withdrawal of the contract, and that the administration would be willing to make it with other parties. Years later, Tuckerman recollected that he had told the president that he would be happier for someone else to take over the business if

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[13] J.T. Doyle, 'An Episode of the Civil War', *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine*, 9 (May 1887), 539-41; Tuckerman, *Statement*, 1-5; *SED 55*, 40-2. There is no single smoking gun as to Raymond's involvement, but an otherwise inexplicable, extensive correspondence: Usher to H.J. Raymond, 18 Sept. 1863, letters sent, STNC; Tuckerman to Seward, 13 Jan. 1864, FTC; Raymond to Usher, 9 Oct. 1863, JPU; *SED 55*, 35, 49; Seward to Lincoln, 15 Dec. 1863, AL. See also 'The Negro Colonization Schemes', San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*, 20 Apr. 1864, and suspect tone of *New York Times* coverage, below.

they could relieve the New Yorkers of the expenses incurred thus far, but that Lincoln 'pressed the matter as a personal favor'. The allegations of slave trading continued to sit uneasily with the president, who 'expressed some fears lest the expedition should "be tampered with by evil-disposed persons *during the voyage*."' The contractors agreed to forego payment until they could present a consular certificate showing that the emigrants had landed.[14]

The participants entered the final stage of negotiations at the very end of March, though even this late, the demands of the administration were in flux. Kock signed over his lease to Forbes, Tuckerman, and Jerome on 30 March, whilst Lincoln pointed Tuckerman in Usher's direction to check the new contract the same day; the secretary of the interior declined including the somewhat notorious Jerome as a party. In another hint of the troublingly divided, even three-way jurisdiction over the policy, Tuckerman also saw Seward, who had drawn up the arrangement with the president's direction. Tuckerman immediately expressed his reservations to both Lincoln and Seward that, according to the paper before him, the contractors now had to obtain in advance Haiti's official assent to the terms of Seward's circular of 30 September 1862, prominent among them, that settlers should be granted citizenship and protected against coming to want, and that children should receive an elementary education. The stipulation was likely inspired by an awareness of the diplomatic shortcomings of the Chiriquí and original Île à Vache contract, to wit, their failure to obtain official clearance from the government that was to receive the emigrants in question, whilst it also guaranteed provision for the settlers even once the contractors had been paid for transporting them. Yet the investors responded by protesting that the *Ocean Ranger* was clocking up demurrage charges, that the distinctive wet and dry seasons in the tropics did not admit of just any timetable, and that they would have to pull out unless they could move quicker than the

[14] Tuckerman, *Statement*, 6-8, 9, 'President Lincoln and Colonization', *Magazine of American History*, 16 (Oct. 1886), 41. Tuckerman's recollection is obviously one to treat with caution in this instance.

turnaround time needed for such permission. Until the colony started to produce its cotton crop, their major consideration was already about minimizing severe losses than making a profit. Indeed, even more so than an increase in the bounty money, what Tuckerman really wanted was for the US government to cover costs of transportation and subsistence for four to six months. Lincoln '"begged that no further objection would be raised"' on the matter of the per capita sum, however.[15]

There was much that was highly unsatisfactory about the new contract. The investors were already on the back foot, unable to pull out without making an even greater loss, and they needed to see, or at least to anticipate, a quick profit in order to remain committed to the venture. Moreover, from the outset, Tuckerman had presciently identified a diplomatic thorn in its side. Following a further interview, the president agreed that the expedition could proceed in advance of obtaining Haitian confirmation of the terms of Seward's circular, but determined that the contractors would not be paid until they had secured it. Usher accordingly presented Forbes and Tuckerman with a blank guarantee that the secretary of state had prepared for the president of Haiti to fill in. It was an awkward compromise, to which Tuckerman assented 'not because I thought it just, but because *time* was of such vital importance that I was unwilling to cause further delay in our preparation.' If the revamped arrangement seemed to offer greater protection to the settlers, it also made failure more likely by tying the investors' personal resolve and their financial means of supporting the colony to a stipulation that was to prove unattainable.[16]

Perhaps this assessment is to abuse hindsight, but it is nevertheless striking to see how dissatisfied all involved were even at that point, to say nothing of their foreboding of a large part of what was indeed to go wrong. 'Both parties were aware that

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[15] *SED 55*, 29, 40-1; *CW* Supplement, 183; Tuckerman to Seward, 31 Mar., 2 Apr. 1863, WHS; Tuckerman to Lincoln, 31 Mar. 1863, AL; Tuckerman, *Papers Relating to the Colonization Experiment at A'Vache, Hayti, W.I.* (1864/5), 2.

[16] Tuckerman to Usher, 6 Apr., to Seward, 17 Oct. 1863, 13 Jan. 1864, FTC; *SED 55*, 24-5, 40; Tuckerman to Seward, 2 Apr. 1863, WHS.

this was a hazardous, almost desperate, venture, for Forbes and Tuckerman knew as little as Secretary Usher about Ile à Vache', wrote Bancroft, 'and that they could not have any rights there until the Haitian government approved Kock's assignment of the lease to them, which antedated the contract but a few days.' Usher asked for, and duly received, positive references as to their means and moral fitness to undertake the expedition, as well as Murray's approval of the ship's outfit. There was, however, no consideration of the investors' familiarity with the island, with the business of cotton planting, or of the possibility of their posting a bond.[17]

It did not help that neither of the cabinet secretaries involved were supporters of the project. A reluctant Seward remarked at some point that the president 'should "father" this important colonization experiment for "it is his choice."' It is unclear whether Usher had any idea of the part he had played in the demise of the Chiriquí scheme; even that is to assume that it *had* died, rather than suffered confinement to an increasingly chilly limbo. Either way, the secretary of the interior was certainly not on his best behaviour when it came to dealing with a rival. Usher failed to turn up for at least one meeting with the president and Tuckerman, and told the latter in the hall of Willard's Hotel that $50 per head was excessive, and that he 'knew "d-d well" that they could be carried out for twelve or fifteen dollars and that we [Tuckerman and associates] were "going to make a good thing out of it."' It is also uncertain whether Usher was speaking just for himself, or for Lincoln too, when he told Tuckerman four days after the president had signed the contract that, owing to the existence of more eligible offers, the New Yorkers should not expect to obtain further emigrants. It seems more probable that the secretary was not committing gross insubordination here, and that he was indeed doing Lincoln's bidding. Perhaps the president was thinking of the

[17] Bancroft, 242; *SED 55*, 25-7; J.J. Cisco to Usher, 7 Apr., H. Barney to Usher, 8 Apr., E.D. Smith to Usher, 9 Apr. 1863, FTC; Murray to Usher, 7 Apr. 1863, Murray communications, STNC. The referees pointed out that Tuckerman was poorer than Forbes, which, as the investor himself later admitted, made him the syndicate's main supplicant and correspondent when payment turned out to be unforthcoming. (Tuckerman, 'President Lincoln and Colonization', 5.)

superior option of emigration negotiations with the European empires, or just regretted making the contract already. Whatever the case, it was not the kind of gesture designed to inspire confidence in contractors who would need to expand their operations if they were to have any chance of realizing a profit. Equally portentously, Tuckerman was adamant that it was actually the investors doing the government a favour, and one that few people in the country could afford to undertake at that.[18]

By elimination, Lincoln was evidently the scheme's only enthusiast within the administration, at least now that it was no longer a matter for the Blairs or Doolittle, though that description hardly does justice to his curiously ambivalent attitude to the business. As with the Chiriquí scheme, his approach seems to have been a kind of perverse doggedness in the face of nagging doubts. As Tuckerman would later assert several times without challenge, the president had stated '"but I mean that this experiment shall be made. Congress has given me $600,000 to use according to my judgment, and I intend that this thing shall be tried"'. Some years subsequently, Tuckerman recalled that when he turned up and suggested that the easiest thing left to do would be for Lincoln to affix his signature, the president shot back, '"O, I know that … and so it would be 'very easy' for me to open that window and shout down Pennsylvania Avenue, only I don't mean to do it – just now."' The investor offered to stay a few days longer in Washington to iron out whatever further complications there might be. Lincoln mellowed, replied, '"No … you've had trouble enough about it, and so have I … I guess it's all right"', and then signed. Whilst it is scarcely necessary to outline the caution with which this reminiscence must be treated, Tuckerman published it two decades after any lingering prospect of compensation had all but evaporated, along with the general public's memory of the entire project. Shortly after signing, Lincoln did something that

[18] Tuckerman to Seward, 13 Jan. 1864, to Usher, 18 Apr. 1863, 18 Apr. 1864, FTC; Tuckerman, 'Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln', *Magazine of American History*, 19 (May 1888), 412; *SED 55*, 29-30.

the New York parties surely wished he had done much earlier, which was to formally cancel the Kock contract.[19]

Whatever the intended spirit in which the arrangement had gone ahead, the contractors did not tarry. Lincoln signed on 13 April, and the next day, Tuckerman informed Usher that the *Ocean Ranger* had already sailed. This was not from New York, but rather from Fortress Monroe with its complement of settlers, itself a clear indication of the investors' impatience whilst finalizing the contract. There was none of the publicity that the lullaby thesis would require to stand up, no exploitation on Lincoln's part of an opportunity to stress his pro-colonization credentials to a wider audience. Indeed, throughout its life, the Île à Vache expedition was to be the subject of nothing better-informed than vaguely sourced snippets in the press, with the first public acknowledgement of its existence apparently Usher's departmental report of December 1863.[20]

Reporters did, however, pick up on the departure and purpose of the *Ocean Ranger*, and of another vessel containing the settlers' supplies. 'Will anybody tell us where the authority comes from (under the Constitution) by virtue of which Abraham Lincoln contracts to transport these contrabands to Hayti and pay them ... for five years from the public treasure?' demanded a hostile editor; '[o]r must we add this to the already large catalogue of violations of the Constitution, an act of Abolition fanaticism, an exercise of power in defiance of law and justice?' The Confederate press also took note, one Georgian paper regaling its readers with a heart-warming tale of how a black speaker sent to persuade the contrabands had warned them that the South was bound to win the war, and that Haiti would then be their only safe haven. Indeed, it would be

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[19] Tuckerman, *Papers*, 2, *Statement*, 7, 'Recollections', 412-13; Tuckerman to Seward, 13 Jan., to Usher, 26 Mar. 1864, FTC; *CW*, vi, 178-9. Similar notes of willingness to proceed with colonization by trial and error, namely by trying out multiple resettlement locales, appear in Seward's diplomatic circular of 30 Sept. 1862, in Mitchell's *Report on Colonization and Emigration* (Washington, 1862), 27, and in Mitchell to Lincoln, 1 July 1862, AL.
[20] Contract, 13 Apr., Tuckerman to Usher, 14 Apr. 1863, FTC.

from the hostile quarters of Dixie that Washington was to hear frighteningly soon that things were not going to plan.[21]

The settlers' experience, events on the island, and the government's response

What we know of the emigrants – their aspirations, opinion, and perspective on events – comes almost exclusively through the filter of reports and affidavits drawn up by white Americans to weigh in on a dispute concerning compensation of the scheme's contractors. This is not to say that such material is of no use to us, or that it was callously indifferent to the settlers' fate. The major points of contention in the Île à Vache affair were Haiti's refusal to grant the emigrants the privileges that Seward had requested, their treatment on-board ship and subsequently on Île à Vache, and, in a somewhat related point, their success in developing the island's infrastructure and agriculture. If the first of these considerations provided an immediately obvious and conveniently technical basis for the administration to refuse payment, the latter two became just as damaging when accounts from Île à Vache made it clear that the settlers had indeed suffered neglect and abuse. The investors ended up disputing only peripheral points of what had gone wrong, focussing instead on the provenance of the problems, and especially on the question of whether it was the government or their own syndicate that had engaged in the business complacently and encouraged misplaced confidence in the other party. Thus, it is possible to draw a roughly accurate overall picture of developments, albeit one that has to be qualified with occasional notes of conjecture, or to employ rather detailed cross-referencing of various accounts.

Arguably, the murkiest aspect of a composite version of events is its beginning, namely, the circumstances of the expedition's departure from Fortress Monroe;

[21] 'The New Emancipation Scheme', *Daily Patriot and Union*, 17 Apr. 1863; 'The Yankees Endeavoring to Get Rid of the Elephant', Savannah *Daily Morning News*, 27 Apr. 1863.

especially so once the various parties' doubts about the underlying veracity of subsequent bad news had disappeared, and turned into attempts to apportion responsibility for undertaking the venture at all. The contractors regarded themselves as having done a favour to a demoralized party of African Americans who were keen to take their chances with a fresh start elsewhere, whilst Usher seized on accusations of misrepresentation before would-be voyagers of what awaited them. Of all the instances where the contractors' and administration's accounts differ, details of what happened prior to embarkation seem the least reconcilable.

The most extensive accounts of the recruitment and embarkation of the expedition come from two reports that Tuckerman made, six months and a year, respectively, after the events that they described. He summarized the settlers' previous circumstances with a number of rhetorical questions that he asked Usher:

> Are you aware what was the condition of these people when taken from the neighborhood of Fortress Monroe? Do you know that they were so happy at leaving these shores that they left several thousand dollars wages due them by the Govt. unpaid? Do you know what was the condition of *their morale*, the female portion at least, in the vicinity of the camp and how rapidly their wages passed from the hands of the men to the hucksters and shopkeepers of the place? Probably not.[22]

The contractor had canvassed Fortress Monroe in conjunction with the black emigrationist William J. Watkins, a Baltimore schoolteacher who was the son of abolitionist William Watkins, and who had co-edited *Frederick Douglass' Paper* during the mid-1850s. Watkins had been one of Redpath's agents, and enjoyed some familiarity with Haiti, but was soon to die on Île à Vache and take an account of the early days of the mission with him. Tuckerman stated that he had brought Watkins along to emphasize to potential settlers that they would have to work hard, and claimed to have letters from him showing the conscientious manner in which the same had proceeded to gather emigrants. Indeed, Tuckerman reported that he found those who had signed up at Fortress Monroe so excited that even he feared that Watkins or someone else had made

[22] Tuckerman to Usher, 20 Oct. 1863, FTC.

excessive claims on behalf of the scheme, until he questioned the leading volunteers and learnt that they were fully aware that they were leaping into the unknown. Tuckerman accompanied each boatload of settlers that went out from Hampton wharf to the *Ocean Ranger*, and described one scene thus:

> To an old and respectable negro who appeared to be a leading spirit among them, I put the question clearly and distinctly whether the people were fully aware of the circumstances under which they left … The old man left my side and standing above the crowd, called on "God and all men to witness that they left of their own free will and choice any by no man's persuasion and with the knowledge that they were going to a strange and new land, there to till the ground and to do daily labour and take their chance for good or for ill &c. &c." To all of which the people cried "Amen" and shouted Hallelujah.

The potential for bias in the foregoing needs no elaboration, though as ever, that does not mean that we should dismiss it out of hand. The main rebuttal that Usher would make was that '[d]eception was practiced upon the emigrants to get them on board the vessel.' This charge is not unproblematic either, for it stemmed from a statement drawn up by James De Long, who was to prove a troublesome presence on the island. De Long had a handful of settlers put their marks to the accusation that the late Watkins had told them that they were sailing from Fortress Monroe to see the president. What inconveniently imbues this questionable account with greater weight is that a government agent sent out to the island, D.C. Donnohue, also signed as witness to the collective statement. Tuckerman was incredulous at the charge: that Watkins 'promised to take these people "to Washington to see the President and to give them $50 per head from the Government" I would scarcely credit if the whole 400 instead of twenty emigrants signed their "marks" to the statement … Nor do I understand what advantage was to be gained by "seeing the President" unless indeed they expected to receive through him their overdue wages at Fort Monroe.'[23]

Ultimately, both sides' accounts sound suspect. Neither is free of what may represent some degree of racial stereotyping: wild enthusiasm and vocal expressions of

[23] Tuckerman to Usher, 18 Apr. 1864, FTC; statement, 28 Jan. 1864, DC; *SED 55*, 51.

religious faith in Tuckerman's, and credulousness in De Long's. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in-between, especially if we consider the possibility that the scheme's canvassers tweaked their appeal according to specific audience. Certainly, conditions were poor in contraband camps, and such concentrations of escapees represented an embarrassment for the government, as reflected in Lincoln's earlier enjoinder to Kock. Although one might reasonably argue that, as had often been the case with colonization, emigrants' free will was exercised under the undue pressure of poor alternative options, it does not seem that anyone was forced to go except by his or her volition. This consideration hardly addresses the question of misrepresentation, though. Whatever the truth in this specific allegation, it is abundantly clear from subsequent events that the settlers had indeed been deceived in many ways. Yet it may be the case that the investors and Watkins had been tricked too, for the new colony's manager was none other than Bernard Kock.[24]

It is not altogether clear why the contractors had kept him on. Informing Usher of this fact in early July, Forbes and Tuckerman argued that they had needed Kock to be present on the island to make good the lease from Haiti, though they added that the authorities had now approved its transfer to them and stressed that Kock was subordinate to an agent whom they had since sent out to take charge. (Moreover, as Whidden had warned Seward, Kock's charter had in any case expired in early 1863.) In a somewhat conflicting further point of explanation, Forbes and Tuckerman admitted that they had felt duty-bound to offer Kock paid employment after all his work in bringing the scheme about, and cryptically told Usher that '[a]lthough this Government has no interest in this matter, we think it proper to state Mr. Kock's relation to ourselves and the colony for reasons known to yourself.' But if signing over the lease to the New York syndicate had limited Kock's scope for multi-thousand dollar fraud, the concessionaire made up for it wherever he could, especially at the expense of the settlers. Indeed, it is

[24] Certificates of J.A. Dix, 6 May, and Tuckerman, 12 Apr., enclosed in Forbes and Tuckerman to Usher, 7 July 1863, FTC.

not even clear how many emigrants there were, either through simple confusion or possibly because Kock bumped the numbers up in order to claim a slightly higher fee. The vice consul at Aux Cayes, George Ross, was soon to sign off on 453 having landed, and fully under the terms of Seward's circular, but he was in cahoots with Kock and remained affiliated to the New York parties even once he had fallen out with the former. The roster of emigrants filed with Forbes and Tuckerman's paperwork lists 424, whilst Kock's own journal apparently revealed that 411 or 431 had left Fortress Monroe, according to two different reports of its contents emanating from the same person. Though the precise total has to remain elusive, there seems little reason to doubt the demographic trends apparent in the list at the National Archives, however. The colonists were predominantly Virginians from the Tidewater area around Norfolk, Petersburg, and Richmond, though more than twenty were from North Carolina and one from Alabama. Almost all of them were young people in their twenties, with men outnumbering women three to one and a notable scarcity of children, but few seem to have come *en masse* from large plantations, as rarely did more than three or four record the same master.[25]

Events took an unpleasant turn for the settlers whilst still at sea. The *Ocean Ranger* had become contaminated from a smallpox epidemic raging in Craney Island, located across the waters of Hampton Roads from Fortress Monroe. Although the delay caused by the incubation period saw it erupt only five days before landing, by Forbes and Tuckerman's own confession, it spread 'somewhat alarmingly' in that time. During the voyage Watkins and Kock allegedly charged the settlers for food and water, and claimed that their money was useless, trying to change it for either Kock's personal currency or 45 Haitian cents on the US dollar. Kock instructed the settlers to sign labour

[25] Certificate of G.C. Ross, 1 June, in Forbes and Tuckerman to Usher, 7 July 1863, Donnohue to Usher, 26 Mar. 1864, FTC; De Long to Usher, 28 Dec. 1863, DLC; Donnohue to Usher, 5 Jan. 1864 (twice), DC; R. Loring to Whidden, 27 Mar., 29 Mar. 1864, Despatches from Ministers to Haiti, NARA; W.D. Boyd, 'The Île a Vache Colonization Venture, 1862-1864', *The Americas*, 16 (July 1959), 51.

contracts, warning that they would not be allowed to disembark until they did. One such document ended up in the hands of the State Department, and had the words 'to be approved by the American Minister resident of Hayti' ominously crossed out. The settlers landed in early May to find nothing prepared for them in the way of accommodation or usable land, despite Kock's promise to the investors that there were already twenty sawyers building houses from the island's natural resources. This did not prevent Ross's barefaced certification, shortly afterwards, that the 'new colony is flourishing under the able wise and humane direction of its projector Bernard Kock'. The thirty or forty smallpox victims were left to die without adequate shelter, kept in isolation about a mile away from the main site. One Robert Henry managed to slip away to see them, even though Kock had declared the area out of bounds, and found five or six whose eyes were being eaten by maggots whilst they were still alive, including a ten year-old boy who had already gone blind, and who was 'walking about praying for death to relieve him.' Once the ill had died, Kock allowed some of the healthy settlers to go bury them in shallow graves without coffins.[26]

Indeed, the emigrants never really moved off the narrow beach and into the island's interior, having to settle for miserable brush and palmetto huts that were too close to the shore even to withstand a violent storm. Kock prioritized constructing his own house and company buildings with what wood he had, but even his domicile was erected on pillars driven into the sea itself. Thus it was that the settlers faced the underappreciated perils of a tropical beach, including the presence of three or four pools infested with alligators. One man who could not stand his abusive treatment at the hands of the management went off and lay in the sand, only for his bones to appear forty yards away the next day; another went mad with disease and disappeared into the woods, never to be seen again. Yet the most persistent and widespread predator was a

[26] The purported exchange rate was out by a factor of more than twenty. Tuckerman, *Statement*, 10; sworn statement, 28 Jan. 1864, DC; Whidden to Seward, no. 32, 21 Aug., no. 39, 3 Oct. 1863, Despatches from Ministers to Haiti; Tuckerman to Usher, 9 Jan. 1864, FTC; Bancroft, 246.

vexingly tiny one: the chigoe flea, or jigger, a parasitic arthropod that burrowed into the settlers' feet. News of this development had reached Lincoln and evidently troubled him by early July, as one visitor recalled:

> He spoke at some length about the efforts that had been made … to meet the Negro question, – how he had urged deportation and colonization, and of the failure of such efforts to solve the difficulty. His sympathy with the suffering caused by some of the mistakes was very evident. He told me, for instance, that the Negroes in the Cow Island settlement on the coast of Hayti were suffering intensely from a pest of "jiggers" from which there seemed to be no escape or protection. His distress was as keen as it was sincere, and I have often thought of it as an illustration of his kindness of heart, which found no detail too insignificant upon which to expend itself. The spectacle of the President of the United States, conducting the affairs of the Nation in the midst of civil war, and genuinely affected by the discomfort occasioned a little group of Negroes by an insect no bigger than a pinhead, was a spectacle that has stayed by me all my life.[27]

Indeed the administration had just received reports of maltreatment transmitted through the Confederate press, the first news that it had heard of the colony's progress from any quarter. Fortunately, the claim that half of the emigrants had already died turned out to be an exaggeration, but Usher immediately demanded an explanation of Forbes and Tuckerman. In an early, ironic taste of the dispute that was to follow, the pair had applied for their payout the very same day, even offering to renew the contract if the government so desired. They enclosed correspondence from Roumain confirming that Haiti could not offer the privileges that Seward had demanded, but they added that Port-au-Prince had already naturalized the emigrants, the next best thing after preferential treatment that would only inflame tension with the inhabitants of the mainland. Meanwhile, at least one foreign diplomatic presence had picked up on the existence of the scheme, and detected similar notes of remorse emanating from Lincoln. 'The subject is so painful to those of the authorities here who were parties to making the contract', reported British minister Lord Lyons, 'and especially to the President himself,

[27] Not to be confused with its larval near-namesake – and, in the spelling used in some of the sources, exact namesake – of more temperate climes, the 'chigger'. A. Wilson to Usher, 31 Oct. 1863, DC; Whidden to Seward, no. 32, 21 Aug., no. 39, 3 Oct. 1863, Brown, Ross and Co. to Whidden, 12 Mar. 1864, Despatches from Ministers to Haiti; J. Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen* (Cambridge, Mass., 1907), 91-2.

who sanctioned it from motives of benevolence to these unfortunate people, that there is a great reluctance to give any definite information concerning it.' Evidence of such humanitarian concern on Lincoln's part, and of his early awareness of the sorry state of the expedition, must sit uneasily with the knowledge that he would only recall the settlers more than half a year later. Those considerations may represent facets of the same underlying commitment to colonization, however, one that manifested itself variously with both heavy personal involvement in the policy and remarkable persistence in the face of bad news.[28]

Although it is a matter of fact that the Île à Vache venture turned into a disaster, one must acknowledge that early reports from the island came exclusively from the troubling pen of James De Long. On the one hand, it does not seem that his despatches were especially misleading in their content. Other agents' accounts of the settlers' suffering were similarly damning, though they did not go into as much detail as De Long had done, and hence did not address all of the points that he made. But his reasons for intervention were far from impartial, and he latterly stirred a great deal of trouble on Île à Vache, which may in turn have played some part in the colony's eventual failure. Allegedly, De Long had initially tried to win over Watkins to his service, then subsequently attempted to thwart his rival canvassing efforts at Fortress Monroe, whilst Tuckerman hinted that the consul had a problem with alcohol, and that Usher himself had expressed doubts as to his personal qualities. Although De Long was later to report to Seward that he had experienced a principled and thoroughgoing conversion against Haitian colonization in all its venal forms, it is possible that his efforts to break up the Île

[28] *SED 55*, 33-4; Forbes and Tuckerman to Usher, 7 July 1863, FTC; R.B.P Lyons to E.M. Archibald, no. 178, 18 July 1863, FO 115/386, TNA. The acting British consul in Havana had reported the landing of the emigrants and warned the foreign secretary, Earl Russell, of Kock's notoriety. Russell asked Lyons for information, and the latter forwarded his request to New York consul Edward Archibald, since the project had originated in his city of posting; even Archibald struggled to obtain decent information, however. Quite independently, Tuckerman concurred that the negative reports had originated in Havana, though he attributed this to disgruntled former employees spreading misinformation. (J. Crawford to J. Russell, 12 June 1863, FO 115/389, TNA; Archibald to W.H.N. Stuart, no. 304, 30 Sept. 1863, FO 115/378, TNA; Tuckerman to Usher, 29 July 1863, FTC.)

à Vache colony stemmed from continued plans to sell the services of the settlers to a resident of the mainland.[29]

Whatever the case – and it does seem that, despite questionable motives, he was essentially more truthful than not – De Long was first on the scene shortly after arriving at Aux Cayes in early June. He claimed to be loath to sail the seven or eight miles to the island without the permission of his government, but reported that in any case, Kock was trying to keep Île à Vache off-limits to all except a few suppliers. Yet the concessionaire was struggling in that respect, for a backlash from the settlers had already forced him to call in the local authorities under Governor Fabre. The latter refused to collude in Kock's ominous demand that those emigrants in possession of revolvers turn them in, and instructed him to cease usurping his own title of governor and issuing his scrip. In early July, Kock himself brought an end to the colony's isolation in dramatic fashion, turning up at Aux Cayes, armed and 'half frightened to death' at the evident discontent of his charges, over twenty of whom soon ended up in the city either on trial or simply in search of a viable living. Reports came with them of forty deaths from a combination of smallpox and exposure, and of having only salt pork and cornbread baked from musty meal to eat. Though Fabre had made the requisite arrests, he came away convinced that the settlers had been wronged; all the trials for improper conduct ended in acquittal.[30]

All this was news to the US mission to Port-au-Prince, which had not officially heard from the State Department, and was in fact never to hear, that the administration had made a contract for colonization on Île à Vache. The legation's secretary accumulated several reports from De Long to paint a better picture of developments before sending them on to Whidden, back home in New Hampshire that summer, who in turn forwarded them to Seward. De Long wrote that Watkins had deliberately

[29] Donnohue to Usher, 2 Feb. 1864, JPU; Tuckerman to Usher, 18 Apr. 1864, FTC; De Long to Seward, 3 Oct. 1863, DLC.
[30] De Long to H. Conard, 25 June 1863, AL; Whidden to Seward, no. 32, 21 Aug. 1863, Despatches from Ministers to Haiti.

mistranslated settlers' testimony before the Haitian authorities at Kock's bidding, but two weeks later, noted rumours that Kock had poisoned Watkins and would soon flee with the expedition's funds.[31]

The first eyewitness account of events on the island emerged in late July, after Whidden's secretary requested De Long to visit it in person. Landing with a Captain Tilton Cook of the schooner *Clara T. Holmes*, the consul faced an immediate challenge from Haitian soldiers, who told him to report to Kock at his 'palace'. The concessionaire instructed him to leave, but De Long replied that he objected to his despotic control 'over the poor blacks lately redeemed from the chains of slavery by the blood of my countrymen'. Present with Kock was Andrew Ripka, the agent that Forbes and Tuckerman had sent out to take control. A native of Philadelphia and co-founder of the alpha chapter of Phi Kappa Sigma, Ripka came from a family of Manayunk cotton manufacturers, and had recently been discharged from the 119th Pennsylvania Volunteers through disability, which, taken together, likely explain how he found himself employed to supervise a would-be cotton plantation at this juncture. Shortly afterwards, Ripka wrested control from Kock in conjunction with the local merchant house of Brown, Ross and Co. The firm was one in good standing with the authorities, but it mixed a troubling variety of roles and conflicting interests, as events would show. The eponymous partners were British subjects, agents for Lloyds Bank as well as for the colony's investors, but Ross had also doubled up as US vice-consul at Aux Cayes, and had issued the fraudulent certificate of satisfactory disembarkation.[32]

Ripka presents the hardest figure to assess in the whole affair. Despite an obvious interest in its success, he was critical of Kock from an early date, and apparently came to doubt the entire project's viability, though one might argue that he could not credibly have done otherwise. Although Ripka co-operated in showing De Long to the

[31] Whidden to Seward, no. 31, 30 July, no. 32, 21 Aug. 1863, Despatches from Ministers to Haiti.
[32] De Long to Conard, no. 4, 27 July, in Whidden to Seward, no. 32, 21 Aug. 1863, Despatches from Ministers to Haiti; *Semi-Centennial Register of the Members of the Phi Kappa Sigma Fraternity* (Philadelphia, 1900), 5; Wilson to Usher, 31 Oct. 1863, DC.

colonists' poor accommodation on his first visit, the consul did not have favourable things to say about him in return. They had actually both arrived at Aux Cayes in June – only, Ripka proceeded immediately to Île à Vache where De Long did not – and the latter alleged that the agent had returned to Aux Cayes two weeks later and threatened to use his influence to remove him if he reported details of the colony to Washington. When De Long asked him why he had not exercised his right to relieve Kock immediately, Ripka cryptically replied that the time was not yet right, making him at least tacitly complicit in two months' worth of abuse, in De Long's opinion. Uniquely amongst those involved in the business, over the lifespan of the project, Ripka returned to the United States then to the island once more, reporting to the administration as well as to his employers during his trip home. During Kock's absence from the island on a trip to Port-au-Prince, Ripka had placed Brown, Ross and Co. in control. Ross had been friendly to Kock, but now evicted him from the island, allegedly for his extravagance rather than his poor treatment of the settlers, and administered the island himself whilst Ripka was away. Once again, the prospect of gain corrupted the management, with Ross starting work on a Potemkin village at Ripka's instigation, and even imprisoning one James Locker for disobeying an overseer. As a disaffected superintendent put it, Brown, Ross and Co. 'at first, sustained Kock, in all his villainy, now they have condemned his whole conduct, and still they are now doing the same thing as heretofore when Kock had charge of the island.'[33]

By the time of Ripka's arrival in the US, all parties were on tenterhooks and desperate for further information, Usher having just drafted a message to Raymond containing the rather incriminating comment that he had expected to hear some suggestions from the newspaperman already. Raymond replied that Ripka had just returned with a more credible and encouraging account than De Long's, but suggested

[33] De Long to Donnohue, 26 Jan. 1864, DC; De Long to Usher, 28 Dec. 1863, DLC; Tuckerman to Usher, 18 Apr. 1864, FTC; affidavit of W. Skinner certified by De Long, 24 Sept. 1863, in Whidden to Seward, no. 39, 3 Oct. 1863, Despatches from Ministers to Haiti.

that all three of them confer on whether to press for the appointment of a government agent. It seems likely that Ripka projected at least an aura of credibility, even if he also claimed that the settlers' circumstances were infinitely better than they had been back home, for Usher now offered him the role of government agent, which he felt it proper to decline. Ripka also had an interesting interview with Seward, who offered some valuable suggestions and acknowledged the difficult position in which the contract's diplomatic stipulations had left the investors. Though Raymond had an alternative recommendation for the new vacancy of special agent, the interior secretary selected his former law partner from Indiana, D.C. Donnohue, whom the Department had entrusted with a sensitive mission to obtain cotton seed from the South the previous year. Apparently the plan was for both Ripka and Donnohue to catch a 20 October steamer from New York to Port-au-Prince, but the latter ultimately failed to secure passage and had to sail out one month later.[34]

At this point, a New York shipper familiar with Haiti from trade, one Allston Wilson, turned up out of the blue to offer a report on the status of the colony. He claimed no more interest in the project than a recent visit, the details of which might help enlighten the administration. His was a lengthy and balanced account, replete with both positive and negative notes, but ultimately weighted towards the former and imbued with an optimism that prosperity was just around the corner. It was true that Kock had not kept many of his promises, that he had built some of the central facilities before proper accommodation for the settlers, that there were alligators in a handful of places, and that the jiggers were a painful problem. But there was a new village planned for the interior of the island, on light savannah that stood safely above the swamps and contained some of the best soil in the world. Although the first plantings of cotton and

[34] Usher to Raymond, 18 Sept. 1863, letters sent, STNC; Raymond to Usher, 21 Sept. (twice), 9 Oct. 1863, JPU; Tuckerman to Usher, 17 Oct., 20 Oct. 1863, 9 Jan. 1864, FTC; *SED 55*, 34-6, 36-8, 39; T.R. Strobridge, 'Letters of D.C. Donnohue, Special Agent for the Procuring of Cotton Seed', *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 21 (Dec. 1962), 379-86; A.A. Ripka to Usher, 3 Oct. 1863, miscellaneous communications, STNC.

corn had not come up for want of rain, Wilson claimed, he had seen twenty to thirty acres of crops spring up from more recent precipitation. 'I heard many express a wish to be back to old Virginia, whilst the experience of others caused them to be thankful that they were free and out of harm's way', as he described the settlers' diverse attitudes. 'The success or failure of the colony depends entirely upon the future good or bad management, if those interested would give intelligent attention … in the course of the next six months there would be an important change manifested.' In a similar vein, the *New York Times* acknowledged earlier reports that there had been some cases of disease on landing, but added that there had not been any further examples, whilst pointedly reminding its readers that 'this colonization was undertaken by an association of several gentlemen here in order to assist the Government in carrying out its then avowed policy.' Indeed, Raymond continued to actively involve himself in the affair, likely securing an interview with Lincoln around mid-December.[35]

Nevertheless, the sooner that Donnohue could report from the island, the better. Usher had thanked Wilson for his useful and encouraging account, whilst Donnohue also conferred with the businessman shortly before his own departure. He was impressed by Wilson's apparent wealth of knowledge, and came away with the sense that above all, it was Kock who was to blame for what had gone wrong: 'I rather expect that he is a very bad man.' Whilst expressing hopes that the colonists would yet manage to support themselves, Usher now warned Donnohue that the contractors might pull out soon, and authorized him to draw upon the Department to provide for the settlers' needs as he saw fit. The agent sailed for Port-au-Prince on 20 November on the same vessel as the newly minted Consul-General Roumain, but Usher reiterated his instructions to

[35] Wilson to Seward, 23 Oct. 1863, miscellaneous communications, STNC; E. Haight to Seward, 22 Oct. 1863, Wilson to Usher, 31 Oct. 1863, DC; 'The Experimental Black Colony', *New York Times*, 19 Oct. 1863; Seward to Lincoln, 15 Dec. 1863, AL.

Donnohue when – as feared – Leonard Jerome crawled out of the woodwork to threaten abandonment of the emigrants.[36]

For his part, Donnohue wasted no time in filing reports, and even penned preliminary missives from Port-au-Prince before moving on to the island. He had already caught up with Ripka there, who admitted that he was in the capital trying to fulfil the contractors' instructions to either sell their interest in the colony, or failing that, abandon it altogether. Along with Whidden, they spent several days discussing what to do with an anomalous category of people who had, after all, sworn to relinquish a US citizenship that they did not even hold for Haitian, and who therefore came closest to any kind of American jurisdiction whatsoever as commodities in a private concern's contract. The Haitian government would not let Ripka send the emigrants to the mainland, or to transfer the investors' interest in the settlement to other parties where such a measure placed black labourers under white control, though it was intrigued by Ripka's offer to sell the colony to the government itself for 15,000 Spanish dollars; indeed, it was intimated that President Geffrard was keen to acquire workers for his estate. Donnohue and Whidden urged Ripka to reconsider, arguing that the authorities would ship the settlers to the mainland and treat them like slaves, and he agreed that the New Yorkers 'certainly could have no right to sell a people who had already received great injustice at their hands'.[37]

However mixed his earlier assessment of the colony's prospects, Ripka now admitted that it was a lost cause. There was not enough growing on the island to support even one man, and he had tried to plant cotton no fewer than six times, without success. Ripka confessed that the colonists 'without one single exception' wanted to go home and join the army, and even that they had expressed a preference for being sold into slavery in the US than staying where they were. He acknowledged that '[b]lame and censure

[36] Donnohue to Usher, 20 Nov. 1863, JPU; *SED 55*, 39-42. Usher drafted an even fierier reply to Jerome than that ultimately sent. (Usher to Jerome, 14 Dec. 1863, FTC.)
[37] Tuckerman to Usher, 9 Jan. 1864, FTC; Donnohue to Usher, 5 Dec. 1863, DC.

must rest on some one – but I trust that I shall not come in for more than my fair share of the odium', and claimed to have taken a severe blow himself in rescuing a settler from a Haitian soldier's beating. Ripka agreed to hand control over to Donnohue on the grounds of the greater diplomatic clout that the agent's status would confer in dealings with the authorities. The two men then attended a dinner hosted by Whidden that included the inquisitive British minister and, awkwardly enough, an unwelcome Bernard Kock, who boasted of putting settlers in the stocks for up to sixty hours, and who was apparently making alarming headway in lobbying the Haitian government to be placed in charge of the island once more. Ripka left for the United States by steamer on 8 December, likely on the same vessel carrying Donnohue's despatches to Usher. Officially, the agent reported that Allston Wilson's statement had been 'nothing more or less than a well devised tissue of falshoods', a ruse intended to make the administration pay up by genuinely acknowledging some of the failings of the venture, especially those that could be attributed to teething troubles and to Kock's personal management, whilst inventing optimistic tales of latterly flourishing crops. Privately, Donnohue also wrote to the chief clerk at the Interior Department to state that 'none but an idiot or someone engrossed with avarice could believe' Kock, that the company's efforts to sell the colony were tantamount to 'selling *niggers* at whole sale', and that the government should recall the settlers. He had not felt at liberty to write this to Usher and have the letter put on record, but told the clerk to show it to the interior secretary. Whether on the strength of this information alone, or in conjunction with Lincoln and Raymond's recent meeting, Usher was in a position to state the day after receiving Donnohue's despatch, which had arrived late the previous evening, that an immediate recall looked likely.[38]

What Donnohue witnessed when he reached the island itself in mid-December only confirmed the wisdom of such a course of action. Perhaps owing to his specific brief to report on the (non-) fulfilment of the contract in terms reducible to legal arguments,

[38] Ripka to Usher, 9 Jan. 1864, FTC; Donnohue to Usher, 5 Dec., 6 Dec., to H. Kilbourn, 6 Dec. 1863, DC; *SED 55*, 42-3.

first he did some counting, and found a mere 292 on the island and 73 around Aux Cayes, 365 in total, whilst making other enquiries that satisfied him that no more than 420 had ever left Fortress Monroe. Thirty were ill, but mortality had dropped; four more would die under Donnohue's tenure. Receiving a copy from Usher of Jerome's protest, he angrily shot back that it had indeed cost the contractors a great deal of money to reduce the settlers to a state of virtual slavery after more than one hundred of them had served the government in some capacity; to build a house for Kock's 'octoroon' prostitute, whilst the colonists went without; and to print thousands of dollars in worthless currency, in whose imposition as wages Ripka had been perfectly complicit. It would seem that Kock had enjoyed some success in his lobbying at Port-au-Prince, because early in January 1864, he had the temerity to show up on Île à Vache once more, but had not walked one hundred and fifty yards 'among his people' when he started to encounter danger. He shrieked that they wanted to kill him, and so Donnohue, drily remarking that they merely wanted to embrace him, arranged for Kock to get the first steamer out and finally leave for good.[39]

There were still parties other than Kock for Donnohue to contend with. First, there was Brown and Ross, who tried to ingratiate themselves with the agent by offering him use of Brown's house whilst still in Aux Cayes, which he wisely refused in favour of staying with De Long. Ross variously tried to influence and overreach Donnohue in order to regain control of the colony, but Donnohue was not impressed by the man who had 'certified that villainous lie', and even less so when Ross attempted to drive a group of settlers from their sight who had done nothing more than crowd them both in the manner that one might expect.[40]

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[39] *SED 55*, 36; Donnohue to Usher, 3 Jan. (twice), 23 Feb. 1864, DC. In a report made immediately on his return to the US, Donnohue would modify these figures to 378 survivors present at the time of his arrival on the island from an original total of 431, the rest having died or returned to the United States of their own accord. He reckoned the latter to be just eight in number. (Donnohue to Usher, 26 Mar. 1864, FTC.)

[40] De Long to Usher, 28 Dec. 1863, DLC; Donnohue to Usher, 5 Jan. 1864, DC.

The second challenge for Donnohue was De Long, who had initially expressed his delight to Usher that there was finally a rare example of a disinterested white now in control. The sentiment was not reciprocated, however. Whilst Donnohue contradicted nothing of the consul's earlier reports, he confessed to finding him more difficult than all the emigrants put together, and was 'certain that he does not deserve any credit for the information furnished the Govt concerning the colony – as he did so more from spite growing out of his own failure to obtain a colony himself, than from a disposition to serve the ends of justice'. Indeed it was not just a case of gratuitous revenge, for De Long continued to present himself to the settlers as their only friend and protector in order to win them over to his own scheme, spuriously citing instructions from Washington that could not have applied to people who had become Haitian citizens anyway. De Long challenged Donnohue's control over expenditure on the emigrants, and was resentful of his efforts to find them work on the mainland whilst himself locked in some kind of ongoing quarrel with the Haitian authorities about the Redpath emigrants. Indeed, he vexed local government as much as he did Donnohue, formally protesting legitimate arrests for theft, inspiring a general breakdown in law and order, and going so far as to invoke the historic fate of the French in Haiti to undermine the two whites left other than Donnohue, an old boatman from New York and a doctor who had both done only good for the settlers. On one occasion, De Long struck the boatman in the mouth, and on another, flourished his stick above Donnohue's head, as though about to hit him, when someone else managed to disarm him. According to a later brief from Forbes and Tuckerman, Donnohue described De Long as a '"G – D – Liar"' and had ascertained to his satisfaction that the consul wanted to sell two or three hundred settlers at $10 each to a resident of Haiti. In the end, Donnohue had to present the emigrants with the stark choice of either following his advice or De Long's contradictory orders, and said that he would leave if they chose the latter. Although the National Archives' holdings on Île à Vache record far more of the contractors' representations than the administration's

replies to the same, it is nevertheless worth noting that the government never challenged any of the allegations that they made against De Long. Indeed, the contents of a contemporary letter from Donnohue in the Usher papers, and a despatch from De Long himself to Whidden, expressing the avowed opinion that there were no trustworthy whites on the island, seem to corroborate such accusations.[41]

The third difficulty for Donnohue was the Haitian authorities. Fabre, Roumain, and several of the foreign consuls came to Île à Vache early in the New Year, accompanied by unnamed English-speaking black figures, to encourage the settlers to join farms on the mainland. Although Geffrard had told Donnohue that he could spend as much time as he needed, the agent was astonished to find the government now averse to the emigrants remaining on the island even long enough for Washington to make alternative arrangements for them. It is possible that, in addition to looking to the settlers' labour, Haiti wanted to remove, in a most literal sense, a situation that was rapidly turning into potential grounds for US intervention and perhaps seizure. If so, its fears may not have been entirely unfounded: citing the same need for a Caribbean coal depot that had given rise to the Chiriquí project, Donnohue told Usher that he 'could establish one here in the best harbor in the world for about the expense of bringing a man of war down here and making these Haytians know that they could not take these people by the dozen to the mainland and treat them like brutes. A score of such islands would not compensate for the outrages they have perpetrated on our contrabands.' Rather conflictingly, Donnohue advised the settlers to depart when Roumain offered to take them to Port-au-Prince on the government steamer, but all of them expressed a desire to return to the US.[42]

Indeed, vested with no more powers than to materially provide for the settlers, and apparently afflicted by a streak of inconsistency that must thwart any scholarly

[41] De Long to Whidden, no. 3, 13 Oct. '1864' [1863], Despatches from Ministers to Haiti; De Long to Usher, 28 Dec. 1863, DLC; Donnohue to Usher, 2 Feb. 1864, JPU; Tuckerman to Usher, 18 Apr., to Seward, 19 Sept. 1864, FTC; Tuckerman, *Papers*, 6-14.
[42] Donnohue to Usher, 3 Jan., 5 Jan. (second letter) 1864, DC; Bancroft, 252.

attempt to summarize his findings, Donnohue continued to make contradictory sounds on the wisdom of the colonists' removal to the mainland as opposed to their return to the United States. In early February, he officially reported his hostility to the idea of local dispersal, following consultation with some of the remaining Redpath emigrants, notably Louisianans who had fared better than most through their superior means, but in a private letter to Usher of the same date he seemed amenable to the idea of settlers taking at least temporary work in Aux Cayes. By the end of the month, Donnohue had warmed again to the notion of their going to the mainland. The Haitian authorities had become more helpful and promised not to molest the settlers, whom Donnohue thought demoralized from lack of work. Their continued drain on government funds also agitated him, even as he lamented their previous maltreatment. Another positive note was that about twenty acres of cotton had suddenly started maturing, much along the lines of Wilson's earlier (but at that time false, or at least premature) claim, again confounding Donnohue's initial reports that the island was barren. In fact the emigrants wanted to arrange for ten or so of their number to be allowed to stay behind and pick it once the others had returned to the US, which now looked like the probable end to their saga.[43]

Indeed it was: unbeknownst to the settlers, Washington had already made such moves. By late January, the administration was on edge from the delayed arrival at New York of the Port-au-Prince steamer, for it knew that a relatively quick turnaround time would force it to decide quickly on the instructions that were to be sent back with the ship. The letters that duly arrived from Donnohue were those he had penned early that month, before more upbeat notes started to appear in his reports. Consequently, Usher replied that he would advise Lincoln to recall the expedition immediately, and in the meantime, asked for a meeting with Seward too. On 1 February, Lincoln and Usher both

[43] Wilson to Usher, 31 Oct. 1863, Donnohue to Usher, 5 Jan. (second letter), 16 Jan. (first letter), 2 Feb., 23 Feb. 1864, DC; Donnohue to Usher, 2 Feb. 1864, JPU; De Long to Whidden, no. 9, 18 Jan. 1864, Despatches from Ministers to Haiti.

wrote to Edwin Stanton asking him to order a transport vessel. The president added that only those who desired to leave should be collected, and that they were to be brought back to Washington to be cared for in the same kind of contraband camp that had caused them sufficient misery to want to emigrate in the first place. In turn, the secretary of war confidentially asked Montgomery Meigs to name a reliable man.[44]

The quartermaster general promptly instructed Major Stewart Van Vliet to hold the clipper *Marcia C. Day* at New York, pending the arrival of Assistant Quartermaster Edward Hartz, whose previous orders to go to Chattanooga were now suspended in favour of leading the rescue mission. Meigs recommended the addition of a surgeon and 20 men of the Invalid Corps; Usher, the inclusion of 365 sets of clothes of various sizes, after learning from Donnohue that some settlers were still wearing their tattered surplus army uniforms; and they both agreed that secrecy was to be the leitmotif of the expedition. Meigs ordered Hartz to sail as though for Aspinwall via the Windward Passage to pick up 500 men bound for Boston, and only to open his sealed orders at 20˚N, the very existence of which he was not even to reveal to the rest of the crew until reaching 26˚N. Similarly, Usher briefed Donnohue with the suggestion 'that no more publicity be given to the movement in contemplation than may be unavoidable.'[45]

Despite a delayed departure, some contrary winds, and an unfortunate incident whereby the men of the Invalid Corps lived up to their name by coming down with gastroenteritis contracted from cooking with tropical seawater, the voyage went passably well, with a spot of dolphin-harpooning providing a welcome break from the monotony of it all. Hartz was cautious about the unsurveyed waters near the island and asked De Long at Aux Cayes for a pilot, but Donnohue beat him to it, having noticed the vessel from the island, and sent out Capt. Conklin, the boatman who had been one of the objects of De Long's irascibility. 'My anxiety on the subject of an early return home I

[44] *SED 55*, 43-5; Usher to Seward, 22 Jan. 1864, WHS; *CW*, vii, 165-6; *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* (4 sers., 70 vols., Washington, 1880-1901), ser. iii, vol. iv, 75.
[45] *Official Records*, ser. iii, vol. iv, 76-7; *SED 55*, 46-8; Donnohue to Usher, 3 Jan. 1864, DC; M.C. Meigs to Hartz, 4 Feb. 1864, Edward L. Hartz Papers, Duke University.

hope will be a sufficient apology for any haste to learn your mission', wrote an expectant Donnohue. On 29 February, Hartz ordered the anchor to be dropped about one mile from the island, and paid a visit to Aux Cayes after discovering that some of the settlers had gone to work in that port. He received a cordial welcome from Brown, Ross and Co. and the Haitian authorities, but, true to form, De Long found ample cause to complain. Expecting Hartz and Donnohue for dinner, the consul was 'at a loss to understand how an Officer of the US Army, commanding a US Transport Ship on special mission to this Govt., before communicating with the US Consul, should go and dine with parties enemies to our country and who are opposed to the mission you are about to fulfill.' In an 'act of humanity' that may have represented a repudiation of his earlier plans – a damascene conversion that he had, after all, claimed to have undergone in a despatch to Seward the previous October – De Long asked that Hartz exercise his discretion and also take forty or fifty suffering and impoverished Redpath emigrants who had come to Aux Cayes. Entertaining a belief 'that it was my duty to offer all the assistance in my power to those whose experimental voluntary expatriation had not yet rendered them the less citizens of our country', Hartz cheerfully complied, although De Long sailed out with them anyway. After a false start from getting stuck on a reef and having to summon two other captains to survey the damage, as per maritime rules, the *Marcia C. Day* set sail on 5 March. Even for the rescue mission there are conflicting reports on the numbers involved: a list in one set of Hartz's papers counted 368 Île à Vache and 39 Redpath returnees to make a total of 407, whilst a similar document in another set offered the figures 364, 28, and 392 respectively. The ship left behind some on the Haitian mainland who were doing well for themselves, though some others were imprisoned shortly after its departure, owing to an allegation of theft.[46]

[46] Edward L. Hartz Diary, LC; Donnohue to 'Commander of the Ship', 28 Feb., Hartz to 'US Consul at Aux Cayes', 28 Feb., De Long to Hartz (twice), 1 Mar. 1864, Hartz Papers; Whidden to Loring, 12 Mar., Loring to Whidden, 8 Mar., 15 Mar. 1864, Despatches from Ministers to Haiti.

What was perhaps more important than their inevitably elusive number was the condition of the passengers, who, according to Hartz's diary, 'were abundantly fed, comfortably clothed, and presented every appearance of contentment, and satisfaction at their altered condition and future prospects.' The ship anchored at Alexandria on 20 March, where it was visible from the White House. Its passengers disembarked shortly afterwards for Arlington's Freedmen's Village, and once the clipper had been emptied, Hartz sent it on to Philadelphia. A Massachusetts military recruiter deemed the repatriated African Americans 'the best looking lot of "darks" he has ever seen together', testament not only to their improved condition but presumably also to the proportion of young men in the company. He and a colleague even approached the War Department to ask about chartering a vessel to take them all to the Bay State, something to which the men were amenable, provided that their wives and children might accompany them. One newspaper recorded an eventual result of nearly one company's worth, which the Richmond *Daily Examiner* lambasted as an example of 'military miscegenation', in light of Massachusetts's concurrent recruitment efforts in Europe.[47]

The settlers' return finally offered some elucidation for a press that had hitherto subsisted on mere morsels of information, although even now, there was much confusion in evidence. One paper reported that the rescue had been pursuant to a cabinet discussion, which seems unlikely. In a common mistake that was to recur long after the war in personal memoirs and the occasional newspaper retrospective, many conflated the expedition with the Chiriquí venture, and even supposed Pomeroy's involvement. This error reflected the administration's silence on colonization since late 1862, a fact that in turn must cast the gravest of doubts on the 'lullaby' thesis. Opinion only ran along partisan lines insofar as the Democratic press was in a better position to mock the administration unequivocally, for many Republicans were appalled too, whilst

[47] Hartz Diary; C.C. Gibbs to Andrew, 22 Mar., T. Drew to Andrew, 24 Mar. 1864, John A. Andrew Papers, LC; 'Washington Specials', *The Daily Palladium*, 22 Apr. 1864; 'What Has Massachusetts Done in this War', Richmond *Daily Examiner*, 17 May 1864.

the tone of abolitionist commentary was one of grim vindication. 'The Democrats at the time pointed out the fallacy of the movement, but, as everything else where they do not chime in with the ideas of our masters, they were declared "*disloyal*"', crowed the *Lancaster Intelligencer*. Horace Greeley's *New-York Tribune*, though hopeful that recent events indeed marked the end of colonization, drew attention to the inconsistency of the hypothetical 'Copperhead':

> Being informed that the plan of Colonizing the Freedmen is a partial failure, he bursts into a complacent rupture, and ejaculates the standard formula, "I told you so!" with a renewed relish. But what, pray, would the man have? Is he for the permanent and eternal slavery of the blacks? You cannot get him to say so. Is he for extending equal privileges to the blacks? Not he! Then is he for Colonization? Why, he is especially delighted when a small Colonization enterprise promises not to succeed very well.

Some papers took exception to others' pronouncements that the outcome spelled the end of 'colonization', but as much out of hair-splitting semantics about the word's reference to the general movement of peoples as insightful commentary on a specific federal policy. Tellingly, the *New York Times* protested too much, scoffing at reports that Raymond had been interested in the venture, only to simultaneously betray him by vehemently damning the secretary of the interior: '[h]ow much [Usher] … managed matters as to secure the defeat of the scheme, which he professed to be aiding, he does not state. It would be well, however, for individuals who may feel inclined hereafter to second and aid the supposed wishes of the Government ... first to ascertain, if possible whether, the Government really wishes its professed policy to succeed'.[48]

Unsurprisingly, there is virtually nothing in the way of private opinions as recorded in manuscript collections on a matter that had been so poorly reported in the press to start with. It seems possible that, as events unfolded during 1863, the fiasco

[48] 'Colonization Matters', *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 19 Mar.; 'Colonization in Chiriqui – The Negroes to Return', *Boston Daily Advertiser,* 18 Mar.; 'The Crusade Against Color', *The Independent*, 31 Mar.; 'Colonization Exploded', *The Liberator*, 1 Apr.; 'One of the pet nigger schemes…', *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 16 Feb.; report of *New-York Tribune*, 25 Mar., reprinted in San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*, 2 May; 'An Absurd Opinion', *Daily National Intelligencer*, 22 Mar.; 'Jumping at a Conclusion', *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, 23 Mar.; 'The Government and Colonization', *New York Times*, 23 Mar. 1864.

became an open secret in certain circles in Washington, as Lyons's report of July would imply, though even the office of the American Colonization Society – located just off Pennsylvania Avenue – had not been much the wiser. 'I have said to Mr Hay that biographers of Mr Lincoln avoid the subject of Mr Lincoln's great unpopularity with Congress in 1863 or about that period', later recalled Edward Pierce, organizer of the Port Royal experiment; 'I was myself at the time greatly disgusted with his scheme for the transporting the [sic] negro population out of the country – which was the subject of the *Ile À Vache* expedition under Senator Pomeroys patronage. He was at the time as strong with the people as ever, but few MC's spoke well of him.' Another idealist working amongst freed slaves, albeit one writing back in 1864 and in anticipation of the settlers' imminent return, confided to Mrs Seward that she 'never could understand how a mind having the least idea of means and ends and that could put two and two together, could seriously consider [colonization]. This side of father Abraham's character always disgusted me, it seemed silly.' Congress did not delay in acting on a similar sentiment: on 15 March, about a week before the *Marcia C. Day* docked, Sen. Morton Wilkinson (R-Minn.) introduced a bill to repeal all acts making appropriations for colonization. It went to the Committee on Territories, which subsequently recommended that it pass, and in early May, Wilkinson asked his fellow senators to join him in condemning the 'hazardous and disgraceful' results of administration colonization policy by voting the funds out of existence. Given various developments surrounding the progress of that resolution, however, it is more properly a matter for the next chapter.[49]

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[49]D.L. Wilson et al., *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana, Ill., 1998), 678; E. Howland to F.A. Seward, 22 Mar. 1864, WHS; *CG* 38:1, 1108, 2218. In October 1862, the ACS had reported hearing rumours that the Pomeroy expedition was to be turned to Haiti, but wondered if it was bound for Navassa, an uninhabited guano-rich island of two square miles that the Buchanan administration had recently contested with Haiti. ACS enquiries the next spring uncovered only De Long's plans and the documents that the consul would have to get Haiti to sign; Mitchell told the Society's officers that Seward meant his template contract to apply to all who offered a colonization scheme, but Usher suggested that the secretary of state did not want it to extend to the ACS. The Society managed to obtain a copy of the Forbes-Tuckerman contract, but knew nothing more than did the general public until the expedition returned the next year. The debacle had mixed implications for the ACS: one state secretary reported that the public were already confusing the venture with the work of the Society, but he

Perhaps the most striking legacy of the Île à Vache expedition is visible on a map. Just as Haiti in general has undergone a transformation from struggling to replace its revolutionary losses to suffering from severe overpopulation, so the once uninhabited Cow Island is now home to ten or fifteen thousand residents, the land tamed since Bernard Kock's day, even if not utterly deforested like the mainland. Indeed, one can find hotels with first-world amenities for people on sailing trips who have heard of the island's natural beauty, and who are able to look past the name of Haiti to appreciate that Île à Vache sits in isolation from some of the risks associated with the rest of the country. Even then, the luxurious facilities of the secluded bays of the north-western part of the Île do not lie far from humanitarian missions to provide safe water and basic education to the inhabitants.

It would be fair to imagine that there would be no trace whatsoever on the island of the expedition of 1863-4. Brown, Ross and Co. had not even waited for the emigrants' departure before starting to make arrangements to strip the settlement of its materials, which would have been too flimsy and perishable to survive for long anyway, and quibbled with Whidden and the Haitian authorities as to what counted as immovable and what as movable. The company even argued for the few proper buildings in the complex to come under the category of personalty rather than realty, the latter of which the government of Haiti alone claimed, since they could be lifted off their pillars. In a final act of cupidity, Brown and Ross held an auction on the quiet to sell off only the trash from the site, whilst holding back the best material for private disposal at a later

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and another hoped to turn the fiasco of 'political' colonization to the advantage of the African colonization movement. (J. Tracy to R.R. Gurley, 31 Oct. 1862, ACS 93; F. Butler to W. Coppinger, 30 Mar., to W. McLain, 1 Apr. 1864, ACS 95; McLain to J. Hall, 2 Apr., 3 Apr. 1863, to Butler, 4 Apr. 1864, ACS 204; Coppinger to Butler, 5 Apr. 1864, ACS 209; copy of contract, 27 Apr. 1863, ACS 177B.)

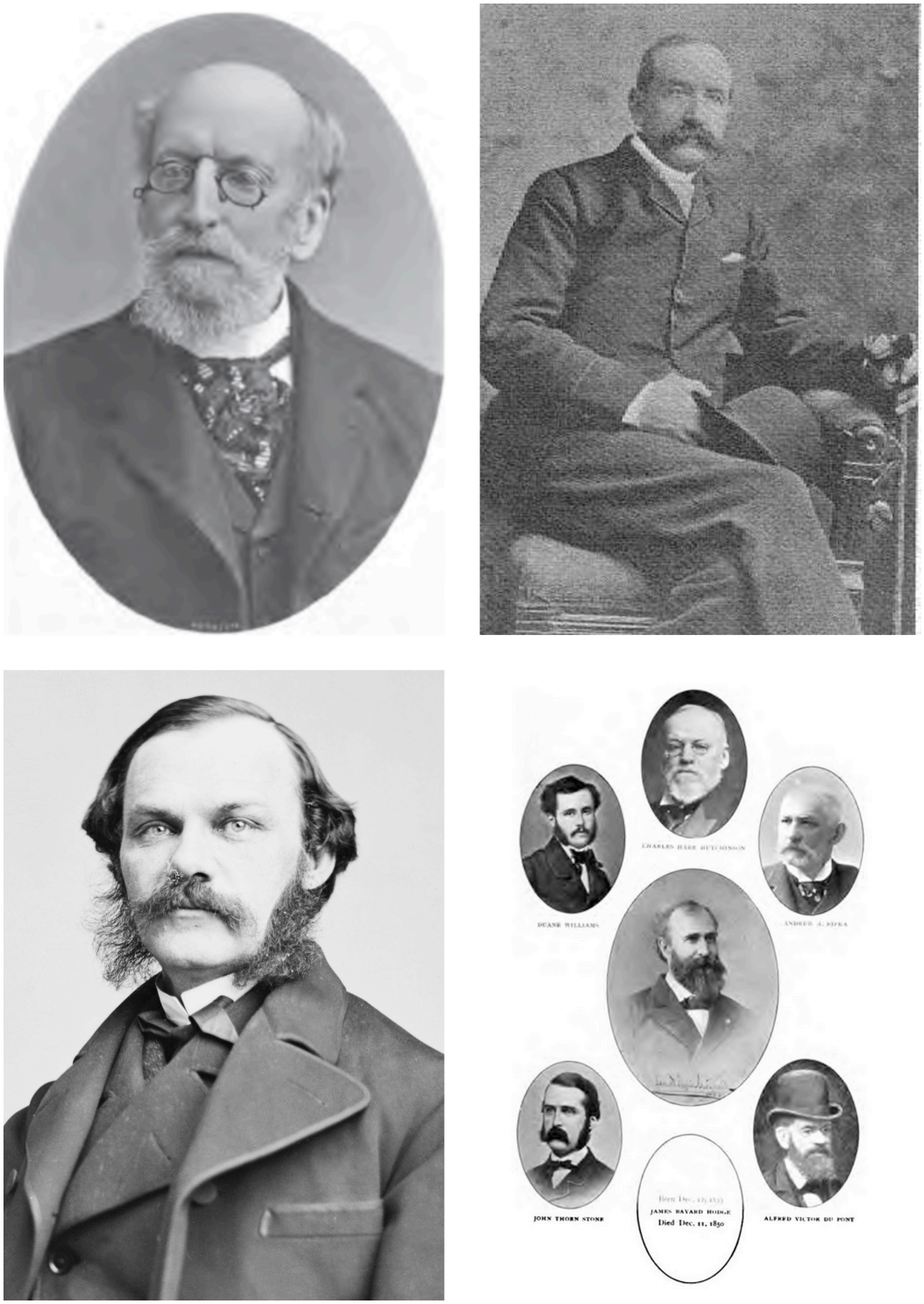
date, in order that they might line their own pockets rather than realize a decent partial refund for the contractors for whom they were supposedly working.[50]

Yet the events that took place on Île à Vache do live on, but in one, perhaps two instances of local nomenclature, rather than in the form of physical remains. On the north coast, there is both the village of Mme. Bernard and Cacor, whose more common variant of Caille Coq, Kakok or even KaKock in Haitian Creole, immediately betrays its origins.[51]

[50] Brown, Ross and Co. to Whidden, 12 Jan., 26 Jan., 18 Feb., 1 Mar., 8 Mar., 12 Mar., 22 Mar., Whidden to Brown, Ross and Co., 30 Jan., 4 Mar., 18 Mar., 9 Apr., Loring to Whidden, 29 Mar., Whidden to A. Elie, 24 Feb., Elie to Whidden, 4 Mar. 1864, Despatches from Ministers to Haiti.
[51] [http://www.lescayes.8m.com/kakoc.html] (2 Apr. 2012)



James De Long, US Consul at Aux Cayes, photographed at his previous posting of Tangier. (Collection of Dr Philip Abensur, Paris.)



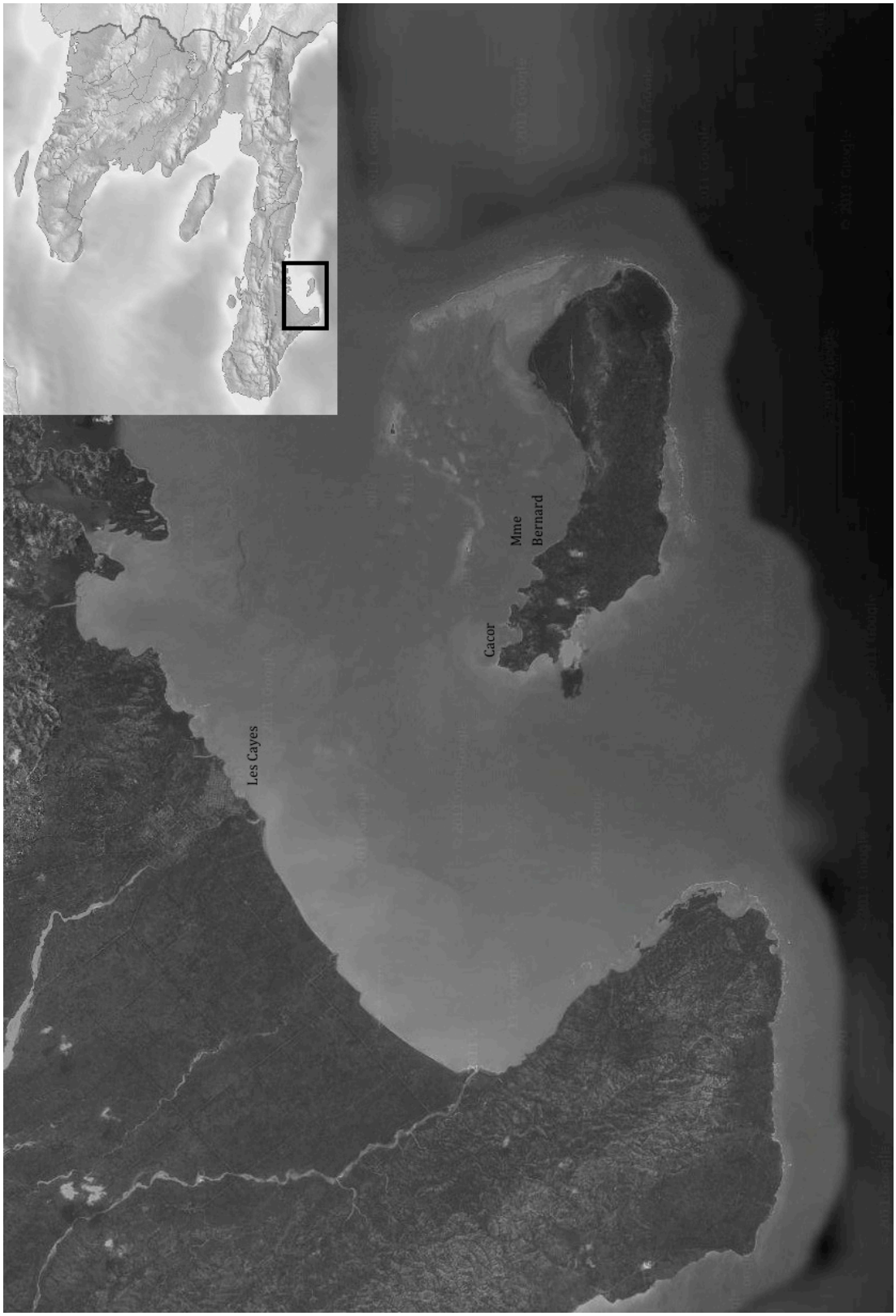
Figures involved in the Île à Vache scheme. Clockwise from top left*: Charles K. Tuckerman, Leonard W. Jerome, Andrew A. Ripka (top right of subset of photos), and the highly suspect Henry J. Raymond. Tuckerman and Ripka are shown significantly later in life.*

(Tuckerman, Personal Recollections of Notable People at Home and Abroad *(2 vols., London, 1895),i, frontispiece; W.H.P. Robertson,* The History of Thoroughbred Racing in America *(Englewood Cliffs, 1964*); Semi-Centennial Register of the Members of the Phi Kappa Sigma Fraternity *(Philadelphia, 1900), preface; Prints and Photographs Division, LC.)*





Bernard Kock's personal currency. (Stack's Bowers Galleries.)


Les Cayes
Cacor
Mme
Bernard

Previous page:

The immediate surroundings of Île à Vache and its location within Haiti, based on a map with modern administrative boundaries and satellite images of terrain that is now far less wooded than in the mid-nineteenth century. Our main description of the settlement's location comes from the thorough but troubling report of Allston Wilson, who despite trying to underplay other problems, actually criticized Kock's choice of site – and thus appears not to have been lying about an issue that was hardly worth misrepresenting anyway, given how easily someone else might contradict him. He enclosed explanatory maps with his brief, but these have become detached and are now lost.

Kock named his settlement Port St Minna (his daughter was called Elise Minna), which other sources explicitly place on the deep and sheltered Baie Ferret. As such, it appears to correspond to Cacor (Kakok) and not to Madame Bernard; since Kock's (deceased) wife had a name other than Minna, the name of the latter settlement would appear to take only tangential inspiration from Kock's colonization efforts. For his part, Wilson described the village as standing on the narrow beach of a large bay opening to the north and lying south-east of Aux Cayes. Confusingly, he compared the depth of its water and accessibility favourably to the rocky bays and higher terrain of the island's northwest, even though the Baie itself is quite near its north-western tip, and he reckoned that Kock had managed to place smallpox victims in isolation over a mile leeward (that is to say, towards the northwest) from the general landing site. On the other hand, the Baie fits with Wilson's criticism that Kock had placed the settlers too far to the northwest from the decent cultivable land of the island.

Wilson explained that good information on the island's topography was impossible to obtain, but also that Kock had never previously been to the island, choosing to site the village where he had landed. The settlement was close to some small swamps, but Wilson reckoned that rich, gently undulating savannah started about a mile into the middle of the island and thence to the east. He made the claim that a new village had been planned for this higher ground and that the settlers were hacking crop clearings and roads through the dense woods, which Donnohue – perhaps just repeating this aspect of Wilson's report with a negative slant – reported as a waste of effort, since it would have been unnecessary on other parts of the island.

(Wilson to Usher, 31 Oct. 1863, DC; Donnohue to Usher, 26 Mar. 1864, FTC.)

The contractual dispute

Long before the Île à Vache expedition had even returned, a major dispute between the contractors and the administration was well underway. It was yet to peak, pending Donnohue's report, and would in fact drag on for years through the persistence of Charles Tuckerman, who was not that wealthy and thus stood to lose the most of anyone, despite holding a rather small stake. Yet heated debate commenced no later than the summer of 1863, with the arrival of the first negative reports from the island, and in the wake of the contractors' incontestable failure to obtain Haitian assent to Seward's demands. That being the case, the dispute was far from a side issue, and even explains a large part of what went wrong, as the administration and contractors each rushed to assumptions of bad faith on the other's part, and thereby anticipated, from an alarmingly early date, the investors' likely withdrawal. Indeed, there was something horribly self-fulfilling about the outcome of a venture that had not even started on an especially positive note, with the New York syndicate effectively locked by heavy expenditure into seeing through an original contract that they did not know the government had placed on ice, hence an almost immediate loss of confidence and the contractors' rushed decision to cut their losses when the project encountered hiccups.

Whilst it is not the historian's job to act as judge and to apportion blame for its own sake, studying the dispute may provide a window onto the dysfunction involved in the Lincoln administration's colonization policy by 1863, especially where it came under two departments as well as the office of the president itself. Even if it did not raise the full range of diplomatic issues as either the Chiriquí or 'imperial' projects, the Île à Vache venture echoed the former, in that a contract administered through the Interior Department again started to impinge on matters that properly pertained to the State Department. Once more, American contractors claimed to be able to speak for a Caribbean state in making arrangements that were actually unacceptable to that

government for placing settlers in a privileged position over its own citizens, albeit neither for introducing immigrants *per se* – whom, in principle, the whole region welcomed in order to address chronic labour shortages – nor for want of positive, if slightly misconstrued, sounds from the representatives of that country in the United States. Yet if Lincoln seems not to have learnt this lesson between the drafting of the Chiriquí and Île à Vache contracts, or perhaps chose to ignore it out of desperation as his own deadline for emancipation loomed with no colonization scheme securely in the works, he moved swiftly on to diplomatically unimpeachable, direct negotiations with European empires remarkably soon after sending out the Île à Vache expedition. Whilst it is probably too much to expect a rigid 'consistency' where his administration evinced a willingness to experiment with various colonization options, and during a period when the policy was evidently in such flux, the government would nevertheless have to pay the price of its uncertainty as to whether to treat colonization as a domestic or an international matter. That price assumed the form of a protracted dispute that brought with it the scope for substantial political embarrassment.

The first and most obvious point of contention was that of the contractors' inability to secure an official Haitian guarantee of the privileges that Seward had demanded for the settlers, above and beyond naturalization. Although soon dwarfed in importance by tales of the emigrants' suffering, their failure to meet that stipulation provided a legally firm reason to refuse remuneration pending more reliable reports from the island, which were essentially six months away in the form of Donnohue's despatches. In any case, the two problems were linked, as the point of the guarantee had been for Haiti to at least underwrite a minimum quality of life for the settlers, whose mere disembarkation was otherwise all that the contractors would need to prove in order to claim their payout. Portentously, in early July Forbes and Tuckerman applied for payment – and asked that the Haitian guarantee clause be equitably waived – on the same day that Usher warned them that he had heard rumours of the emigrants' distress.

The contractors pre-emptively admitted that they had not managed to get Haiti to sign Seward's blank, and enclosed correspondence from Roumain confirming that no emigrants could expect additional privileges. They argued that since Haiti had administered an act of naturalization, which was the next best thing after preferential treatment that would simply anger the existing population, they should still receive their money.

Indeed, James Mitchell had opened up a characteristically secretive correspondence that spring with the Haitian commissioner, who checked with Port-au-Prince, only to have to confirm that Geffrard and his cabinet hoped for a relaxation of Seward's terms and felt altogether obliged to reject the idea of an enclave of privileged settlers within the boundaries of the republic. Roumain hastened to add that encouraging emigration was still the main goal of Haiti's mission to the United States, and that American financial assistance would help make that country more successful, and thus increase its appeal to the US black population; he even hinted that his government might reconsider the question if certain 'conditions' changed. For his part, Mitchell echoed what he was advocating in his concurrent work on the 'imperial' projects, and pressed Seward for an emigration treaty with Haiti that would aid in 'settling our national policy on the subject'. Nothing came of the suggestion, but in August, the secretary of the US legation at Port-au-Prince did indeed file the naturalization papers to which the contractors had referred, the emigrants having renounced on oath all but Haiti.[52]

Unfortunately for the New York syndicate, and however redolent Haiti's response of the objections that Colombia had sounded the previous autumn about settlers coming to the country on a special footing, the act of naturalization alone was not enough to meet the demands of the contract with the United States. The lines of the

[52] Forbes and Tuckerman to Usher, 7 July 1863, FTC; *SED 55*, 33-4; Mitchell to F.W. Seward, 5 Mar., to W.H. Seward, 15 July, certificate of H. Conard, 28 Aug. 1863, Miscellaneous Letters of the Department of State; F.W. Seward to Mitchell, 6 Mar. 1863, Domestic Letters of the Department of State.

ensuing debate were never to change, in essence: Tuckerman protested that Seward's blank guarantee had been a late and unexpected insertion to a contract that the government had already made with Kock, and that he and Forbes simply happened to be fulfilling, while Usher replied that the only contract of any relevance was that made with Forbes and Tuckerman themselves, one that contained a certain clause as non-negotiable as the rest. 'It is a simple impossibility conflicting with their laws and which no nation has ever agreed to and which our own Govt with regard to Irish or Chinese emigrants would never agree to', argued Tuckerman; 'Mr Seward's proposal is an admirable one, but is simply impracticable in our case and would place the emigrant in a false position.' The secretary of state, perhaps realizing the complications that he had caused, seems to have been personally disposed towards relieving the contractors from their 'perplexing position', even confessing as much to Ripka.

Yet this was to no avail. Despite Seward's input in the drafting of the contract, the document displayed Usher's signature and officially came under the Interior Department's jurisdiction. As early as that October, Tuckerman already wrote of the colony as a failure, and announced his intention to recover whatever assets he could, since payment had failed to materialize on grounds of non-fulfilment. 'Had the Government not clung to the literal carrying out of the clause binding the Haytian Government to do more for these people than they do for their own people', he lamented, 'it might still have gone on, at least, we should have been timely reimbursed for a portion of our vast outlay and possessed the means of prosecuting the enterprise until results are more apparent than they now are.' Ironically, what should have been a protective measure put the settlers at risk as its inevitable result impelled the contractors to abandon them.[53]

Indeed, their dispute with the administration raised the question of which side had been responsible for introducing a further weakness at the outset of the venture:

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[53] Tuckerman to Usher, 29 July, 20 Oct. 1863, 9 Jan. 1864, Forbes to Seward, 19 Feb. 1864, FTC; *SED 55*, 34, 37, 40-1, 43.

the figure of Bernard Kock. From an early day, Tuckerman protested that all he had known was that Kock had an outstanding contract with the US government, from the New Year, that needed to be fulfilled. 'We should never have undertaken it had not the President, before we had anything to do with it, made the contract with Kock', he explained. Tuckerman argued that it was the administration that had manifested undue confidence in the swindler first, withholding at the time whatever unfavourable assessment of him it later purported to have entertained. From his point of view, the government had even misled the contractors by revealing that its investigation into slave-trading allegations had turned up nothing, thus implying a basic level of satisfaction with Kock. In any case, Lincoln had then assured the investors that he wanted the 'experiment' to proceed. Again, Usher countered that Forbes and Tuckerman should have only been concerned with their own contract, and that they seemed to be groping for an 'after-thought to cover losses incurred in an improvident enterprise'.[54]

Neither side comes across that impressively in the government files. For all his meticulously detailed memoranda, Tuckerman never named the actual date from which he had become involved in the business, a suspicious omission, given that we know that Kock was actually on the prowl for investors from late 1862 – that is to say, before Lincoln had signed the original contract. Although Tuckerman could rightly claim that the president had made an arrangement with Kock on 31 December 1862, albeit one lacking the certification of the State Department, he had no credible answer to Usher's charge that he had been duped, and that whatever contract Kock had shown him could not have been transferrable to third parties. Yet the administration was hardly on solid ground, either. It had intimated to Forbes that the original contract itself was essentially fine, save its signatory, and that the government would consider making it with another party, which outwardly hinted that it had at least some confidence in the venture. Tuckerman protested to Seward that he had no idea that the latter had entertained

[54] Tuckerman to Usher, 29 July, 17 Oct. 1863, 18 Apr. 1864, FTC; *SED 55*, 40, 50-1.

misgivings and played a part in repudiating the original contract. On the contrary, the official line of the administration, as expressed in Mitchell's annual report, had been that Kock was a 'practical businessman'. Indeed, Lincoln's belated proclamation cancelling the agreement with Kock only after it had been redrafted with Forbes and Tuckerman seems to attest to either administrative sloppiness, an already guilty conscience, or an attempt to the keep the venture at least open until it could be rearranged with new parties.[55]

Undoubtedly, the murkiest aspect of the debate over apportioning responsibility for Bernard Kock was that the matter actually seems to have come up between Usher and the contractors even during the negotiations. In their first report, shortly before the dispute blew up, Forbes and Tuckerman conspiratorially told Usher that although it was none of the government's business, they still felt it appropriate to at least inform him that they had employed Kock, 'for reasons known to yourself'. The interior secretary was to condemn them the next year for having been willing to overlook 'the aversion with which this man was looked upon', but they shot back that Usher had been perfectly aware at the time that they intended to call on Kock's services.[56]

New details and lines of argument presented themselves to both sides once Donnohue had returned and filed his report, but this only muddied waters already swirling with the cloudiness of retrospective rationalizations based on imperfect, even conflicting information. In April 1864, Usher could finally act on what had clearly been his inclination throughout, and denied Forbes and Tuckerman payment on either contractual or equitable terms. Citing some of the ugliest aspects of Donnohue's report, Usher referred to the apparent use of handcuffs and stocks, and the contractors accordingly deducted them from a total easily accounted for several times over by other expenses, whilst grumbling that the stocks actually belonged to the Haitian authorities

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[55] *SED 55*, 50; Tuckerman to Usher, 18 Apr. 1864, to Seward, 17 Oct. 1863, FTC; Tuckerman, *Statement*, 6; *CW*, vi, 178-9.
[56] Forbes and Tuckerman to Usher, 7 July 1863, 18 Apr. 1864, FTC; *SED 55*, 51.

and that the cuffs had been used only lightly and legitimately. Agreeing with the secretary's low estimation of Kock, they reiterated that his involvement was, above all, the administration's fault, whilst introducing the delicate matter of another troublesome figure, one whose weight lay solely on the anti-government side of the balance: James De Long. Embarrassingly, the previous spring, Usher seems to have let slip personal doubts about the consul in Tuckerman's presence, which allowed the latter to land a powerful counterpunch against the notion that he had acted negligently in permitting Kock to stay on as the manager of the project. 'The character of this De Long was not wholly unknown to you', alleged Tuckerman with reference to the consul's recall from Tangier, '[y]et he was permitted to go out and be the representative of the United States at Aux Cayes – the very place of all others where a little reflection would have convinced you his presence would be dangerous to our interests and to the interests of the colony.' The contractors evidently felt that they had found a particularly exploitable chink in the administration's armour, for by the next year, they had made De Long's role in disturbing the colony their main argument against the United States government.[57]

It is questionable how suited Usher was to the role of defending the administration's involvement in a project that he had never supported, and one undertaken in pursuit of a broader policy that he had by now come to oppose, albeit more out of self-interest than considerations of principle. Whether a reflection on the intemperate bluster of someone who could not be bothered to apply his best lawyerly skills to an unwanted 'case', on a trait of general mediocrity that was to inspire growing calls in Washington for his replacement by someone else, or simply on the knock-on effect of unclear initial information followed by Donnohue's infuriatingly contradictory assessments, Usher certainly handed the contractors some compelling charges of inconsistency on the administration's part.

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[57] *SED 55*, 50-2; Tuckerman to Usher, 18 Apr., to Seward, 7 Sept., 19 Sept. 1864, FTC; Tuckerman, *Papers*, 6-12.

In fairness, both parties had reversed their positions since the previous year. The contractors had initially scoffed at reports that the colony was in trouble, but soon accepted that such was the case, and by early 1864, blamed the government for squandering their resources on a doomed, experimental venture. But Usher's *volte-face* was the more impressive of the two. In October 1863, he had referred to Île à Vache as 'a place which now appears to be so inhospitable that the blacks are in danger of perishing', but inspired by Donnohue's final report, and even drawing on the upbeat notes of Wilson's questionable account, he subsequently argued that 'the enterprise could have been made a success with a moiety of the money you say you expended', had it simply not been for their use of Kock's services. Tuckerman replied that Kock's reign had soon given way to that of Ripka and Brown, Ross and Co, and that even Donnohue had not managed to make the colony work despite three months of trying. That is to say, nobody could plant a settlement there – the soil was matted with roots and infested with vermin, and even the belated cotton spurt was misleading, since good specimens actually ought to have stayed low – and thus there was no reason to single out the contractors as especially incompetent. When Usher added the unsympathetic response of the Haitian people to the American emigrants, and the apparent fact of deep-seated cultural differences, to his contradictory takes on the island's potential, Tuckerman could reply that such an argument only bolstered his own case against the government for ever considering Haitian colonization:

> Will you pardon me sir for saying and I mean no disrespect that your mode of argument to my mind makes ludicrous a very serious matter, for it unavoidably recalls the Irishman's defense when charged with the breaking of a borrowed kettle. 1st that it was never broken – 2d that it was returned in good order – 3d that it was broken when it was borrowed.

On their own, such arguments were more convincing than they were effective, but the contractors were also able to threaten Usher, Seward, and Lincoln with revealing details to a wider audience of what had transpired in their negotiations. Tuckerman had aired this option as early as October 1863, but his warnings reached a crescendo early the

next year, when he summarized his case in a pamphlet that he had printed, in the first instance – as he explained – for ease of perusal, but with a view to circulating it if necessary.[58]

Having heard that Seward was keener than Usher to adjust the matter equitably, he and Forbes tried to contact the secretary of state, but were bounced back to the Interior Department. Much to their frustration, and reflecting what was by now a genuinely confused jurisdiction as well as the secretaries' personal evasiveness, the Interior Department redirected them to State in late 1864. The contractors brought up Seward's remarks that the president should 'father' his own colonization scheme, as well as the State Department's unfortunate description of the administration's approach to the policy as one of experimentation, which had appeared in a despatch to Charles Francis Adams printed in the *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs* for 1862. They tempered their blackmail with the suggestion that Seward and Lincoln had been quite right that it was a matter of trial and error, and that the administration should therefore feel no compunction in drawing on a still sizable appropriation to cover an instance where the policy had unfortunately not worked.[59]

Through his embittered stinginess and 'discreditable epithets', Usher was in danger of coming off significantly worse than his colleagues if the matter turned into public scandal. Tuckerman had already countered the secretary's suggestion that the contractors had failed to do enough for the settlers with the indignant retort that '[h]ad we conducted this emigration according to *your* estimate of cost, the poor creatures would have perished before reaching the island.' Where Lincoln had wished families to constitute the majority of the settler party, in order to get the colony going on a stable basis, and vainly so given the ultimate preponderance of young men, Usher tried to halve what the president had been willing to pay for transporting children, and had

[58] Tuckerman to Usher, 29 July, 20 Oct. 1863, 18 Apr. 1864, to Seward, 13 Jan., 17 Mar. 1864, FTC; Tuckerman, *Statement*; *SED 55*, 37, 51.
[59] Tuckerman to Usher, 20 Oct. 1863, 7 Mar. 1864, to Seward, 13 Jan., 17 Mar., 8 Oct., Forbes to Seward, 19 Feb., 17 Mar. (second letter) 1864, FTC; *FRUS*, 236.

insisted in the hall of Willard's Hotel that the contractors knew '"d-d well"' that settlers could travel for $12-15 rather than the agreed $50. Tuckerman noted from the tone of Usher's recent report to Congress that he seemed to endorse the colonization appropriations' apparently imminent repeal, but suspected that he had a guiltier conscience than he let on: '[w]herever the blame lies I really think in your midnight thoughts if they ever recur to such topics that you will let the Government take its honest share.'[60]

No further answer came from Usher, at least not for the rest of his time in office. As early as September 1864, however, Tuckerman reported from Raymond that Usher actually shared Seward's opinion that the investors ought to be paid somehow; he heard even more promising notes the next year, and in March 1866, claimed to have successfully solicited a letter from Usher in which the secretary stated that he did not doubt the equity of the contractors' case. Allegedly, Usher had not considered the matter closed, but judged that it was strictly for Seward to waive the Haitian guarantee clause in order to make compensation possible. Yet even so, at least whilst still in Washington, Usher had added nothing to his opposition to payment, except for an apparent acknowledgement of the veracity of Tuckerman's descriptions of his dealings with Seward, Lincoln, and himself, though the comment in question was ambiguous: specifically, Usher reiterated that it was impossible for the president to offer payment outside of the terms of the contract, 'least of all to avoid a threatened publication of private conversation, and which neither himself nor any one connected with this affair has any occasion to fear if the truth is observed.'

Indeed, nobody answered Tuckerman's protests during mid-1864, but whether through Lincoln's delegation of the matter to the more trustworthy and competent Seward, the increasing weight that the contractor placed on the role of State Department employee De Long, or simply Seward's nagging conscience about the president's actions

[60] Tuckerman to Usher, 18 Apr. 1864, FTC.

or his own unworkable clause, the secretary of state was henceforth to prove the more helpful official. According to Tuckerman, even Lincoln himself had remarked just prior to his death that '"these gentlemen shall have justice"', and had given his blessing to the contractor's plans to officially place the matter before the executive branch so that Usher could in propriety ask Seward to order payment, when the 'awful events of April occurred.' Whatever the degree of truth underpinning this favourable recollection of a martyred president's opinion, Lincoln's murder and Usher's replacement with James Harlan the same May left Seward as the only figure in government familiar with the project. Despite not always answering Tuckerman's recurrent appeals, tellingly, he was far more accommodating than not.[61]

Going by the rather one-sided content of the contractor's letters, things looked optimistic in late 1865. Having demanded nothing more than the contractual $50 per head for 431 emigrants the previous April, which amounted to about a quarter of the investors' actual expenditure of $90,000, Tuckerman could now write to an apparently cognizant Seward of reimbursement for the additional expenses incurred in maintaining the colony, and even of a 'compromise' offer of $40,000, to say nothing of broaching the matter of adding interest, which government practice did not normally allow under such circumstances. Evidently, his case had somehow become more compelling in the meantime, whether through the return of peace, the prospect of public scandal increasing with the strengthened allegations against De Long or, conversely, such a danger diminishing now that the venture's main supporter in government was dead. There remained the problem of the rightful source of redress, however. Although Seward offered his input if requested, President Johnson pointed Tuckerman to an increasingly exasperated and somewhat unreachable Harlan, who proposed to go through the case *ab initio* from the files of the Interior Department, and who would only

[61] Tuckerman to Seward, 7 Sept. 1864, 26 Sept., 8 Oct., 28 Oct., 'Tuesday evening' [early Nov.] 1865, 7 Feb., 23 Mar. 1866, to Harlan, 27 Dec., 28 Dec. 1865, FTC; Tuckerman, *Papers*, 3-4; Tuckerman to F.W. Seward, 10 Nov., 8 Dec. 1865, 9 Oct. 1867, to W.H. Seward, 28 May, 15 Aug. 1866, 14 Sept. 1867, WHS.

contemplate payment outside of congressional adjustment if Johnson ordered as much. The new interior secretary took Usher's report of March 1864 as the last word on compensation, and pled his inability to reverse a predecessor's decision without new evidence. Tuckerman pestered him with so many protests, all to the effect that Usher's opinion had not been binding, that Harlan eventually snapped. Even if the contractor was right, the new secretary argued, 'it is a misfortune for which I am not accountable; and your effort to place me in such a situation … is as unjust and ungenerous as would be an attempt to hold the present judge of the Supreme Court of the United States responsible for what you might deem to be an erroneous judgment rendered by the Chief Justice Marshall'.[62]

The saga did not end there. Tuckerman took his claim to Congress in April 1866, backed by something at least approaching an endorsement from Seward, but a favourable Senate Committee on Claims held off action pending Rep. Justin Morrill's (R-Vt.) resolution for information on the colonization fund, a delay that ultimately left Tuckerman empty-handed; a similar attempt in 1868 also got nowhere. Yet there was another, politically easier way for the executive to do right by Tuckerman, now long abandoned by the other investors: offer him a diplomatic position. He raised the possibility as early as 1865, and Seward and Johnson nominated him for a new mission to Greece the next year. In the absence of an appropriation, congressional approval was not immediately forthcoming, and the matter dragged on long enough that he acquired a wry sense of humour about it, rejecting an unnamed alternative posting for its climate with the remark that '[p]erhaps the Secretary thought that I was still interested in colonization matters, but I tried to swallow that pill once and have suffered from a

[62] Assuming that such treatment was indeed undeserved, it is difficult to explain Harlan's unhelpfulness towards Tuckerman, who asked Harlan frankly if the reason for refusing him access to the files of the Interior Department, as Usher had promised, was on account of the vendetta that the late secretary of the interior had initiated against his successor. Tuckerman to Usher, 18 Apr. 1864, to Seward, 28 Oct., 'Tuesday evening' [early Nov.] 1865, to Harlan, 'Saturday evening' [early Nov.], 13 Nov., 19 Dec., 26 Dec., 27 Dec., 28 Dec. 1865, 6 Jan., 22 Jan., 1 Feb. 1866, FTC; *SED 55,* 61-4.

nausea ever since!' But in 1868, he became the first US minister to Greece, and thus finally relieved Washington of his persistent lobbying.[63]

In an ironic twist, someone else involved in the Île à Vache affair did manage to obtain compensation, and with far less evidence than Tuckerman: James De Long. Suddenly presenting an application in 1866 for $1,000 to cover his own efforts in looking after the emigrants, De Long credibly explained that the 'cause of my delay in forwarding my account was in consequence of a difference of opinion between the Department of State and that of the Interior when I was in Washington in reference by which Department the claim ought to be settled', though he could offer only a deposition from his vice-consul, and an 1864 report from the *New-York Tribune*, as proof of his labours. Taking the matter to Congress, and filing it with other expenses incurred during a 'siege' of Aux Cayes on a later occasion, he suffered the disappointment of Grant's pocket veto in 1872, but successfully obtained $1,166 two years later.[64]

Conclusions

On the one hand, it is not primarily our job as historians to offer retrospective moral judgement premised on twenty-first century standards, or to abuse hindsight in order to pass all too knowing, self-satisfied comment on how politicians might have improved on ventures that went wrong. Yet on the other hand, there is also something slightly weak about completely rejecting the idea of apportioning at least some kind of blame,

[63] Harlan to Tuckerman, 27 Apr. 1866, O.H. Browning to U. Mercer, 29 May 1868, letters sent, STNC; Tuckerman to Harlan, 23 Apr., to W.H. Seward, 7 June, to F.W. Seward, 18 June 1866, Mercer to Browning, 28 May 1868, FTC; Tuckerman to F.W. Seward, 15 Mar. 1865, 20 May, 3 Oct. 1866, 30 Apr. 1867, to W.H. Seward, 7 July, 15 Aug. 1866, 14 Sept. 1867, WHS.

[64] Harlan to Seward, 9 July 1866, Browning to De Long, 28 Oct. 1867, C.H. Emerson [?] to J.C. Cox, 2 [?] July 1868, [?] to T. and C. Ewing, 19 Jan. 1869, letters sent, STNC; De Long to Seward, 29 May, to Harlan, 17 Sept. 1866, to Secretary of Interior, 28 May 1867, 21 Mar. 1868, declaration of De Long, 7 Dec. 1867, T. and C. Ewing to Browning, 18 Jan. 1869, DLC; W.J. Stewart, *Presidential Vetoes, 1789-1988* (Washington, 1992), 43; United States, *Statutes at Large* (123 vols., Boston and Washington, 1848-), vol. xviii, part iii, 579.

especially where we are able to avoid handing it out gratuitously, but rather deploy it constructively in order to highlight, say, administrative weaknesses and the points at which clashing official jurisdictions created problems. As ever, we need to move colonization away from its standard appearance in the literature as an item on some kind of celestial charge sheet against the moral character of Abraham Lincoln, and instead towards analysis as a real, albeit flawed policy of the United States government during the Civil War. We need to be perfectly clear that the president and the contractors hardly meant the settlers to come to harm on Île à Vache, but come to harm they did, and under somewhat foreseeable circumstances. Perhaps the best resolution of these conflicting impulses is to be found in a concept that was still evolving in the nineteenth century, though one that we should use broadly, and without a legalistic baggage that weighs the question down with the same intellectually stultifying burden of Lincoln being on 'trial', and of his 'guilt' or 'innocence'. That concept is one of negligence.

On that score, it does not make for easy reading to see just how suffused with an air of prescient doubt were the negotiations for the project, or to learn that Lincoln was keen to try what he termed an 'experiment'. Such an empirical attitude was consistent with Lincoln's broad humanitarianism in avoiding the concentrated risk of mass African American removal to a lone untested site, and also with a desire to offer emigrants a genuine range of choices, yet it was nevertheless inevitably problematic where the pioneers were destined for an ill-prepared location. Put another way, what is so troubling is not that the Île à Vache mission went wrong, but that it did so in ways that the administration and the contractors appear to have anticipated. As the truly collective basis of that remarkable sense of impending difficulties would suggest, there was plenty of blame to go round. Although they probably had the better claim against the government than vice-versa, the investors allowed themselves to be blinded by their avarice into ending up in a situation with a fairly stark choice between seeing the matter

through properly, and cutting their already significant losses. Indeed, what stands out is how little everyone involved in the business trusted each other, making them quick to pull out at signs of trouble: the administration held back resources from the contractors, and the contractors were evidently careful not to overprovision an untrustworthy Kock, making failure on the island all the more likely.

Developing this last point, the interpretive framework of negligence seems all the more applicable when we consider that the real problem in carrying out the scheme was not one of overbearing control on the part of the administration, or indeed on the part of anyone, but its opposite: that of a dangerously diffuse sense of responsibility engendered by what was a divided purview over the scheme along just about all possible axes. Diplomatically, it was unclear whether the project ultimately pertained to Haiti or to the United States; domestically, to the president, State Department, or to the Interior Department; and, amongst the stakeholders and other agents who had a potential say in the project's actual management, it arguably devolved, at various points, on Forbes and Tuckerman, their wider syndicate, Kock, Ripka, De Long, and Donnohue. The only major participants who seemed to have no official claim on giving their input were the settlers themselves, who nevertheless exerted the most pressure of everybody. Even where we have to trace their actions through sources written by white Americans with other purposes in mind, their rising against Kock and the details of the settlement that they reported to others, in a situation where objective information was otherwise so manifestly lacking, reminded the administration that there was a pressing human story to the considerations that it had to weigh up. That was ultimately instrumental in bringing about the expedition's recall.

Yet with such a lack of hierarchy and jurisdictional clarity, it is no wonder that even a sincere attempt to protect the settlers – Seward's blank guarantee – did more harm than good, given the rival pretensions to ultimate oversight that it fuelled, or perhaps more accurately, the scope for bureaucratic buck-passing that it introduced. In

view of all that went wrong, it is tempting to ask the same question that preoccupied Hay and Nicolay in their biography of Lincoln, that of whether the settlement might have succeeded had superior management and more authoritative direction been in evidence. Ultimately, it is difficult to say without branching out from Civil War scholarship to a specialization in mid-nineteenth century tropical cotton cultivation; certainly, we know that Donnohue upped his estimation of the island's potential during early 1864, for whose corresponding season the previous year Kock had initially aimed when fishing for a contract in late 1862. Yet like most counterfactual questions, it is a tangential and distracting mystery; the point is probably not so much whether the scheme *could* have worked under *different* circumstances, as that it could probably *never* have done under its *actual* ones, for the reasons outlined above.[65]

For those readers inclined to judge Lincoln personally, the harshest condemnation should probably be reserved for his knowingly undertaking an unsatisfactory scheme in the first place, rather than for his subsequent deeds. The one jarring trait in evidence over the actual lifespan of the project, however, was the administration's desire to keep the affair as quiet as possible at the expense of what might have been a more effective response to the developments that were unfolding on the island. We know that Lincoln had requested secrecy during the earliest phases of contractual negotiations, and the Port-au-Prince mission's repeated requests for the slightest official notification of the project, as well as the month's delay incurred when Donnohue could not, or at least would not, requisition steamer passage in the name of pressing official business, also suggest that the administration continued to act on such an urge.

Yet once again, we are in danger of stepping outside the frame of reference of an individual who had to reconcile his personal conviction of the merits of a certain policy with an awareness that it had encountered mostly scorn when aired in public the

[65] J.G. Nicolay and J. Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (10 vols., New York, 1890), vi, 363-7.

previous year. Likewise, however much blame we see fit to attribute to Lincoln for what happened on Île à Vache, he responded to events in a manner that was probably as consistent as it could have been with his longstanding desire to open outlets of black resettlement, coupled as it now was with a newfound sense of urgency inspired by his own policies of emancipation. Accordingly, whilst reports from the island distressed Lincoln from an early date, he avoided recalling the settlers until a somewhat protracted process of investigation had established that it was truly a lost cause. In a similar vein, he took early events on Île à Vache as a warning rather than as a defeat, and turned away from arrangements with domestic contractors that incurred more diplomatic complication than they were worth, and instead towards more reliable partners, the European empires that are the subject of the next chapter.

5 The European Empires and Later Developments

In perhaps just one respect, experience had mellowed James Mitchell by 1862. Having been unable, during his stint in Indianan state government, to foresee anything but political disaster in the failure of colonization to produce immediate results, Mitchell wrote to Lincoln in July of that year that, if assigned the formal agency for which the president had likely already lined him up, there would be no need to 'stimulate expensive emigration'. Indeed, the government ought to experiment with as many locales as possible in order to identify the more desirable ones, and should really look to peacetime to scale up its colonization efforts. Amongst other destinations, Mitchell highlighted the Danish West Indies – on whose behalf Copenhagen had just undertaken to accept slave trade recaptives intercepted by the US navy, thus quietly divorcing Washington from its longstanding default option of Liberia – and added that 'even England might be invited to draw a supply of free labor from the South for her West Indian possessions', hoping, too, that 'such a correspondence could be made the means of indoctrinating the British people with republican views and theories.'[1]

[1] J. Mitchell to Lincoln, 1 July, 3 July 1862, AL. This chapter draws heavily upon and condenses large parts of P.W. Magness and S.N. Page, *Colonization after Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (Columbia, 2011), to which the reader can turn for elaboration on most of the points herein. Never really effective on account of the Seward-Lyons Treaty (1862), which finally allowed the Royal Navy to clamp down on the slave trade effectively, the Danish arrangement passed so quietly and easily as to raise concerns in some quarters. Deeming it an unratified and unconstitutional pseudo-treaty, Secretary of the Navy Welles refused to have anything to do with it, whilst the ACS and various humanitarian voices were dismayed that the government was willing to doom recaptives to plantation apprenticeships for the sake of convenience. The Danish *chargé* had also hoped to include provision for free African Americans looking to emigrate, but the US government was not to make such an offer until the 30 September circular. (37th Congress 2nd Session, House Miscellaneous Document No. 80, *Employment of Laborers of African Extraction in the Island of St. Croix* (Washington, 1862); D.H. Miller, *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America* (8 vols., Washington, 1931-48), viii, 833-54; J. Jay to Sumner, 12 June 1862, roll 26, Charles Sumner Papers, LC; *CG* 37:2, 3358-9; J. Harris to W. McLain, 9 Aug., F. Butler to R.R. Gurley, 16 Aug. 1862, ACS 93.)

According to Mitchell, Lincoln replied, '[i]f England wants our negroes, and will do better by them than we can, I say let her have them, and may God bless her.' Simultaneously, three and a half thousand miles away, the British Colonial Office, itself spurred on by hopeful despatches from the West Indies, took note of the passage of the Second Confiscation Act and the very real possibility of obtaining freedman labour for the holdings of its under-peopled – and more pertinently, underworked – post-emancipation empire. Colonial Secretary Henry Pelham-Clinton, Duke of Newcastle, and Foreign Secretary Earl Russell stood watch for a signal from the British mission to Washington, which duly reported that the Chiriquí project currently commanded the administration's attention, but also that that venture looked likely to incur grave diplomatic complications. Indeed, the British *chargé* William Stuart, deputizing for an absent Lord Lyons, enjoyed some remarkably honest and friendly discussions with Seward, for neither man was inclined to press the cause of black resettlement to the exclusion of other considerations of foreign policy. The secretary of state confessed to Stuart in early September that 'although he knew that the President and other members of the Cabinet would not agree with him, … no extensive emigration of Negroes would take place' – although if it did, he added, the British colonies would suit them more than anywhere else. A week and a half later, he elaborated on the provenance and nature of Central American protest against the Chiriquí scheme, and subsequently gave Stuart notice on 28 September of the imminent emigration circular that recent cabinet discussions had inspired. As it became apparent by mid-October that the Chiriquí scheme was nevertheless progressing apace, Stuart introduced a potential note of hostility by warning Seward that any US colony would breach the provisions of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty. The secretary replied that 'so many difficulties have been interposed that he scarcely expected it to be carried out, and that the emigrants would certainly not be allowed to land there, unless the New Granadian Government desired it.' Still, Seward would not concede that that state fell under the treaty, deeming it one of

the exemptions therefrom that Washington and London had subsequently agreed upon, as they had British Honduras on the other side of the equation. In any case, the Foreign Office had never really intended to force the matter, since to all intents and purposes, the venture appeared to be one based around emigration and naturalization into the host polity, rather than formal US annexation.[2]

Reflecting the literature's tendency to see elaborate political ruses behind the administration's colonization policy, some scholars have already seized upon the potential diplomatic gains of offering African American labour to the European empires – which those powers indeed recognized, and to no little consternation – to claim that such was actually Lincoln's main motivation. Yet what stands out is Seward's astonishing frankness as to the prospects of black emigration, and that at the most critical time during the entire war for forestalling British recognition of the Confederacy; furthermore, it was neither the first nor the last time that he would undermine colonization in front of parties other than his own government. Thus, if the president was indeed attempting to use colonization primarily as a crafty, albeit rather cumbersome and laborious diplomatic diversion, he somehow forgot to alert, or at least failed to bring on side, his chief diplomat, whom he not only knew to be a vocal opponent of the policy but also allowed to remain as the first port of call for the representatives of the powers that he sought to win over. Moreover, the president presumably let the cat out of the bag himself in January 1863, when he confessed to Lyons that he could appreciate exactly why Britain feared tying itself to the cause of the Union with a black emigration treaty. Whilst one need not deny, then, that Lincoln might have seen additional benefits to engaging the European powers in the task of

[2] 'Lincoln and the Negro', *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, 26 Aug. 1894; Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 14-15; J.J. Barnes and P.P. Barnes, *The American Civil War Through British Eyes* (3 vols., Kent, Ohio, 2003-05), ii, 169, 175, 189-90; illegible to W.H.N. Stuart, no. 131, 22 Sept. 1862, FO 5/934, TNA; *SED 55*, 7-8. Mitchell's claim should be treated with care, but evinces a sentiment that Lincoln duly acted upon, and rather recalls another witness's memory of an 1861 encounter with the president: 'One of the guests … remarked … that he wished all the negroes of the United States would emigrate to Canada, as we Canadians were so fond of them. Mr Lincoln said: "It would be all the better for the negroes, that's certain."' (A.M. Ross, *Recollections and Experiences of an Abolitionist* (Toronto, 1875), 134.)

colonization, it is clutching at straws to stress the primacy of anything other than the sincerity of his belief in black resettlement.[3]

Indeed, British diplomats were perfectly capable of spotting the potential trap, and consistently qualified their genuine, albeit doubtful hopes for a share of any black exodus from the United States with a fear that the needs of the colonies would entangle London in conflict. By all indications, the Lincoln administration desired to colonize the 'contrabands', refugee slaves who would bring with them abundant experience of heavy agricultural work, but also the hefty price tag of potential legal conflict with Confederate masters who claimed them as property. The sugar colony of British Guiana (Guyana) had already sent an agent to Washington, who soon established that reports of the overarching African American desire to emigrate had been greatly exaggerated, and also that the administration's plans were hazy outside of the Chiriquí project. Whilst that particular envoy diligently avoided placing British diplomats in any sort of embarrassing position, Whitehall was keen to set up a uniform emigration system for the empire, and to have such canvassers take orders from the legation rather than act on their own initiative. In fact, precisely one month after the issuance of the 30 September circular, Russell spoke so coolly on the whole idea of black emigration in conversation with the American minister to London, Charles Francis Adams, that the latter confidently '[made] report of his lordship's answer as definitively closing the matter.' It may well have been similar diplomatic concerns that ultimately ruled out positive responses from Denmark and France, two of the other recipients of the offer. The US minister to Copenhagen, Bradford Wood, reported a promising initial meeting with the foreign secretary, Carl Christian Hall, apparently qualified only by Hall's desire to consult ministerial colleagues who held significant influence; it seems that nothing more transpired, however. Whilst no European mission to Washington had been quicker to follow up the possibility of

[3] H. Holzer, 'Did Lincoln Want to Ship Out Blacks?', *Civil War Times*, 50 (Oct. 2011), 73; M.W. Fitzgerald, '*Colonization after Emancipation*' (review), *American Historical Review*, 116 (Oct. 2011), 1138; Barnes, ii, 307.

apprenticed black labour for its colonies, albeit then in the form of slave trade recaptives, Union-intercepted correspondence suggests that Richmond was certainly willing to warn Copenhagen that it considered the arrangement a northern ruse to 'palm off' those African Americans who came under the Second Confiscation Act onto a neutral power. For its part, France apparently kept the door open early into the New Year, remaining in close contact with Britain where both were keen to see how the other proceeded through such uncharted waters. The French foreign minister asked William Dayton for time to consult other government departments, and, at the end of December, inquired of Henri Mercier, Dayton's opposite number in Washington, whether the French expedition in Mexico might make use of emigrants as workers and soldiers. It was an ironic thought, given Doolittle and the Blairs' belief in black resettlement as a tool for US expansion in Central America, and Mercier tactfully replied that it was probably not the right time to co-operate, that Stanton would surely reserve black manpower for the army, and that refugees from plantations likely did not constitute the most desirable kind of worker; the matter seems to have rested there. Remarkably, it was the quietest of the European responses of late 1862, that of The Hague, that was eventually to bear the most fruit for Washington's attempts to cultivate treaty-based emigration arrangements.[4]

Despite Lincoln's public endorsement of the European options in his message to Congress, by the end of the year, it already appeared that lingering doubts on both sides of the Atlantic might bring them to an untimely end. An agent for the British Honduras Company, John Hodge, set off from London for Washington, armed with the Foreign Office's permission to recruit from amongst the contrabands for his firm's ambitious

[4] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 17-18, 20-2; Barnes, ii, 176, 190-1, 213-14; Colonial Office, *Confidential Correspondence Respecting the Emigration of Free Negroes from the United States to the West Indies* (London, 1863), 4, 13-14, 24, 28-30, 44-5; *FRUS*, 227-8, 634-5; B.R. Wood to W.H. Seward, no. 85, 11 Nov. 1862, Despatches from US Ministers to Denmark, NARA; *FRUS* 1863, i, 72-3; W.L. Dayton to Seward, no. 221, 7 Nov. 1862, no. 262, 29 Jan., no. 282, 5 Mar. 1863, Despatches from US Ministers to France, NARA; D.B Carroll, *Henri Mercier and the American Civil War* (Princeton, 1971), 237, 247-8 n.

schemes to convert exhausted Belizean logging lands to cotton plantation, but also bound by orders to take strict guidance from Lyons, and not to send emigrants from ports south of Philadelphia, a stipulation intended to ensure that the Confederacy would struggle to claim that Britain had been complicit in encouraging initial acts of African American flight. Even before Hodge departed, news of his Guyanese counterpart's disappointing experiences in the United States had reached Whitehall. On the American side, Seward characteristically naysaid and stalled matters in a Christmas Day meeting with Lyons, outlining divisions within the cabinet – and indeed in wider political circles – over colonization, as well as asking the minister to hold off until the congressional session ended on 4 March, whilst nevertheless dutifully requesting a formal statement of the British government's terms.[5]

Given such uncertainty, it is perhaps no surprise that when the administration eventually gave its first clear signal in months that it truly wished to proceed with a formal emigration convention, it came from the very top. 'The President of the United States sent for me yesterday', reported Lyons on 27 January 1863, 'and … told me that he had been for some time anxious to speak to me in an informal and unofficial manner on the subject of promoting the emigration of coloured people from this country to the British colonies.' Lincoln offered to help Britain claim a share of African American labour in such manner as would avoid incurring diplomatic complications, which prompted Lyons to ask whether the two governments might agree to drop the idea of treaty-based arrangements and instead establish a simple system of emigration agencies – as he had already discussed with an enthusiastic Mitchell – which, however, would only offer to pay the passage of those willing to place themselves under apprenticeship. The minister then went to Seward, who promised to place him in contact with Usher on the grounds that emigration was Interior Department business. Yet even two weeks later, neither the president nor the secretary of state had seemingly briefed their colleague, who, in his

[5] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 22-4; Barnes, ii, 278-81; Colonial Office, *Correspondence*, 53-4.

appointed meeting with Lyons, 'appeared to be disposed to further the removal of the coloured race from this country, but not to be prepared to enter at the moment upon a discussion of any specific plan.' The minister suggested that sending out a party of influential African Americans, ideally to return with favourable reports, probably represented the best way of removing what both Lincoln and Mitchell had identified to him as the main stumbling block to emigration: black opinion.[6]

On 19 February, Lyons handed Seward the desired memorandum, suggesting that the government of the United States authorize private colonial agents to make three-year contracts for labour in the British West Indies, albeit in a recruitment exercise to be held under the supervision of the British legation. The secretary of state again begged the minister to delay further action until Congress adjourned, as he thought Capitol Hill likely to confirm the president's power to raise African American troops that session, and concomitantly to affect the wider question of colonization; he added that he had now copied in Usher, and persuaded him to agree to such a pause. Once that date passed, Seward made good on his bargain – ostensibly, at least – only asking that the British government agree to the terms of his 30 September circular, much as he was about to demand of Haiti through the Île à Vache contractors. The secretary left the other particulars to Usher, who met Lyons on 30 March and conceded that he foresaw no objections to the lieutenant governor of British Honduras proclaiming the ports of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia as points of embarkation for those African Americans willing to emigrate, as per an act of the previous year that colonial legislators had passed with an obvious eye to developments in the United States. With no little gall, given his relationship to the Chiriquí scheme, Usher also 'observed that since it had been known that Congress had a large sum to promote

[6] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 24-7; Barnes, ii, 305, 306-08, 328.

emigration, the Department of the Interior had been beset by speculators who, while, pretending to be friends of the Negro, in reality sought their own interest.'[7]

Negotiations entered what looked likely to be their final stage in late April, when John Hodge finally arrived in Washington, presumably via the Caribbean first, accompanied by William Anderson, a West Indian planter with firm abolitionist credentials who had previously been in the United States on a similar mission, recruiting free black settlers for Jamaica in 1851. Matters proceeded unexpectedly smoothly, given the air of pessimism prevalent at the time of Hodge's departure from London. Seward offered an untypically warm welcome, probably on the president's instructions; Lincoln backed down on the question of an emigration convention after an initial meeting with Hodge, allowing for merely informal guarantees between the two governments as to settlers' wages and privileges; and even the inhabitants of the contraband camps that the president duly permitted Hodge to visit told the agent that they were indeed interested in emigrating, provided that their families were permitted to accompany them. Whilst the American Colonization Society, a lobbyist for a rival resettlement venture for Spanish Honduras, and elements of the Confederate press all picked up on Hodge's presence and filed negative reports of his activities, northern newspapers merely noted his arrival and could only speculate as to the details of his plans. The Belizean project opened up a second, free-state pool of emigrants when Anderson used his antislavery connections to address African Americans in Philadelphia and New York, the latter location bringing him into the orbit of black abolitionist, Presbyterian minister, emigrationist, and founder of the African Civilization Society, Henry Highland Garnet. It was possibly through their recruitment efforts that Hodge and Anderson first met John Willis Menard of the Interior Department, who had just recently made abortive

[7] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 27-8; Barnes, iii, 7, 20-1, 29-30.

plans to leave for both Liberia and Haiti, and now co-operated with his patron James Mitchell in organizing the venture to British Honduras.[8]

Early that May, having already undertaken what he evidently deemed adequate investigative fieldwork in the United States, Hodge presented preliminary terms to Usher. His firm, the British Honduras Company (BHC), agreed to finance the transportation of 500-1,000 adult male labourers and their spouses, whilst the government would bear the cost for an estimated 1,500-3,000 children and elderly dependents, though such arrangements marked only the initial stage of a plan of what Anderson called 'self-sustaining emigration', whereby a portion of the labourers' earnings would contribute to a fund for the passage of 50,000 more African Americans over the next ten years. Negotiations concluded on 9 May, with every expectation of the administration's seal of approval, only to encounter the rudest of *volte-faces* two days later. Suddenly, Usher told Hodge that his plan had become 'inexpedient', and that it was not even 'worth the while to discuss the particular terms of the proposition submitted by you', since the colonization legislation was limited to the freed slaves of the District as at April 1862 and the 'contrabands' of the Second Confiscation Act – not that such restrictions had been allowed to stand in the way of the predominantly northern recruitment drive for the Chiriquí project, one should add – whom Usher now deemed off-limits on account of the demands of military recruitment, a point on which Secretary of War Edwin Stanton had apparently inspired him. This turnaround also represented the moment at which various accumulated differences between Mitchell and Usher finally erupted, the origins of which are far harder to establish than their subsequent results. (In addition to the likelihood of a simple personality clash where the strong-minded Mitchell was concerned, the divisions between the two men apparently had something to do with an earlier dispute somehow connected to the Cincinnati pro-slavery publicist Elwood Fisher, and perhaps just with the probability that Mitchell and

[8] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 29-32; R.B.P. Lyons to J. Russell, no. 361, 27 Apr. 1863, FO 5/934; J. Hodge to Lyons, 9 July 1863, CO 318/239, TNA.

Usher had encountered each other across the aisle of pre-war Indianan politics.) A stunned Hodge offered to lower his suggested number of emigrants, and gently reminded Usher that he had only ever proceeded with the president's full blessing, but it was not long before he had to report to Lyons that all looked lost.[9]

Such an attempt to boldly reverse the official policy of the administration was not to go unchallenged, however. Hodge and Mitchell managed to call in Montgomery Blair, who delivered a speech in Cleveland on 20 May claiming that the contraband camps merely provided advantageous points of embarkation for colonization at the war's conclusion, whereupon the military value of the freedmen would cease; a reference to the assistance of the 'capital and intelligence of the great commercial powers' in bringing about the 'destined glory' of African American removal to the tropics hinted at Blair's familiarity with the British imperial projects. At some point later that month, Hodge, Mitchell, and Blair met to revamp the BHC's offer, then Mitchell took the new draft to Seward, and asked that it be considered alongside the Guyanese scheme of the previous autumn; that colony had appointed a representative in New York who had remained in contact with Mitchell ever since, in order to stake Guiana's claim on black American labour at a more opportune time. Both ventures met the terms of the 30 September circular, and Mitchell managed to get an initially grudging Hodge to drop his appeal for federal subsidies, thus allowing them to bypass a hostile secretary of the interior in the absence of any actual government expenditure, and simply to approach the commander-in-chief for a canvassing pass for the contraband camps that the US army controlled. Actually, by early June, Usher had become rather more apologetic in his tone to Hodge, but nevertheless stressed once more that Stanton's policy had tied his hands. The manager of the BHC accordingly consented to Blair's offer to take him

[9] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 32-4, 82-5, 97; Hodge to J.P. Usher, 6 May, 7 May, 9 May, 14 May, P.H. Watson to Usher, 12 May, G.C. Whiting to Watson, 13 May 1863, British Honduras communications, STNC; Usher to Hodge, 11 May, in Hodge to Lyons, 9 July 1863, CO 318/239; Hodge to Seward, 11 May 1863, public papers: national affairs, WHS; Lyons to E.J. Eyre, 18 June 1863, FO 5/934; *SED 55*, 32.

straight to the top, though not without evincing an awareness of the divisions within the cabinet that he would consequently have to straddle. On 13 June, Hodge met Lincoln once more, who read his interior secretary's note of refusal, and then 'said that what he told [Hodge] at first was his honest desire, and after some remarks relative to the emigration of the negro race', signed a paper that Mitchell had drafted for him:

> John Hodge of London, and S.R. Dickson, agents of the British Colonies of Honduras and Guiana, are here in accordance with the well settled policy of the United States, to aid such free persons of color as desire to remove to their colonies. We, therefore, recommend all parties and persons having the direction or charge of such, to present no hindrance to them or their agents in the work of canvassing for emigrants, but to render them and their regularly appointed agents, all the aid possible in this work.[10]

Shortly afterwards, Mitchell carried the papers to Stanton, who wrote on them 'not approved'. Once he saw what his secretary of war had done, Lincoln lost his temper for only the second and last time in Mitchell's presence. Embarrassingly, the differences within the administration did not go unnoticed by outside parties: Lyons, who had witnessed first-hand Mitchell's tendency towards independent action, as well as the generally poor communications between executive departments over colonization business, complained to Russell that Lincoln had a habit 'of approving papers submitted by his subordinates, without coming to an understanding with his Cabinet.' Lyons accordingly sent Hodge to seek the approval of Usher, now in New York, who replied that since it was the president himself who had granted permission, he could hardly disagree. That was enough for Lyons to incline towards authorizing the lieutenant governor of British Honduras to 'proclaim' the three northern ports, pending Seward's approval, but he still entertained sufficient concerns about the status of the contrabands

[10] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 34-7; M. Blair, *Comments on the Policy Inaugurated by the President* (New York, 1863), 10, 12; Mitchell to Seward, 19 May, to F.W. Seward, 20 May 1863, WHS; Hodge to Lyons, 9 July 1863, CO 318/239; M. Blair to Lincoln, 12 June 1863, AL; *SED 55*, 33.

as to prevent Hodge from recruiting amongst their number until further clarification might arrive from the Foreign Office.[11]

At this juncture, Russell balked. Once again, a British policymaker decided that the potential diplomatic ramifications of involvement in Union colonization efforts signally outweighed its enticements. The foreign secretary, 'disposed to agree' with Lyons, accordingly halted the port proclamation. In Washington, Hodge sought clarification from Mitchell as to whether the order's wording, 'free persons of color', included contrabands; the colonization agent duly confirmed that he had used such terminology after consultation with Attorney General Edward Bates, and that '"there is no distinction in law it is only in time."' Still, Hodge could do little more to resolve a matter that was fully out of his hands, and as long as he potentially needed to prepare a new home for hundreds of African Americans, it made sense to sail for British Honduras with some haste; he departed on 11 July. Back in London, the Colonial Office keenly fought his corner, incredulously asking the Foreign Office what it was that they had spent almost a year working towards, if not the immigration of the more agriculturally skilled classes of black Americans. 'Lord Lyons is apprehensive that embarrassment may be caused at the end of the war by the emigration of escaped negroes to British Honduras or British Guiana', acknowledged one of the Colonial Office's bureaucrats; but, he argued, '[w]ould any such embarrassment be caused by a similar emigration into Canada? There is no United States law to prevent these persons from leaving New York or Boston, there is no colonial law to prevent their arrival at Belize.' It was simply a private arrangement between merchant and emigrant, and 'it would seem to be a question whether Her Majesty's Government are bound contrary to the desire of the United States Government to exercise a superintendence over British emigrant ships in United States ports, and to examine into the previous history of the emigrants, in order to ascertain that none of them are refugees from the Confederate states.' The Colonial

[11] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 37-9; 'Lincoln and the Negro', *Globe-Democrat*; Barnes, iii, 69-70; Lyons to Russell, no. 567, 19 June 1863, FO 5/934; *FRUS* 1863, i, 582-3.

Office conceded that permitting any sort of emigration from southern ports would be risky, but otherwise, a buffer of Union-controlled territory through which escapees would have to pass surely took the blame off British shoulders. Such arguments were evidently persuasive, for on 5 August, Russell changed his mind once more, telling Lyons that he waived all objections to contrabands, provided that they sailed only from the three specified northern ports.[12]

The two-month delay on the British side, and concomitant lack of pressure from Lyons, was presumably grist to Seward's mill. The minister had requested the State Department's approval of the port proclamation on 17 June, which only proved forthcoming when Lincoln prodded Seward on the very same day that he met Frederick Douglass for the first time, 10 August. It is hard to know exactly what had occurred in the interim, other than the predictable wartime distraction of the height of the campaign season, but it seems that Seward had at least been trying to sway Lincoln, even writing him a paper unfavourable to the British request for settlers. Aided by a diary that has since been lost, Mitchell recalled asking Lincoln in an 18 August meeting whether colonization indeed remained the policy of the administration. The president answered in the affirmative, stressing that 'such scenes as those in New York the other day, where negroes were hanged to lamp posts' during the Draft Riots, had reinforced his conviction that '[i]t would have been much better to separate the races.' As with any such reminiscence, Mitchell's anecdote must be treated with some caution, but it tallies with other references to the president's preoccupation with racial violence, and deserves significant credence from the fact that Mitchell certainly spent the next day writing columns for the *Methodist* and the *New York Observer*, announcing that Lincoln had

[12] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 39-41; Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 9 July, 8 Aug., to Lyons, no. 437, 5 Aug., T.F. Elliot to A.H. Layard, 31 July, Hodge to Lyons, 3 July, in Lyons to Russell, no. 663, 20 July 1863, FO 5/934.

reached an agreement with Britain to transport volunteer labourers to the West Indies.[13]

Running concurrently with the diplomatic delay of that summer, and indeed redeeming it from fruitless waste by addressing the scheme's greatest pitfall of them all, was an investigative African American exploration of British Honduras. Menard and Charles Babcock of Salem, Massachusetts, old acquaintances from Garnet's African Civilization Society, joined Hodge and two other 'commissioners' on the voyage to Belize, to see what they made of a location that stood to become their new home. Their findings were mixed: a white British minority regrettably seemed to comprise the real ruling class and to dominate landholding, but the visitors also felt that race relations lacked the instinctive prejudice of colour that they knew in the United States, whilst there was actually a sizable black presence in the Belizean courts and legislature that might be bolstered by African American immigration. All four investigators came away with a more or less favourable impression, although they insisted firmly to Hodge that they would need to see decent housing and guaranteed land grants on completion of labour contracts, and they accordingly decided to spread a mostly upbeat word about British Honduras in the United States. Their mid-September return was a timely one, for the recent Draft Riots sat heavily on the mind of Garnet and his New York-based organization. Whilst the Civilization Society looked to both improvement at home and emigration from the United States, and had for some time rejected the idea of mass exodus in favour of the selective emigration of pioneers of the better sort, the summer and autumn of 1863 unsurprisingly witnessed a pronounced swing towards an emigrationist stance once more. Following events through fragmentary newspaper reports, and through a sparse trail of letters whose contents inevitably became somewhat dated whilst in transit between British Honduras and New York is not easy,

[13] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 41-2; *CW*, vi, 378-80; *FRUS* 1863, i, 620; 'Lincoln and the Negro', *Globe-Democrat*; Mitchell, 'The Colored People of the United States', *Methodist*, 19 Aug. 1863, Mitchell communications, STNC; Mitchell, 'Negro Emigration and Colonization', *New York Observer*, 10 Sept. 1863.

but it appears that Garnet had up to two hundred families ready to emigrate by late October, and that all looked tentatively promising bar Seward's predictable failure to keep the US consul in British Honduras up to speed.[14]

Indeed, the White House proactively involved itself in black emigration once more in late 1863. The African Civilization Society had contacted James Mitchell in September, asking him to 'bring notice to the President the facts of our existence and the object of our organization'. Equipped with references from Henry Raymond and US Sanitary Commission director Henry Bellows, a delegation of its key officers – albeit minus its founder Garnet, whom George LeVere had succeeded as president – met Lincoln on 5 November and cryptically asked for $5,000 to assist with the 'general objects of its formation'. Given that the Society's avowed objectives covered African American elevation both in the US and abroad, and also that no account of the meeting appears to have survived, the handful of historians who refer to the encounter tend to frame it in cautiously generic terms of Lincoln's burgeoning appreciation of black aspirations and of black political sophistication. Nevertheless, it is surprising that the involvement of Mitchell, and especially his request to draw the desired sum of money from the colonization fund, has not heretofore invited further investigation. Actually, we do know something of what transpired, because the visit of the Civilization Society left traces in the papers of the American Colonization Society: LeVere and his colleagues discussed emigration with Lincoln and Mitchell, although apparently with reference to Liberia and even to another location on the western coast of Africa, rather than to British Honduras, which nevertheless remained fully in the picture thanks to a newly dedicated investigative committee within the Society. Despite the Caribbean thrust of the Blair and Doolittle schemes, the president and his colonization agent had always retained a soft spot for Liberia, albeit one qualified by the blunt realization that that

[14] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 43-51; C. Babcock, *British Honduras, Central America. A Plain Statement to Colored People of the U.S. Who Contemplate Emigration* (Boston, 1863).

destination was highly unpopular amongst African Americans. They were not far off the mark. Even now, the Civilization Society avoided calling on the 'hated' Colonization Society whilst in Washington, although it asked for $5,000 from that institution, too; as noted, the delegation also seemed to contemplate bypassing Liberia for a new African colony, accordingly spurning the ACS's counter-offer of free charter of its ship.[15]

Despite its relative lack of notoriety and the indirect nature of much of the evidence surrounding it, the meeting with the African Civilization Society in many ways deserves recognition as the more successful counterpart of the president's August 1862 address to the delegation of black Washingtonians. On that occasion, Mitchell had brought together an essentially hostile group so that Lincoln could lecture them; this time, the president himself listened to a statement of the African American delegates' general aims, and presumably enjoyed a more freely mutual discussion with known pro-emigration voices, whom Mitchell went so far to describe as the 'proper body of discreet colored men' that the government's programmes had hitherto lacked. The colonization agent also perceived other advantages to such an approach: 'I confess to a reluctance to aid white men in building up private fortunes and large semi-tropical estates to be worked by colored labor at the national expense. But if a few thousands given from year to year to a Society of colored men will aid them to a distinct nationality or several of them, the American public will sustain the act.' Yet as things turned out, nothing more came of the meeting with the African Civilization Society, likely because it proved impossible to persuade Usher to release colonization funds that did not strictly extend to northern free blacks.[16]

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[15] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 86-8; Mitchell to Lincoln, 5 Nov., African Civilization Society to Lincoln, 5 Nov., Mitchell to Usher, 5 Nov. 1863, AL; E. Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery (*New York, 2010), 257; B. Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro* (New York, 1962), 193; W. Coppinger to R.R. Gurley, 23 Oct. 1862, J. Orcutt to W. McLain, 17 Nov., Secretary of the African Civilization Society to McLain, 21 Nov. 1863, ACS 95; McLain to J. Hall, 7 Nov., 13 Nov., to H.M Wilson, 7 Nov., to J. Tracy, 13 'Oct.' [Nov.] 1863, ACS 204; Tracy to J.B. Pinney, 17 Nov. 1863, ACS 236; Statement of the Executive Committee, 1 Jan. 1864, ACS 286.

[16] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 88; Mitchell to Lincoln, 25 Nov. 1863, in Mitchell to Usher, 4 Feb. 1864, Mitchell communications, STNC; Mitchell, *Brief on Emigration and Colonization* (Washington, 1865), 12.

Indeed, the administration's active pursuit of colonization seems to have come to the murkiest of ends over the winter of 1863-4. Much as with the rather indefinite demise of the Chiriquí scheme, the source record is agonizingly poor on such a significant development, though perhaps somewhat inherently so. Most importantly, diplomatic jitters re-surfaced at the lower levels of the British imperial administration with respect to the Belizean scheme. In *Colonization after Emancipation*, we wondered, working from a 1930s summary of the archives of British Honduras and from a fleeting reference in the lieutenant governor's legislative address of early 1864, whether it was London that had once more imposed what appears to have been a further ban on African American immigration, although the absence of any applicable entry in the out-books of the British National Archives provided some cause for puzzlement. Just recently, Magness has undertaken research in Belize that seems to qualify that statement. It appears that such a prohibition did not emanate from Whitehall, but rather that the lieutenant governor felt that he was receiving dangerously mixed signals as to the inclusion of the contrabands, itself no surprise in a slow-moving, multi-layered communications system under which news of complex internal divisions within London, and of uncertain diplomatic exchanges between Britain and the United States, only reached Belize City via the additional filter of the Jamaican government. Keen not to embarrass the metropole, the lieutenant governor cautiously kept 'contrabands' out of his port proclamation of September. Amidst additional concerns about defending settlers on new BHC lands from Indian, Guatemalan, and Mexican incursions, it seems to have taken so long for the colony to hear clearer confirmation on the matter that Hodge essentially switched his focus to Chinese labourers by early 1864. Furthermore, that London did not exactly impose a blanket immigration ban on all of its colonies is suggested by the fact that Guiana issued a port proclamation of its own in 1864 without challenge, although Whitehall continued to lose at least some sleep as to its diplomatic

implications right down to 1865, even as imperial administrators agreed that the prospect of African American immigration looked increasingly slim indeed.[17]

A further colonization option died over that winter, albeit one seemingly known only to Lincoln and Seward within the administration, as well as to a handful of State Department employees and their correspondents. For the Netherlands had not actually rebuffed the 30 September circular; indeed, the Dutch minister had actually jumped the gun somewhat, making enquiries about the possibility of obtaining African American labour as early as July 1862. Rather, The Hague had chosen to adjust the labour ordinances for its main colony of Dutch Guiana (Suriname) first, and only then to offer its formal reply to the United States, in mid-1863. Whilst Robert F. Durden, the 1957 biographer of James Shepherd Pike, US minister to The Hague and veteran *New-York Tribune* reporter, offered a perfectly adequate summary of these developments in his work, Civil War historians have entirely overlooked the Dutch scheme, which left no trace whatsoever in the files of the Interior Department and evidently also requires the researcher to look safely into 1863 in those of the State Department. The business occurred entirely behind the closed doors of formal diplomacy, with no Hodge-like figure appearing in Washington to speed things along or leave us a record of his dealings with the administration, although the American consul in the Surinamese capital of Paramaribo and a New York firm seemingly knew of at least some such plans and dabbled in preliminary arrangements. Despite their minor departure from the terms of his circular, Seward pronounced the new Dutch labour ordinances 'liberal, just and precise', and in July 1863, granted Pike plenipotentiary status on the draft treaty that he sent him as an enclosure, suggesting that the Senate and president would approve it. After some merely semantic clarification of its terminology, Pike and the Dutch foreign

[17] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 52-3, 55-62; J.A. Burdon, *Archives of British Honduras* (3 vols., London, 1931-5), iii, 254; Magness to Page, 20 Jan. 2012, correspondence available on request.

ministry easily reached an agreed version in December 1863, which the king duly signed.[18]

Thereafter, it suffered a similar limbo-like fate to the British scheme, although the evidence arguably carries more of a hint as to Seward's role in contributing to its demise. In February 1864, the secretary of state informed Pike:

> I am obliged to confess that it is not now expected that the treaty in regard to negro emigration will be ratified. The American people have advanced to a new position in regard to slavery and the African class since the President in obedience to their prevailing wishes accepted the policy of colonization. Now not only their free labor, but their military service also is appreciated and accepted.

Eric Foner, who has also uncovered this despatch, though apparently without registering the existence of the wider project that produced it, rightly remarks that Seward 'coyly absolved' Lincoln here of what was actually the latter's pre-eminent place in federal colonization efforts. The secretary of state made some equally vague but negative sounds to the Dutch minister around the same time, telling him that 'it was doubtful whether [the treaty] will be confirmed by [the Senate] in view of the altered condition of affairs relating to the treaty since the negotiation commenced'. Indeed, he even offered a similar forecast to an inquisitive contractor as late as June, though also curtly reminded him that such business was confidential, and thus that he could not offer him any more details. Whilst The Hague expressed its disappointment at the unexpected stillbirth of the treaty, Pike certainly did not lament his handiwork going to waste, admitting to political intimate Sen. William Fessenden (R-Maine) that, whilst he did not 'believe it would do any harm in its operation, … I think the principle on which it is based, a vicious one.'[19]

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[18] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 73-81; R.F. Durden, *James Shepherd Pike: Republicanism and the American Negro, 1850-1882* (Durham, 1957), 85-93; *FRUS*, 634-5; J.S. Pike to Seward, no. 91, 26 June, no. 103, 8 Oct., no. 113, 16 Dec., no. 114, 19 Dec. 1863, Despatches from US Ministers to the Netherlands, NARA; Seward to Pike, no. 113, 31 July 1863, Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, NARA; Miller, *Treaties*, viii, 856-7.

[19] *FRUS* 1864, iii, 310, 312; Foner, 260; R. Van Limburg to Seward, 9 Feb. 1864, Notes from the Dutch Legation, NARA; Seward to Van Limburg, 12 Feb. 1864, Notes to Foreign Legations: The

It is impossible to read anything specific into Lincoln's place in the Dutch negotiations, save to observe that we can be fairly sure that Seward had not initiated the venture on his own account, and not even on that of a desire to foster good relations with neutral powers, given how often he tried to frustrate the administration's parallel dealings with Britain. Yet the fact that the project took shape purely through the channels of the State Department did allow Seward a degree of control and damage limitation that he lacked with respect to the other schemes. This may have shown up in his apparent disinclination to hasten Pike along, or even to contact him where the minister had not done so first, which conduced to utter silence from the State Department on the matter between July 1863 and February 1864. Despite Seward's very real distaste for colonization, it was ultimately of benefit to him to be able to act as a buffer between the will of the president and the actual process of negotiating terms for black resettlement.

With considerations of colonization policy having accrued increasingly weighty diplomatic elements since 1862, it is worth speculating whether Seward's persistence in checking and slowing the progress of colonization, albeit without crossing the line into anything so hackle-raising as acts of outright disobedience against Lincoln, did indeed help convince the president to put colonization on ice. Even a purely 'pragmatic' assessment which assigns the policy an early 1864 time of death must consider several other factors, notably the return of the Île à Vache expedition, the ever-heightening Mitchell-Usher dispute, and the effects of congressional hostility. Indeed, it appears that in late 1863, Edward Bates opined to a Missourian Unionist and militant slaveholder that the president's colonization plans had failed in the face of 'Jacobin' resistance thereto, although his wording in the letter in question is rather ambiguous. Yet there is certainly a case for adding Seward's rather less dramatic and ongoing role to that list of difficulties. Tellingly, Danforth Nichols, superintendent of the Arlington Freedmen's

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Netherlands, NARA; Seward to L. Marx, 2 June 1864, Domestic Letters of the Department of State, NARA; Pike to W.P. Fessenden, 6 Apr. 1864, James Shepherd Pike Papers, LC.

Village, proffered his thanks to the secretary of state some years later, 'knowing that it was through you that the scheme of colonization of the blacks in Central America and Hayti was prevented even though strongly advocated by the lamented Lincoln'; Nichols also recalled that Seward had visited his camp no fewer than eleven times during the autumn and winter of 1863, which may well have provided an occasion on which the secretary confided aspects of current administration policymaking to him. Certainly, Seward notoriously enjoyed Lincoln's confidence so much as to engender substantial envy on the part of the other heads of department, and indeed of large swathes of the Republican Party, a burgeoning trust that the secretary earned through his underlying loyalty to the president, at least after the incident of the 'April Fools' Memorandum'. It was just as well that the president and secretary of state came to respect and trust each other's counsel, for no policy tested their relationship more than did colonization.[20]

Colonization repudiated? Early 1864 to April 1865

Whilst administration colonization activity appears to have come to an effective end around early 1864, that in itself is not the most interesting point of debate so much as one as to the real significance of the period thereafter, down to Lincoln's death. If we

[20] E. Bates to Broadhead, 26 Sept. 1863, James O. Broadhead Papers, Missouri History Museum, St. Louis; D.B. Nichols to Seward, 5 Apr. 1872, WHS. With some rather vague phrasing as to whether he was referring just to Missouri politics or to radicalism in general, Bates stated to Broadhead, a prominent political lieutenant of Frank Blair within that state, that 'I have conferred with the President, and I hope not without some good effect. He knows the character of these Jacobins – He knows that they have thwarted his own plans of settlement and restoration; and that they are even now, laboring to build up a party against him; and are trying to force him to dig his own grave.' Evidently, its significance depends on the meaning of 'settlement' in this context: Bates's biographer, Marvin Cain, apparently took it as a reference to colonization, and himself used the word 'resettlement' as a synonym therefor in summarizing some of Bates's other letters, notably a 19 Sept. 1862 promise from Bates to his ally Hamilton Gamble that Lincoln would prove soundly conservative on what Cain describes as 'manumission and future resettlement of the Negroes', and must therefore be given a free hand in such matters. Unfortunately, Cain's imprecise references have prevented me tracing that second letter in order to establish whether such terminology closely reflected Bates's, or merely Cain's own. (M.R. Cain, *Lincoln's Attorney General: Edward Bates of Missouri* (Columbia, 1965), 213, 222, 237-8.)

take the approach that the president is 'on trial' for continued adherence to colonization, then, in the absence of an extant autographed manuscript 'confession', it is likely that we will feel compelled to give him the benefit of the doubt, adjudge that he had given up the policy from considerations of principle rather than that he had simply eased off through political frustration, and accordingly 'acquit' him. Yet colonization was not a crime, but rather an official federal policy in which Lincoln had evidently believed up until this point. Though perhaps not inherently incorrect in its approach, there is certainly something needlessly defensive and palpably unsatisfying about seizing on an easily explicable thinning-out of the evidence to point to a sudden conversion on the president's part. 'Always dominating the writing on Lincoln and colonization is the question: "When, if ever, did Lincoln give up the idea of colonizing African Americans abroad?"', rightly identifies Michael Vorenberg. He adds:

> On deeper reflection, however, it seems that these efforts to guess at what Lincoln thought and when he thought it are not very valuable. … [T]he fact remains that Lincoln never did think that immediate abolition was preferable to gradual abolition. … In the same way, it is possible that Lincoln *privately* believed that the best future for most African-Americans would be one in which they lived separately, outside of the country, even though, as president, he knew that he had to work toward a different, biracial future.

Vorenberg adds a crucial note of qualification, that Lincoln would have known by 1865 that colonization was nonetheless 'hopeless' and 'unworkable', and would never have been caught making any efforts towards it, a case that his omission of some of the late evidence allows him to slightly overstate. Yet the broader question that he raises is a salutary one: to what extent did colonization inactivity really reflect an ideological departure rather than a mere practical reality?[21]

One chronic administrative headache that perhaps stood to disappear only if colonization went with it *in toto* was the Mitchell-Usher dispute. That fight persisted for more than a year after it had openly erupted, for despite what turned out to be a critical

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[21] M. Vorenberg, 'After Emancipation: Abraham Lincoln's Black Dream', in J.Y. Simon et al. (eds.), *Lincoln Revisited: New Insights from the Lincoln Forum* (New York, 2007), 218-19.

jurisdictional ambiguity as to whether Mitchell worked as an 'agent' or a 'commissioner', his direct presidential appointment and Lincoln's personal patronage prevented Usher from firing him, however frequent the interior secretary's recommendations to that effect from May 1863 onwards. Whilst the didactic tone of Mitchell's publications and his personal eccentricities have tempted scholars to assume that he must have rubbed everyone up the wrong way, he only seems to have fallen out with Usher within the administration itself, although Stanton was presumably best avoided too. Mitchell had friends in Lincoln and Bates, and a collaborator at the very least in Blair, whilst there is not even an obvious suggestion in the admittedly rather sparse record that he allowed Seward's 'betrayal' of 1854 to poison his dealings with the State Department. Moreover, he had even got on fine with Usher's predecessor as interior secretary, the sickly Caleb Smith, who in late 1863 wrote from his Indianan retirement to advise Mitchell to take his case straight to the president, and who apparently owed Mitchell $50 at his death early the next year.[22]

Yet Usher was perfectly at liberty to try to force Mitchell out through means of constructive dismissal, intercepting and logging his mail at the Interior Department, withholding key files, and disallowing petty expense claims. Mitchell fought back, using high-ranking Methodist contacts to turn the tables and push for the replacement of Usher himself, and also managed to insert mention of his office into an early version of the Freedmen's Bureau bill so that he might achieve administrative independence from the secretary of the interior. Whilst Lincoln left no comment respecting the side to which he inclined in the dispute, if either, it seems that Usher fell out of the loop of the British projects from June 1863, albeit perhaps to no great personal regret. For his own part, Mitchell had to request an update from a predictably taciturn State Department as to

[22] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 82-6, 88-9; G.S. Boritt, *The Lincoln Enigma: The Changing Faces of an American Icon* (New York, 2001), 9; C.B. Smith to Lincoln, 5 May 1862, AL; Mitchell to Usher, 22 Oct. 1863, 21 Jan. 1864, to J. Harlan, 6 June 1865, Mitchell communications, STNC; Smith, list of debts, 12 Apr. 1864, Caleb B. Smith and Charles W. Spooner Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.

whether there had been any diplomatic developments in connection to those schemes, but evidently enjoyed some degree of personal access to Lincoln over colonization matters, as the interview with the African Civilization Society demonstrated. Yet the greatest casualty of the Mitchell-Usher fight was probably not the efficient execution of those ventures that the administration already had underway, but one visible only by the fact of its absence: the initiation of new projects, which completely dried up as both men prioritized mutual sabotage over harmonious policymaking.[23]

Whilst murmurs surrounding the failure of the Île à Vache expedition might well have provided sufficient cause on their own for Congress to repeal the colonization appropriations, Capitol Hill also threw fuel on the flames of the Mitchell-Usher conflict by requesting a comprehensive statement of expenditure in January 1864. Refusing to share information with one another, both men ultimately produced rival colonization reports, although with no little significance, Usher beat an under-prepared Mitchell to the finishing-line by several months. The secretary of the interior wrote out all mention of new colonization schemes beyond his May 1863 about-turn to Hodge, which despite reflecting a predictable outcome of Mitchell's own tendency towards secrecy – evidently one of the colonization agent's counter-productive traits, as it would turn out in this instance – also marked a wilfully minimal account of the extent of what Usher did know of them. Against the ticking clock of Sen. Morton Wilkinson's belligerent resolution to repeal the colonization fund, Lazarus Powell (D–Ky.) spotted that Mitchell had not yet offered his account of developments, and on 25 March persuaded his fellow senators to request the report of the 'commissioner of emigration' before continuing, an office whose very existence Usher took pedantic pleasure in denying. On 11 May, Wilkinson

[23] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 84-5, 89-90; *SED 55*, 38, 45, 46-7; Mitchell to F.W. Seward, 15 Sept. 1863, Miscellaneous Letters of the Department of State, NARA; W.H. Seward to Usher, 19 Oct. 1863, correspondence: not indexed, general, WHS. In *Colonization after Emancipation*, 91, we interpreted Seward's letter of 19 Oct. as evidence that even Usher was forced to chase up prospective diplomatic developments pertaining to the British schemes, but since the main text of Seward's reply merely refers to an 'inquiry from the Department of the Interior', it may actually represent a belated match for Mitchell's communication. Nevertheless, the fact that Seward still addressed Usher with an update of events since June rather confirms the general impression that the interior secretary was out of the loop.

tried to move in once more for the kill, but this time it was James Lane (R-Kan.) who anxiously stalled him, reminding the Senate that Mitchell's report was still outstanding.[24]

The senators could not know that as long as their requests for information passed from the White House to the Interior Department via the normal channels, such missives had to cross the desk of a head of department who was deliberately omitting to pass them on to their intended recipient. By the time that Mitchell discovered that he had been invited to offer his version of events, it was already too late for him to do more than send an unofficial circular asking to be allowed to present a report at the next session. Whilst Thomas Hendricks (D-Ind.) accordingly warned his colleagues that they were proceeding on the strength of incomplete information, by 25 June, impending adjournment for the summer meant that the Senate could no longer defer debate. Henry Wilson (R-Mass.) denounced the 'folly' of colonization, which Reverdy Johnson (Unionist-Md.) would not allow to go unchallenged, observing that Wilson had been in the vanguard of those Republicans willing to take their direction from Lincoln in 1862; indeed, Wilson had changed his vote most publicly as to the inclusion of colonization in the District Emancipation Act. Lane deemed Mitchell's character 'unimpeached and unimpeachable', but leant towards repeal through what appears to have been a hope that the funds might thus be freed up for his internal resettlement scheme in Texas, agreeing with Wilson 'that the idea of deportation is exploded, but … not … the separation of the two races.' Several senators debated whether withdrawing the appropriations and thereby terminating Mitchell's office would prevent them ever hearing the desired report, but in the end they decided to risk such an outcome, consenting to repeal in the form of an amendment to the civil expenses bill, and hurriedly moving on to another topic. Other than the sobering fact that most of those present had absolutely no idea of any further projects that the administration had

[24] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 89-92; *CG* 38:1, 1108, 1274, 2218.

initiated beyond Île à Vache, there was one other thing remarkable about the vote: Wilkinson claimed to have conferred with Usher the previous evening, who 'said [the amendment] was right and ought to be passed.' A one-time advocate of racial separation and a man who stood to personally gain from the Chiriquí scheme, which he had touted as recently as his annual report of December 1863, was content to drop an entire swath of his departmental policy remit so that he might be rid of a turbulent priest.[25]

Except for those present on the Senate floor, the repeal of the two sets of colonization appropriations of $100,000 and $500,000 escaped significant commentary, although elements of the ACS, Mitchell, and, some years later, Ambrose Thompson spotted that Wilkinson had botched his amendment by forgetting to add the relevant clauses of an obscure piece of tax legislation from June 1862 that had assigned a share of revenues from confiscated lands to colonization. Lincoln signed the voluminous, end-of-session sundry civil expenses bill without comment, a deed that, despite its usual appearance in the literature as an apt coda to his interest in colonization, clearly carries little of the interpretive weight that it would from a standalone proposition: realistically, would Lincoln have opted to bring a significant part of the federal government's work to a halt on account of a policy that he knew to be dormant and probably beyond revival until the cessation of hostilities? The White House seems to have been at least aware of the rather buried repeal clause, for John Hay famously remarked in his diary for 1 July that Lincoln had 'sloughed off' colonization. But actually, his full entry is rather more ambiguous than that:

> I am glad the President has sloughed off that idea of colonization. I have always thought it a hideous & barbarous humbug & the thievery of Pomeroy and Kock have about converted him to the same belief. Mitchell says Usher allows Pomeroy to have the records of the Chiriqui matters away from the Department to cook up his fraudulent accounts by. If so, Usher ought to be hamstrung.

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[25] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 92-4; *CG* 38:1, 3261-3; 'Department of the Interior', *New York Times*, 10 Dec. 1863.

It is not clear whether Hay had reached this conclusion from a conversation with the president, or had simply taken the bill as a prompt to offer a personal inference, and perhaps one that he had drawn some time earlier. For the most part, his diary is terse and matter-of-factual; one might have expected him to record an intimately introspective discussion with Lincoln in rather more obvious terms, although his wording certainly does not preclude such an occurrence, or even a broader accumulation of similar remarks on the part of his boss. Matters become even more complicated when we recall that Hay and his colleague Nicolay do not seem to have known of the imperial schemes.[26]

What is most noteworthy is that the secretary simply did not express the kind of opinion that scholars so often attribute to him. Even if Lincoln did go so far as to confide changed feelings to Hay, they were along the lines of 'slough[ing] off' – as though dead skin or tissue, and gradually so, even layer by layer – a policy that had attracted only corruption, which in turn had '*about* converted' the president as to its wider merits. Whilst the cryptic words 'sloughed off' ultimately defy decipherment, it is intriguing that Hay does not have Lincoln down as, say, 'seeing the light' or any equally reassuring equivalent, whilst he also appears to project much of his own dislike of the graft that colonization had attracted onto the president's thought process. Sizing up the diary entry, Phillip Paludan suggested that 'Lincoln then seems to have abandoned the idea as much because of the complications and corruption that attended the enterprise as out of a belief that he should now become more liberal.' Weighing into the debate over colonization in the wake of his provocative *Lincoln: A Novel* (1984) and the television dramatization arising therefrom (1988), no less a figure than Gore Vidal has also passed comment on Hay's phrasing, pointing out that '"about converted" doesn't sound to me like a sprint to Damascus.' On its own, Hay's observation is so pervaded with vagueness

[26] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 94-5, 151 n. 45; Mitchell, *Brief on Emigration and Colonization*, 2; T.S. Malcom to W. Coppinger, 16 May 1864, ACS 95; J. Bigelow to A.W. Thompson, 6 Feb., 24 Feb. 1879, AWT; M. Burlingame et al., *Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay* (Carbondale, 1997), 217.

and uncertainty, both as to its meaning and its author's credentials on the specific policy in question, that it could mark anything from an authoritative last word confirming Lincoln's rejection of colonization, a moment of presidential frustration that he had accurately witnessed but which did not necessarily betoken Lincoln's permanent abandonment of the policy, to a somewhat questionable inference from absence by a man who was not even privy to the second wave of projects.[27]

Yet the Hay evidence is not the only suggestion we have that Lincoln did not necessarily take the repeal of the appropriations as closing the door on colonization. Although his original communication has been lost, possibly in a fire that claimed most of the Bates papers, the president forwarded a query from a now cash-strapped and limbo-bound Mitchell, whose office had been a creation of the president and not of Congress, to the attorney general, which a clerk summarized thus:

> Sept 9th The Pres't
> Requesting opin. as to whether prov'ns of laws [perhaps 'Cong.'] for colonization of colored persons have ceased & whether office of Comm[r]. of Emigration continues
>
> [enclosing]
>
> " 6th James Mitchell, Comm[r]. of Emigration to the President
> & c – & c (Endorsed on commun. [?] to Pres't from Jas Mitchell
> Requesting opinion of Atty Gen'l on points above mentioned to be ordered by Prest

On account of his impending retirement, Bates only slowly got round to replying. 'I beg pardon for having overlooked ... in my latter days in the office, the duty to give formal answer to your question concerning your power still to retain the Revd Mr Mitchell as your assistant or aid in the matter of executing the several acts of Congress relating to the emigration or Colonizing of the freed blacks', apologized the attorney general. 'It is too late for me now to give a formal opinion upon the question, as this is my last day in office. I can only say that, having examined all the acts referred to, I am satisfied that,

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[27] P.S. Paludan, 'Lincoln and Colonization: Policy or Propaganda?', *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 25 (Winter 2004), 36; G. Vidal et al., *Conversations with Gore Vidal* (Jackson, 2005), 103.

notwithstanding the act which repeals the appropriation contingently, you still have something to do, under those acts'. The president had as much right to retain Mitchell as he had enjoyed to appoint him originally, Bates confirmed; '[a]nd I hope it will be done, for he seems to be a good man, of zeal & capacity.' It is impossible to know how much Lincoln was asking such questions in his own right as opposed to merely forwarding Mitchell's line of enquiry, although the clerk's summary of the president's letter perhaps hints at something slightly more substantial than a perfunctory covering note. Certainly, that the government could undertake colonization without expense – and therefore without funding – was a point that Mitchell was keen to emphasize the next year, when he pressed for the renewal of the costless emigration arrangements with Britain; that hardly precludes the president himself thinking along similar lines, however, especially given his known qualms concerning the unsavoury effect of money on colonization policy. Furthermore, whilst we cannot tell for certain whether Lincoln conceived of his request for clarification with a proactive view to resuming colonization, or merely as a matter of theoretical interest, it does seem slightly unlikely that he would have asked a septuagenarian statesman, whom he knew to be on the cusp of a long-overdue retirement, for a formal legal opinion out of nothing more than passing curiosity.[28]

Whilst there is no smoking gun for Lincoln's continued belief in colonization from early 1864, there are other hints, which, however tentative in their nature, necessarily compare rather favourably to the complete void of evidence that he had actually repudiated the policy. Sean Wilentz takes to task those scholars who draw conclusions from the fact that the president never explicitly renounced colonization, but it is worth noting that some of Lincoln's contemporaries made exactly the same assumption. More significantly, they issued him clear demands to distance himself from

[28] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 98-9; D. Mowry (ed.), 'Letters … From the Private Papers and Correspondence of Senator James Rood Doolittle of Wisconsin', *Missouri Historical Review*, 11 (Jan. 1917), 133; Lincoln to Bates, 9 Sept. 1864, Register of Letters Received: 2 Mar. 1861 – 31 Dec. 1868, Records of the Attorney General's Office, NARA; Bates to Lincoln, 30 Nov. 1864, AL; Mitchell, *Brief on Emigration*, 2-7.

the policy or to face the consequences, namely, a slump in his standing amongst radical and even moderate Republicans. Admittedly, much of their fury over colonization was tied up with hatred of the Blairs, who seemed to be forever starring in the role of the president's evil counsel. Although it is not clear how much the Blair clan really spoke for Lincoln by 1864, he made incriminatingly few gestures to their critics, only belatedly asking for Montgomery's resignation on the friendliest of terms in order to ensure a united Republican ticket that autumn. The postmaster general had already kicked up a storm with an October 1863 diatribe against the abolitionist wing of the party, and his brother Frank raised the temperature once more with a February 1864 broadside from the floor of the House, reaffirming the president's desire for emancipation with 'compensation for slaves in the loyal Border States, and colonization of the freedmen in some suitable locality'; Montgomery supplied Lincoln with a copy of the speech a few days afterwards. Accordingly, three weeks later, Henry Winter Davis rose to demand that the president repudiate the Blairs and colonization once and for all, declaring Frank's remarks 'a vindication of the colonization policy', as well as reminding the other representatives that the White House had disavowed none of what Blair had said. The member for Missouri's first district met Davis's challenge by extolling the virtues of 'Mr. Lincoln's humane, wise, and benevolent policy' at some length, in amongst wide-ranging criticism of his 'Jacobin' opponents' approach to emancipation and reconstruction policy. One observer wrote to the president from the gallery of the House before Blair had even finished his speech, asking him to renounce the congressman, who surely 'misrepresents you'. The White House offered nothing by way of reply. 'Lincoln's creature was sent here for a special purpose', concluded James Garfield (R-Ohio), 'which, when accomplished, he put him back in his place [in the army], thus ratifying all he said and did when here.' If colonization really meant little to Lincoln by this point, and if his differences with the radicals truly were more cosmetic than real, then he squandered a valuable opportunity to signal his sympathy with at least some of their concerns, and

that just months away from a long-brewing rupture over reconstruction and abolition policy.[29]

Furthermore, a perfectly explicit suggestion that the president had not abandoned colonization appears in the curiously underused post-war writings of Gideon Welles, the most insightful of the three cabinet diarists and a prolific note-taker. Already, just a few years after the events that he went on to describe, the former navy secretary felt that 'historians, biographers, and commentators have made slight, if any allusion' to Lincoln's commitment to black resettlement. 'In Cabinet meetings, where the subject was frequently discussed, and at the time the preliminary emancipation proclamation was issued, he wished it understood that deportation [colonization] was in his mind inseparably connected with that measure', recorded Welles. The secretary seems to have had little inkling of the second wave of projects, and probably overstated his part in the collapse of the Chiriquí scheme as much from ignorance of its lifespan beyond September 1862 as from boastfulness, but he apparently saw enough of the president's response to the failure of the Île à Vache expedition to declare that 'Lincoln, though disappointed in these experiments, by no means abandoned his policy of deportation and emancipation, for the two were in his mind indispensably and indissolubly connected.'[30]

The easy retort to Welles's essays would be that they represent the voice of a prodigal Democrat disenchanted with congressional reconstruction and keen to claim

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[29] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 105-08; S. Wilentz, 'Who Lincoln Was', *The New Republic*, 15 July 2009; 'Judge Blair's Speech', *New York Times*, 17 Oct. 1863; 'Mr. Blair's Speech', *Chicago Tribune*, 10 Feb. 1864; *CG* 38:1, 509-14, Appendix, 45; M. Blair to Lincoln, 16 Feb., C.M. Hawley to Lincoln, 27 Feb. 1864, AL; H.W. Davis, *The President's Colonization and Compensation Scheme* (Washington, 1864); F.P. Blair, Jr., *The Jacobins of Missouri and Maryland* (Washington, 1864); W.E. Parrish, *Frank Blair: Lincoln's Conservative* (Columbia, 1998), 194.

[30] G. Welles, 'The History of Emancipation', *Galaxy*, 14 (1872), 840-1, 848-9, 'Administration of Abraham Lincoln', *Galaxy*, 24 (1877), 439-40, 444. In the former, Welles stated that the return of the Île à Vache expedition marked an end to administration colonization policy, which he appears to have qualified in the latter piece with the claim that Lincoln did not actually abandon the idea at that point. Yet the difference seems to lie less in a cynical rewrite of history than in the far greater depth that he was able to accord colonization in the second essay, and also in the crucial distinction between the incontrovertible end of effective colonization activity in early 1864, and the president's lingering attachment in principle to the policy.

the martyred Lincoln as a paragon of racial conservatism. Yet radicals such as George Julian and Samuel Pomeroy, and a liberal such as Carl Schurz, also committed to print their abiding impression of the president's earnestness as to colonization. Conversely, Welles himself was actually no supporter of the policy, though he expressly warned his readers not to interpret this as meaning that he somehow supported racial equality, and he could scarcely criticize colonization enough on account of the fraud that had dogged the policy during the war. Furthermore, the secretary's writings are remarkable for their subtlety, nuance, and even-handedness. Far from trotting out a simplistic pseudo-Lincoln for contemporary polemical purposes, Welles cautioned against anything but the most historicized appreciation of the administration's emancipation policy: '[i]t is impossible at this day for those who were not participants to conceive the perplexities attending the disposition of the slavery question in its various and complex phases'. If Welles did have an agenda, it was one that he did not try to hide: rescuing Lincoln from the emerging truism of the 1870s that it was Seward who had been the administration's real statesman, and who had frequently been obliged to guide an inexperienced presidential hand. Such a version of events irritated Welles, who felt that the secretary of state had actually tended to be rather less practical than his boss, and to get in over his head whenever he meddled in matters that did not rightly concern him. Thus, it is really quite striking that Welles admitted at some length that Lincoln had supported, whilst Seward had opposed, a policy that the navy secretary had himself also disliked.[31]

[31] Welles, 'Administration of Abraham Lincoln', 441, 444; J. Niven, *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy* (New York, 1973), 575; M.D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York, 1994), 82-3.

The Butler-Lincoln meetings

It is with respect to the very end of the war that the student of Civil War colonization must encounter the most contentious evidence of all, namely, Benjamin Butler's notorious account of two meetings with Lincoln shortly before the latter's assassination. Contrary to what seems to be a working assumption in much of the literature, the debate over the president's late interest in colonization does not rest exclusively on the veracity of Butler's anecdote, as we have seen from the foregoing discussion of other material pertaining to 1864-5, and from the broader debate in the introduction of this study over where the burden of proof actually lies between those who would have Lincoln repudiate long-held attitudes and those him retain them. Yet, if indeed true, Butler's anecdote certainly provides by far the most vivid and revealing picture of why Lincoln might well have clung onto ideas of colonization. Probably, there will be some readers who can come round to the notion that Lincoln never really gave up hopes for black resettlement, whilst remaining unable to shake off their qualms over Butler's story. When the seeds of doubt have been planted and enthusiastically cultivated by more than half a century of near-consensual historiographical treatment, it is difficult indeed to ever truly eradicate them, and certain aspects of Butler's story do remain highly suspect. Yet if such readers can at least agree that it has become a legitimate topic for academic debate once more, that alone would represent no small departure from the recent tendencies of the literature.

Constraints of space prevent a full elaboration of the details of the three versions of Butler's story to have come to light, although the interested scholar will find pointers to full textual comparison in the footnotes. According to the more concordant elements of a brief *New York Times* report (1884), Butler's contribution to Allen Thorndike Rice's *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln* (1886), and Butler's *Autobiography* (or *Butler's Book*, 1892), in an early 1865 conversation with the major general, a clearly disturbed Lincoln

brought up lingering fears of racial disharmony in the South, asking 'what shall we do with the negroes after they are free?' He then opined that it would be better for African American soldiers, otherwise on the point of demobilization, to relocate to other climes, and asked Butler to undertake some calculations as to the logistics of mass colonization. Some days later, Butler returned to report that such an undertaking was numerically impossible, but that a more select group of 50,000 black troops under his command could survey, dig, and defend a canal across the isthmus of Darién, and subsequently call upon Congress to send their families to join them. 'There is meat in that suggestion, General Butler; there is meat in that suggestion', replied Lincoln, who then sent him to consult Seward as to the diplomatic considerations that it might entail. The secretary of state expressed little surprise at Lincoln's concerns, admitting that the president had spoken to him frequently upon the subject, but before anything more could happen, Seward was injured in a carriage accident and then once more in the assassination conspiracy that claimed Lincoln's life.[32]

There are some obvious problems with Butler's renditions of events, although they mostly concern more peripheral points, self-complimentary embellishments, or excusable errors of dating and conflation when it comes to recollections that he had to dredge up after a lapse of some two or three decades, without the assistance of a diary or apparent recourse to the exact text of his earlier printed tellings of the story; he also employed the services of a stenographer from the late 1870s, which presumably kept his anecdotes flowing with less scope for reflection and double-checks than that normally enjoyed by someone putting words to paper at a gentler pace. As with most published reminiscences, the participants' manner of speaking seems somewhat inflated, especially by the 1892 version. The president offers unlikely words of praise for Butler's military manoeuvres, for some of his other qualities, and for his standing amongst

[32] Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 109-14; 'Spain to Abandon Cuba', *New York Times*, 20 Aug. 1884; A.T. Rice (ed.), *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time* (New York, 1886), 149-54; B.F. Butler, *Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences of Major-General Benjamin F. Butler* (Boston, 1892), 903-08.

African Americans, whilst the major general gets to name himself as a geostrategic and racial visionary who continued to hold Lincoln's confidence despite some recent low points in his chequered career. Although redolent of some of Welles's comments from as early as the 1870s, the terms in which the president expresses concerns about black troops' scope for violence do not ring altogether true; Mark Neely, the most prominent critic of the Butler anecdote, rightly claims that they have acquired the flavour of a 'sort of *fin-de-siecle* racial fantasy' by their 1892 rendition, in which Lincoln states that white soldiers of both sides were more trustworthy than black US troops. In short, there appears to be a watertight list of eminently sound reasons to dismiss the story outright.[33]

Yet its reputation was not always thus. When Butler published his story on more than one occasion – and indeed, Welles his own recollections – during the lifespan of many of Lincoln's contemporaries and political intimates, nobody appears to have challenged him, even though the controversy surrounding Ward Lamon's *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, for example, suggests that a vociferous contingent of self-appointed custodians of the president's memory had already emerged. When Rice's compilation appeared, one periodical simply referred to Butler's recollection as 'the most interesting in the book'. Early in the twentieth century, an African American newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*, even rued that with 'the [canal] colonization project perhaps by this time we could boast of a country or at least a breathing spot we could call our own.'[34]

Yet the Butler story was to become the main exhibit in the mid-twentieth century historiographical turn on Lincoln and colonization, in which growing discomfort over the story's implications drew succour from increased scholarly specialization to introduce novel notes of doubt, although Butler's broadly poor reputation and the high stakes riding on his claims meant that he had already fallen into disfavour prior to the

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[33] M.E. Neely, Jr., 'Abraham Lincoln and Black Colonization: Benjamin Butler's Spurious Testimony', *Civil War History*, 25 (Mar. 1979), 83.
[34] Peterson, 79-81; 'A Chat about New Books', *Catholic World*, 44 (Dec. 1886); 'Lincoln and the Panama Canal', *Chicago Defender*, 12 Apr. 1913.

full-blown emergence of the lullaby thesis, which by its very line of argument necessarily expresses no confidence whatsoever in his claims. With some input from Roy Basler, the tale became a point of difference in the early 1950s between the two chroniclers of the Chiriquí scheme, Warren Beck and Paul Scheips. Although George Fredrickson argued as late as 1975 that Butler had been essentially truthful, Neely seemed to close down all debate in 1979 with a point-by-point dismissal covering the tale's purported incongruities and inconsistencies, notably with respect to Butler's claimed timeline. Nevertheless, the major general's anecdote remains neither provable nor disprovable in the final instance. For the most part, it is possible to handle it only by abstraction, sifting what truth there might be from embellishment, misrecollection, or outright mendacity. The resultant debate is accordingly a rather top-heavy one in which much of the stated case both for and against Butler's truthfulness does not really comprise new lines of argument at all, but rather an enumeration of other historians' stances by way of support; of accumulated weight, not muscle. By the same token, scholars have not been immune to changing with the historiographical winds: in a lively 1988 exchange in the *New York Review of Books*, Gore Vidal pulled up Richard Current for changing his stance on Butler's story from slight doubt during the 1950s to total incredulity by the 1980s, whilst even Fredrickson had avowedly come to accept the implications of Neely's detective work by his final lectures in 2006.[35]

Yet the direction of such gusts may be changing once more, much as with the tentative signs of a willingness to entertain the broader notion of Lincoln's post-1863 interest in colonization, and perhaps simply from a gnawing sense of dissatisfaction at just how cut-and-dried has been the mainstream academic dismissal of an incredibly

[35] P.J. Scheips, 'Lincoln and the Chiriqui Colonization Project', *Journal of Negro History*, 37 (Oct. 1952), 449 n. 57; G.M. Fredrickson, 'A Man but Not a Brother: Abraham Lincoln and Racial Equality', *Journal of Southern History*, 41 (Feb. 1975), 56-8, *Big Enough to Be Inconsistent: Abraham Lincoln Confronts Slavery and Race* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), 129-30 n. 2; Neely, 'Abraham Lincoln and Black Colonization'; P.D. Escott, *"What Shall We Do with the Negro?": Lincoln, White Racism, and Civil War America* (Charlottesville, 2009), 223; Wilentz, 'Who Lincoln Was'; 'Gore Vidal's 'Lincoln'?: An Exchange', *New York Review of Books*, 28 Apr., and replies thereto, 18 Aug. 1988; Peterson, 92, 394-5.

distinctive story that, as it turns out, the major general felt comfortable repeating on multiple occasions, years apart. 'After all, isn't it possible that Butler and Lincoln did have a conversation some time in late 1864 or early 1865', asks Vorenberg, 'that Butler remembered the date incorrectly, that Butler told Lincoln his various schemes for using African soldiers abroad, and Lincoln nodded approvingly, perhaps because he liked the idea, or more likely because he wanted to end the conversation with a general whom he did not much like.' It is also worth adding that, whilst Butler's truthfulness remains beyond either proof or disproof, some of Neely's arguments for dismissal have recently run into trouble. In 2008, Phillip Magness re-opened the case by alerting historians to the existence of the 1886 Rice version of the 'colonization interview', where they had previously drawn upon nothing more than *Butler's Book* (1892), whose greater removal from the events that it describes loads it with more factual flaws than its earlier counterpart.[36]

The main thrust of Neely's case had been that Butler was not even in Washington when some of his references to conversations held in March would have required him to be. Using the more internally consistent Rice account, Magness suggests that both Butler-Lincoln meetings actually fell in the week between Lincoln's visit to Richmond and 11 April, the second of them certainly on the latter date, as indicated by an invitation to the White House that has survived in the Butler papers and that corresponds to his recollection of an early morning appointment. (A similar misplacement as in *Butler's Book* of the date of Seward's carriage accident continues to raise valid questions about the major general's recollections of his encounter with the secretary of state, but the mistake now comes within the parameters of a few days, and may accordingly appear to be more of the ilk of innocent memory lapse or accidental conflation with other meetings.) Another prominent line of attack on Butler, that he sought to claim retrospective credit for the idea of the Panama Canal by fabricating US

[36] Vorenberg, 'After Emancipation', 218; Magness, 'Benjamin Butler's Colonization Testimony Reevaluated', *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 29 (Winter 2008), 1-28.

isthmian plans not otherwise attested as early as 1865, must also run up against firm evidence that later that year, Seward and General Grant did in fact discuss the very idea that Butler claimed to have taken to the secretary of state: a Darién canal dug by black troops. That does not in itself confirm Butler's involvement, and it may still be the case that he had heard the idea from other sources, given that the isthmus was on the government's mind in 1865 following a recent Colombian ban on US transit thereof. Yet at the very least, it is a striking coincidence, and it quashes a once presumed *im*possibility of his story in a situation whereby, as with any other source, the onus lies more on sceptics to disprove than believers to affirm.[37]

With such channels for 'contextual' doubt over Butler's story now somewhat narrowed, albeit perhaps not altogether blocked off, the debate appears likely to recur to the claimed substance of his meetings. It is worth wondering if there is not, after all, some common ground that we can stake out, which admittedly has to involve rather more concessions from the doubters, since theirs is currently the dominant, even domineering point of view. Likely owing in part to the unnerving absence of further evidence either way, and the pleasure that Lincoln's harshest critics unsurprisingly derive from Butler's anecdote, those who dismiss the source sometimes become unjustly shrill in tone towards those who confess that they do not. Levelling such flat charges as 'credulity' is uncollegial, and perhaps ill-advised where future scholars might decide that the real credulity lay with those late twentieth and early twenty-first century historians who simply airbrushed out a substantial challenge to a magnetic narrative of racial progress that was in turn based on a small sample of one man's deeds over a four-year period of his life. Sceptics might also concede that Lincoln's surviving circles appear to

[37] Neely, 79-80; Magness, 'Benjamin Butler's Colonization Testimony', 5-11, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 114-15; J.Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* (31 vols., Carbondale, 1967-2009), xv, 413.

have at least held their peace over Butler's story, and that, quite apart from whether it *is* untrue, it is something that we *want* to be untrue.[38]

It may be possible to bring aspects of the content and of the presumed significance of Butler's account down to a level of constructive debate and amicable disagreement, rather than of complete dismissal or unquestioning acceptance. In 1975, Fredrickson placed high stakes on the Butler-Lincoln encounter, which he took to 'support the hypothesis that Lincoln died with the same basic views on black-white relations that he held tenaciously throughout his public life.' Though still amenable to Butler's essential truthfulness even after Fredrickson had announced his changed views, Henry Louis Gates recently made a conciliatory attempt to draw off some of the heat surrounding Butler's anecdote, although Wilentz for one signally rebuffed him. 'If I can risk a speculation', writes Gates, 'it seems to me that even if we did in fact learn that Lincoln held on to the very end to the idea of colonization … this would not sully his reputation in any meaningful way, if we judge him by nineteenth-century standards'. Certainly, it would be easier to accept the key elements of Butler's story if we could break our persistent intellectual habit of mutual exclusion, whereby Lincoln simply cannot hold both hopes and fears for the future of American race relations, or toy with new ideas, such as the black vote, whilst clinging onto old ones such as colonization.[39]

Offering what amounts to another compromise position of sorts, Vorenberg inclines to accept that the Butler-Lincoln discussions occurred, but queries whether they really constituted 'colonization': 'I agree with Neely that Lincoln had given up on the idea of colonizing freed people by this time. But this was not a plan for colonization. It was a plan for black soldiers … who were owed something but who, in Lincoln's mind, were unlikely to ever become citizens of the nation.' Admittedly, neither Butler nor Lincoln uses 'colonization' in their two discussions, although in the 1886 version,

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[38] Wilentz, 'Who Lincoln Was'.
[39] Fredrickson, 'A Man but Not a Brother', 58; H.L. Gates, Jr., *Lincoln on Race and Slavery* (Princeton, 2009), lxiv.

Butler's reminiscences follow a brief acknowledgement of Lincoln's well-known 'negro colonization' schemes. It also seems that the major general wrote to radical correspondents in 1865 of his opposition to 'colonization', although his real fire was reserved for the domestic racial separation arrangements put forward by William Sherman and Jacob Cox; moreover, it is clearly problematic to discredit a purportedly fabricated story by unquestioningly taking parts of its progenitor's other writings as sincere rather than as, say, a cunning attempt to get right with radical opinion. And as noted in the introduction of this study, those who supported black resettlement in one form or another sometimes displayed an impressive knack for convincing themselves, as well as others, that they did not support 'colonization', whatever they understood that word to mean. We need to guard against taking them at their word where self-perception and the potential over-estimation of their own originality may be involved.[40]

Furthermore, despite our evident preoccupation with the truthfulness of the sole chronicler of the Butler-Lincoln interview, the meeting's real significance lies in the views that *Lincoln* expressed, not in those of Butler, who only produces his plan for selective black military resettlement following an initial conversation in which the president expresses concerns about race relations, and wonders if large-scale transportation to more congenial locations such as Liberia and South America might well be logistically possible. For those who fundamentally accept that such a conversation occurred, what was this, if not what Lincoln had always termed colonization? Once again, significant numbers of African Americans were to move so as to address the presumed instability of racial co-existence in the United States. We need not feel bound to 'colonization' in our own choice of terminology, for the word does have its flaws, but should equally resist the temptation to make a complete semantic switch

[40] Vorenberg, 'Abraham Lincoln's "Fellow Citizens" – Before and After Emancipation', in W.A. Blair and K.F. Younger (eds.), *Lincoln's Proclamation: Emancipation Reconsidered* (Chapel Hill, 2009), 161-2; Rice, 150; J.A. Marshall, *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler* (5 vols., Norwood, 1917), v, 647-9; Foner, 402 n. 52; Butler to Sumner, 5 Feb. 1865, roll 32, Charles Sumner Papers, LC.

between our descriptions of the president's earlier efforts and what he proposed in April 1865 so that we can simply fill a void where we feel that some kind of acknowledgement of his personal evolution ought to be.[41]

For those willing to admit of the validity of such an exercise, a point-by-point run through a collated version of the particulars of the Butler-Lincoln meetings reveals a mixture of strengths, weaknesses, and ambiguities that may touch on a genuine scope for misrecollection on the part of the major general, as well as misinterpretation on both his and ours. Whilst the president's morose question, '"what shall we do with the negroes after they are free?"', might appear to sound rather stilted and unrealistically contemplative, his anguish over race relations – especially where his lifelong hopes for the triumph of gradualism had been forced to give way to the realities of immediate abolition – is perfectly well attested. Strikingly, Lincoln had expressed some similarly pessimistic thoughts to an Ohioan congressman two years earlier, 'remark[ing] that he was troubled to know what we should do with these people – Negroes – after peace came … He said that "Whatever you and me may think on these matters peoples opinions were every thing" – He seemed to be sticking in the bank because of the popular delusion that nothing can be done with the Negro if he is *free*.' There is a tantalizing flash of another cross-reference when Butler appears to betray a passing familiarity with the British schemes and their fate in his brief coverage of Lincoln's pre-1865 colonization efforts; although the point is not a clincher, those plans were far from common knowledge, even at cabinet level.[42]

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[41] Rice, 151.

[42] Butler, *Autobiography*, 903; A.G. Bogue, 'William Parker Cutler's Congressional Diary of 1862-63, *Civil War History*, 33 (Dec. 1987), 330. 'And, as I remember, speaking from memory only, [Lincoln] attempted to make some provision at Demerara [Guiana], through the agency of Senator Pomeroy, for colonizing the negroes. The experiment was not fully carried out, the reasons for which are of no moment here.' Butler's connection of Pomeroy with Demerara might reflect a flat misrecollection of the Chiriquí scheme and nothing more, but as noted, others too inadvertently conflated Pomeroy with other colonization schemes, presumably on account of the abiding impression left by the unparalleled press coverage and public discussion of colonization during late 1862. Since such reports had been perfectly clear in themselves as to Pomeroy's destination, and Butler evidently demonstrated an appreciation of US isthmian designs whether

Aside from the questionable but rather tangential personal compliments that Butler puts in Lincoln's mouth, the least convincing assertions concern the president's low estimation of black troops, and his correspondingly high one of their ability to commit violence and depredation. Such worries receive a lurid rendition indeed by the time of *Butler's Book*, albeit one tempered by a more characteristically humane concern that slave soldiers' former masters will oppress them even in a free society. Whilst it is not hard to discern the stock imagery of a certain post-Reconstruction discourse creeping into such recollections, such contamination alone does not make it untrue that Lincoln had once more expressed typical concerns about racial disharmony, so much as it may reflect on two to three decades' colouring of Butler's memories by the ideas in circulation around him. Moreover, in his most famous attempt to explain his colonizationist rationale, the president had managed to perplex even a contemporary audience of millions, and that despite allowing it access to a thorough and fresh transcript of his address to the black deputation: African Americans were not to *blame* for racial violence, exactly, and yet a vicious war of 'white men cutting one another's throats' had somehow broken out strictly on their account, thus rendering any failure on their part to leave the United States 'extremely selfish'. In light of Lincoln's evident ability to come out with such close logic alongside sanguinary imagery and bold statements of causation approximating blame, might we not forgive Butler for perhaps losing his grasp of some of the president's nuances after almost thirty years' remove, especially against a contemporary backdrop of increasingly confident truisms about innate black capacity for malice when placed in positions of power, and instead for merely remembering talk of a race war provoked by African Americans?[43]

There is another seemingly unlikely aspect of the major general's tale that may not be so far removed from Lincoln's known colonization commentary as scholars have

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he was actually being truthful or not, it seems somewhat unlikely that he totally confused Chiriquí with distant Demerara. (Rice, 150.)

[43] Butler, *Autobiography*, 903; *CW*, v, 371-2.

tended to argue. Whilst there appears to be a strong hint of mass, even comprehensive deportation lingering over the president's purported suggestions, especially in the form of such talk as 'getting rid' of African Americans in *Butler's Book*, and in the general slant of their conversations towards the deleterious effects of racial co-existence on whites rather than blacks, Lincoln does not actually state, beyond a passing, perhaps sloppily off-the-cuff or misremembered remark about 'sending all the blacks away', that he is aiming for complete removal, or that he will waive a requirement for African American consent. Granted, he evinces a discomforting failure to break down the 'negroes' into groups that may be more and less inclined to leave, and asks for some ambitious logistical calculations on the possibility of their 'exportation', but the strongest suggestion of such systematic removal as the American marine will permit actually emanates from Butler when he subsequently reports his full calculations to Lincoln – although the president does express some disappointment at the major general's altogether sceptical findings, as well as his own prior suspicion that such an exercise would indeed be impossible, much in the same vein as the doubts that he had expressed at Peoria in 1854. Still, Lincoln had proven perfectly capable in his second annual message of reconciling calculations and qualitative assumptions premised on the gradual yet thorough disappearance of African Americans with an attack on forced deportation and the prejudicial sentiments that underpinned the same, for his accompanying argument had been that black Americans would *choose* to leave the United States of their own accord, although the government might nevertheless provide them with assistance. If we can credit that he still held on to even vestiges of such a belief, especially if he thought African Americans likely to emerge from the war with no greater enticement to remain in the United States than their personal freedom, then much of the supposed incredibility of the Butler meeting may disappear.[44]

[44] Butler, *Autobiography*, 903-04; Rice, 151-2; *CW*, ii, 255-6, v, 520, 534-5.

That may in turn represent the real significance of their discussions: Lincoln did not necessarily anticipate renewing colonization for certain, although he supposedly mused that the arrival of peace might free up the requisite naval resources, and he did not necessarily invite all the particulars of Butler's suggestions, or find himself in complete accord with them, beyond the cautious endorsement, '"there is meat in that"'. Rather, the point would be that he once again entertained the same old doubts over the future of race relations, and the possibility that African Americans might have to leave the country in order to forestall social disharmony. As Gates recently suggested, we can 'find it perfectly reasonable that a war-weary Abraham Lincoln, who we know was still dreaming about the merits of colonization only two years before his death, might have allowed himself to wonder about – metaphorically "doing the figures" one more time – the feasibility of shipping the bulk of the former slaves out of this domain.' Yet set against a literature based on Lincoln's personal growth, especially via his purported repudiation of old stances, in turn a choice of scholarly emphasis that compensates for what most historians agree to be the tentative nature of his new departures in the area of black rights, even a recurrence to colonizationist thinking must count as significant.[45]

One final consideration of the Butler anecdote is that of his presumed motivation for fabricating the whole encounter, rather than merely embellishing it around the edges in the manner discussed. On balance, this represents by far the weakest aspect of the argument against his underlying truthfulness.

First, people very rarely make things up out of thin air – or even have the imagination to do so, let alone the power of recall to repeat them with some consistency years apart – but much of the literature falls back in this instance on an alarming *a priori* assumption that, since the anecdote in question came from the mouth of Benjamin Butler, it practically *must* have been untrue. The major general was a political appointment with a typically chequered record, not someone who, to have completely

[45] Gates, lviii.

fabricated the content of his interview with Lincoln, would have more likely been such a pathological liar as to barely function in society; his 'Beast' moniker is also more appropriate to pantomime villainy than to academic assessment, and we ought to consider how much we sympathize with those particulars of his poor reputation that were Confederate in provenance. Even in 1865, Butler probably still held more weight with Lincoln than most accounts suggest, albeit more a grudging presidential respect for his political significance than any sort of personal affection. It had been Grant rather than Lincoln who had pushed to relieve Butler from his command of the Army of the James, the most obvious recent downturn in his career, whilst on 11 April, the date of their second meeting, Lincoln intervened to frustrate the investigation into cotton-smuggling at Fortress Monroe which was the occasion of Butler's uneasy visit to Washington, and a source of worry to some of Lincoln's closest associates as well.[46]

Even assuming that the president did consider the major general more a liability than a benefit, that did not necessarily prevent him unburdening himself of some of his most haunting concerns to a prominent soldier-politician who happened to be otherwise idle and around to listen to him. Furthermore, there may even have been something positive to be said for sending Butler out of the country. The administration had just despatched the equally colourful and controversial Daniel Sickles to Colombia on a mission to negotiate the reopening of isthmian transit, which many suspected was partly supposed to neutralize him; aptly, his visit sparked local fears of renewed US colonizationist intent. Yet rather more importantly than trying to calibrate Butler's career prospects in 1865, we need to answer a fundamental question as to how much we believe of the source record surrounding someone whom we have deemed prone to total mistruth. Do we think all of Butler's near-1,200 page autobiography untrue? If not, which parts seem more credible, and why? Do we scrub his contemporary letters and

[46] Peterson, 92; L.H. Johnson, 'Contraband Trade During the Last Year of the Civil War', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 49 (Mar. 1963), 635-52; D.G. Surdam, 'Traders or Traitors: Northern Cotton Trading During the Civil War', *Business and Economic History*, 28 (Winter 1999), 301-12; *CW*, viii, 395.

military despatches from the evidentiary record too, or do we feel that the worst self-aggrandizement only tends to enter the picture some years afterwards, in one's memoirs? Ultimately, these do not, and cannot, constitute arguments that Butler was not lying in this instance. But they are points that we need to give serious consideration before bludgeoning open Pandora's box with the crude assertion that the major general was simply an untrustworthy witness.[47]

Second, it is most unclear what Butler was supposed to achieve through such lies, especially when compared to the presumably extensive list of alternative falsehoods that he could have produced. The only developed critique of his story is that of Neely, who regards it as cover for his real reasons for going to Washington, namely, the cotton-trading investigation, and as a means of answering his detractors by demonstrating that he had still held the president's confidence at the end of the war. If so, the anecdote seems an eccentric way of going about it. Neely argued that it is 'rich in the details which create credibility, [but which] also offer numerous ways of verifying its accuracy'. Would it not be more intuitive, however, for a lying Butler to avoid offering the sceptical investigator the rope with which to hang him; to keep the meetings' placement vague, rather than attempt to recall dates and locations in such a way as might allow a future Neely to contradict him and thus, presumably, bring the rest of his memoirs into question; or simply to write out any mention of his Washington trip whatsoever, so as not even to draw the reader's mind to thoughts of why he might have been there? If it is so incredible that Lincoln could have still entertained thoughts of colonization in 1865, why would Butler risk inventing them where doing so might incur public correction from those of the president's associates who had a better claim on knowing more of his future designs, when the major general could simply have Lincoln shake his hand and congratulate him on a good war – in a manner that we might find somewhat suspect, but also hard to pick away at, in the absence of obvious chinks – before making an ill-fated

[47] T. Keneally, *American Scoundrel: The Life of the Notorious Civil War General Dan Sickles* (New York, 2002), 311; Foner, 401-02 n. 52.

trip to the box office that placed Butler beyond provable contradiction? If Butler meant for Lincoln to posthumously write a line for his curriculum vitae, why not have the president expound on a skill that could be more useful and lucrative for him in the present than being known by all and sundry as essentially competent in the deployment of long-demobilized troops to dig a canal that the French seemed to have sewn up by that point? Admittedly, we can probably produce answers to all the foregoing questions, and there remains a valid query as to whether Butler was indeed claiming credit for a canal idea that he had merely picked up from others in 1865, whether wittingly or not. Yet such questions and their likely responses illustrate a wider point that, once we decide to latch onto some autobiographical evidence, we will always be able to argue for and against it in increasingly abstract terms. In that respect, Butler's account may not be especially unbelievable compared to others of its genre, and at some point, the debate probably has to fall back to *why* we want to treat it as incredible.[48]

Furthermore, if a hypothetically mendacious Butler's intended emphasis were on the actual colonization content of his meetings with Lincoln rather than the compliments that he pays himself, then there would seem to be two arguments against the validity of his recollections. One would be that he was trying to proclaim himself a supporter of colonization, perhaps the kind of politician suited to the Jim Crow era; someone not afraid to rekindle the possibility of black resettlement with the revelation that the iconic Lincoln had shared his views even in 1865. The other would be that he actually intended to publicize an *anti*-colonization stance, presumably at the expense of a president who had broached the idea near his death and who was no longer around to defend himself, in order to stress his own progressive credentials – though he would have been doing so to a Gilded Age audience whose racial conscience already slept rather easily by the mid-1880s. It says much about our insidious ability to cast doubt on a source – and indeed, much about the mixed import of Butler's story – that we can

[48] Neely, 79, 81-2.

probably argue for both of these positions, which read perfectly persuasively on their own and yet stand in diametric opposition to one another. And sure enough, the exchanges between Butler and Lincoln are just too messily mixed in their upshot, and collaboratively mutual in their dynamic, for the major general to pose as strongly for or against colonization, especially in some kind of intended contradistinction to the president. In sequence: Lincoln expresses concerns about racial disharmony; Butler makes some ultimately unfavourable logistical calculations at his behest, without offering any notes of principled protest against the idea; Lincoln admits that he had suspected as much anyway, but asks about more select provisions for black troops; then Butler suggests the idea of the canal party, albeit with a conventional colonizationist suggestion that the soldiers' families eventually join them, to which Lincoln offers an encouraging but non-committal reply. If Butler was trying to unambiguously identify Lincoln or himself with one side or the other of some kind of racial debate for polemical purposes, the reader could be forgiven for having to ask which it was, and that for each man.

Ultimately, we can never know what transpired. For just three days after the certain fact of a meeting with Butler, the president was fatally shot. At some point shortly after the attempt on his own life, Seward looked back on his relationship with the president in conversation with a visitor, a New York publisher, J.C. Derby. Unlike Lincoln's words to Butler, the encounter ended up in print within a couple of years, during the lifetime of the man who had uttered them:

> "No knife was ever sharp enough to divide us upon any question of public policy," said the Secretary; "though we frequently arrived at the same conclusion through different processes of thought." "Once only," he continued, musingly, "did we disagree in sentiment." Mr. D. inquired the subject of dissent. "His 'colonization' scheme," was the reply, "which I opposed on the self-evident principle that all *natives* of a country have an *equal* right in its soil."

In June 1865, Seward's private secretary George Baker also took stock of his boss's differences with the late president, and concurred that 'Lincoln and Seward never

disagreed in but one subject – that was the colonization of the negroes.' Perhaps, such observations correspond rather neatly to the Seward whom Butler remembered as unsurprised to learn that the major general had recently held the conversation with the president that he claimed to have done. Perhaps, too, they simply ring true in a broader sense of the extent to which the policy had riven the innermost circles of the administration, albeit in a manner forever lost to us except for these occasional glimmers in the sources. Either way, they do not sit easily with the standard account of a president who had simply given up colonization with the advent of an emancipatory turn to the war two and a half years previously, or who had never even truly believed in it.[49]

[49] F.B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House* (New York, 1867), 291; G. Hunt, *Israel, Elihu and Cadwallader Washburn: A Chapter in American Biography* (New York, 1925), 116.

Epilogue

With Lincoln's death, a new administration, and, in relatively short order, even recently improbable battles over African American rights to be fought, most of the individuals who feature in this study gave up the pursuit of colonization, albeit more from a change in wider political circumstances than in their personal convictions. Of course, there was some outstanding business to try to wind up. Charles Tuckerman pestered the Johnson administration for some years, as we have seen, evidently refusing to interpret an incident in which he was briefly locked in on his own with Lincoln's body, lying in state in New York's City Hall, as some kind of symbolic message that his hopes for redress might have died with the president. James Mitchell also did not succeed in his attempts to favourably resolve a protracted salary dispute that the repeal of the colonization appropriations had engendered, and although he met up with Edward Bates in St. Louis in late 1865, as well as remaining in contact with other Washington friends for some time, he eventually decamped to a Methodist seminary in Georgia.[1]

The air of mystery surrounding the significant expenditure on the abortive Chiriquí project lingered for some years, with Pomeroy's fellow legislators proving signally unwilling to forget his failure to account for drafts totalling $25,000, however little they recalled – or had ever even known – of the other aspects of that scheme. Treasury Secretary Hugh McCulloch asked the cabinet in late 1868 for any information that its members might remember, to which Seward replied with a rendition of events on Île à Vache. Gideon Welles acerbically recorded that '[t]he subject was new to most, or all of the others. Seward, in expiating upon it, magnified his own doings … he attempted to belittle Mr. Lincoln, who, he said, knew nothing … of public affairs except

[1] C.K. Tuckerman, 'Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln', *Magazine of American History*, 19 (May 1888), 413-14; P.W. Magness and S.N. Page, *Colonization after Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (Columbia, 2011), 99-104.

what related to army movements. In this he does injustice to Mr. Lincoln, who better understood things generally than Mr. Seward.' Actually, the navy secretary did his colleague an injustice of his own in remarking that the secretary of state 'took no part against' colonization at the time. Given the limitations of what Welles had witnessed of the administration's later execution of the policy, however, his error was almost certainly unwitting rather than deliberate.[2]

In one way, collective memories of the very notion of colonization aged terribly in a post-slavery United States. They were almost wilfully erased from the record of the slain Lincoln, whose public remarks on black suffrage, and his inevitably elevated reputation by comparison with his successor, meant that unlikely factions already vied to claim him as their own. As early as September 1865, Thaddeus Stevens condemned colonization as the 'favorite plan of the Blairs, with which they had for a while inoculated our late sainted President', adding '[b]ut a single experiment made him discard it and its advisers.' Yet thoughts of racial separation were hardly limited to that family. Probably taking inspiration from William Sherman's recent order to set aside parts of the South Carolina and Georgia coast for freemen, in 1865, Major General Jacob Cox ran for the governorship of Ohio on a platform of internal colonization. Whilst radical Republicans were horrified, not failing to connect the proposal to its obvious antecedents, Cox's papers reveal plenty of support from the public, especially from the army; that November, he won by a landslide, although it is impossible to tell how much the outcome reflected support for any one part of Cox's manifesto.[3]

Yet, true to their reputation, the Blair family still comprised the most forceful advocates of colonization to those who would listen: in late 1866, Francis, Sr., broached the idea of black settlements around the Rio Grande with Oliver Howard of the Freedmen's Bureau, once more with a view to US expansion in the Caribbean; a year

[2] H.K. Beale (ed.), *Diary of Gideon Welles* (3 vols., New York, 1960), iii, 427-9.
[3] R.N. Current, *Old Thad Stevens: A Story of Ambition* (Madison, 1942), 215; W.H. Ahern, 'The Cox Plan of Reconstruction: A Case Study in Ideology and Race Relations', *Civil War History*, 16 (Dec. 1970), 293-308.

later, he took a similar plan to the presumptive presidential nominee Grant, who 'looked aghast' at Blair's suggestion that the plan might constitute a 'compromise' alternative to congressional reconstruction. Nonetheless, Grant's accession to the White House found him contemplating the annexation of Santo Domingo, partly as a refuge for African Americans. His willingness to incorporate the island polity as a state, and his broader vision of southern freedmen exploiting the offer of such a refuge as a bargaining chip to force whites to appreciate their labour, imbued it with a certain radicalism that attracted significant African American and abolitionist support; tellingly, the Blairs opposed his annexation plans. At a basic level, however, provision for the voluntary movement of African Americans again seemed to offer an additional solution to the quandaries, even dichotomies, of Reconstruction.[4]

Viewed in the long run, it was the sincere efforts that Republicans expended during the late 1860s and early 1870s to incorporate African Americans into the political fabric of the United States that actually look the more incongruous than separatist rumblings. Although appalled and spurred on in the short term by the intransigence of the ex-Confederate South, the conflicting impulses of liberalism meant that even Emerson's 'party of hope' struggled to find, and then to sustain, a firm legal, cultural, and ideological basis on which to premise formal African American citizenship, let alone meaningful social integration. Thoughts of segregation writ large provided a curiously recurrent, though in practical terms and quantitative results, almost invariably overhyped, solution to such problems. Indeed, an upswing in black emigrationist sentiment, the 'Exoduster' movement of the late 1870s, threatened to overwhelm the resources of an American Colonization Society whose mission white Americans struggled to remember, even as they were to adopt and modify its ideas for decades to come. Self-interest ensured that a handful of people recalled the one-time policy of the

[4] F.P. Blair to F.P. Blair, Jr., 5 Oct. 1866, 8 Dec. 1867, BF 2; N. Guyatt, 'America's Conservatory: Race, Reconstruction, and the Santo Domingo Debate', *Journal of American History*, 97 (Mar. 2011), 974-1000; F.P. Blair, essay on annexation of Santo Domingo, 1869, B-L.

United States government, with Ambrose Thompson enquiring as to the unrepealed parts of the colonization fund in 1879, apparently in connection to the renewed wave of black flight. Yet the retreat of the scope of the federal government, and the simple inability of peacetime to match the sheer flux and uncertainty of the war years, kept such plans to the drawing board. For as the chronically yawning chasm between colonizationist intent and colonizationist results revealed, though perhaps only with the hindsight that the historian gets to enjoy, the real significance of the idea of black resettlement lay in those choices that it allowed Americans to avoid making.[5]

[5] S. Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 318-65, 453; J. Bigelow to A.W. Thompson, 6 Feb., 24 Feb., 15 Mar., 2 Apr., 5 Apr., 17 Apr. 1879, C. Warden to Thompson, 6 Sept. 1880, AWT; Thompson to B.F. Flanders, 19 Feb., 15 Mar., 2 Apr., 6 Apr., to Bigelow, 22 Feb. 1879, letter-books, AWT.

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