

**“A Knife Sharp Enough to Divide Us”: William H. Seward, Abraham Lincoln, and
Black Colonization**

Sebastian Page

Shortly after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, one James Derby called on his fellow New Yorker, Secretary of State William H. Seward. The secretary had already been recovering from a carriage accident when, on the night of the fateful events at Ford’s Theatre, an accomplice of John Wilkes Booth tricked his way into Seward’s house and stabbed him repeatedly. Miraculously, Seward survived, though during his second convalescence he received a stream of worried visitors. With Derby, he pondered his relationship with the late president. “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.’” Derby asked on what matter. “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.’”¹

The foregoing anecdote chafes with the literature on slavery, race, and black “colonization” (resettlement) during the Civil War. Historians have tended to assess that policy with their focus squarely on the “Great Emancipator,” thereby saddling their analysis with an unhelpful moral import, and steering it toward optimistic claims that Lincoln either insincerely peddled colonization to calm white racism, or, at worst, renounced the measure

¹ Francis B. Carpenter, *The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln: Six Months at the White House* (New York, 1867), 290–91.

partway through the war.² Accordingly, it is easy to lose sight of colonization as a real policy, liable to undergo trial and error, experience peaks and troughs, and involve supporters and opponents alike in its formation and execution. Of all the individual casualties of the prevalent emphasis on Lincoln, it is Seward, the statesman upon whom the president called the most consistently, who stands out.

Yet the literature on foreign relations has also played its part in underestimating the importance of black colonization to the relationship between the two men.³ When we think about diplomacy during the Civil War, we picture those external, existential challenges that galvanized the Union: the prospect of the European powers recognizing the Confederacy, the reality of their equipping it, and their exploitation of its challenge to U.S. authority for their own interventions in North America. It is surprising, even embarrassing, that, when we turn instead to points of internal division, the abortive, impractical, and amoral policy of colonization should loom so large. Yet such differences between the president and his secretary of state are attested well beyond Derby's story. Seward's biographer, George Baker, wrote in June 1865 that "Lincoln and Seward never disagreed but in one subject—that was the colonization of the negroes."⁴ "In the colonization project . . . he had little faith," reported

² Michael Vorenberg, "Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 22–45; Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York, 2010), 258–61.

³ General works, such as D. P. Crook, *The North, the South, and the Powers, 1861–1865* (New York, 1974), often fail to mention colonization, while even such a promising title as Howard Jones, *Abraham Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom: The Union and Slavery in the Diplomacy of the Civil War* (Lincoln, NE, 1999), makes only scattered references.

⁴ Gaillard Hunt, *Israel, Elihu and Cadwallader Washburn: A Chapter in American Biography* (New York, 1925), 116.

a British visitor of 1862, whose account took the luster off Derby's by adding that Seward "obviously looked to the solution of the negro question by the gradual dying out of the black race."⁵ Ironically, it is sources in foreign archives that shed the most light on Lincoln and Seward's differences over colonization, which shows how considering the Civil War in an international context can improve our understanding of it in an internal one.

Colonization's divisiveness between Lincoln and Seward is all the more remarkable because of their near-convergence on other questions of emancipation and race relations. Having enjoyed an undeserved reputation for radical abolitionism throughout most of the 1850s, Seward revealed his underlying conservatism during his campaign for the Republican candidacy in 1860, the secession crisis of 1860–61, and the war itself. He despaired at the rupture of the Union because he was confident that slavery would disappear anyway, especially once the Republican Party gained control of Congress—and with it, the machinery to admit further free states.⁶ Like Lincoln, Seward harbored a deep-seated preference for gradual, compensated emancipation, which proponents of moderate antislavery often connected with the colonization of those slaves freed in the process. (Privately, Seward would struggle to accept the immediacy of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which he saw as likely to promote slave insurrection.)⁷ Most historians also argue that Seward served Lincoln faithfully for four years, following a one-time attempt to take control of foreign policy from an inexperienced president who had derailed Seward's own bid for the

⁵ Edward Dicey, *Six Months in the Federal States* (London, 1863), 1:234.

⁶ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York, 1970), 104, 221–23.

⁷ Walter Stahr, *Seward: Lincoln's Indispensable Man* (New York, 2013), 191, 338, 343–44.

nomination only at the last minute.⁸ Why, then, did colonization disturb Seward so much as to cast doubt on the standard account of his unwavering loyalty to Lincoln?

In short, the secretary's hostility to colonization stemmed from both ideology and pragmatism. The former is often the victim of the latter, however, especially during the exigencies of war. Moreover, by its nature, pragmatism involves conflicting considerations, and nowhere were these more in evidence than in the idea of colonization, which married a "practical," grim forecast for U.S. race relations to the impractical logistics of mass resettlement. Yet opponents of colonization might also perceive contradictory mandates within "pragmatism," especially over whether to frustrate a convoluted policy at every step or to allow it to play out and fail of its own accord. Such was the dilemma that Seward faced. While always opposed to colonization in principle, he wavered when handling it in practice, as we shall see.

Ideologically, despite his shifting stance on emancipation around 1860, a life spent in the abolitionist circles of upstate New York had immersed Seward in the belief that colonization was a racist denial of African Americans' birthright and a devious means of propping up slavery while purporting, before antislavery audiences, to attack it. In 1850, Seward had lamented how outlets for black flight from the South, such as Liberia, the west African settlement founded by the American Colonization Society (ACS), strengthened slavery by removing those free African Americans whose example might have inspired slaves to claim their liberty.⁹ Moreover, he thought that black expatriation belied a chronic

⁸ Michael Robinson, "William Henry Seward and the Onset of the Secession Crisis," *Civil War History* 59, no. 1 (March 2013): 35.

⁹ William H. Seward, "Freedom in the New Territories," in *The Works of William H. Seward*, ed. George E. Baker (New York, 1853–84), 1:64. Hereafter, "Seward" without elaboration refers to William H. Seward, while other family members are specified. See also Seward,

demand in the United States for labor, as well as the interests of African Americans themselves, who could not expect better material circumstances elsewhere. “I am always for bringing men and States *into* this Union,” he explained, “never for taking any *out*.”¹⁰ In an age when so many of his contemporaries viewed the migration of “troublesome” minorities as a panacea to all manner of social ills, Seward’s stance was far from axiomatic.¹¹

Although ultimately, and problematically, a supporter of American homogeneity as well as of American expansion, Seward was not lured by colonization’s siren promise of achieving either. While various supporters of the idea, white and black, won converts during the 1850s by turning their attention from distant Africa to the geostrategically tempting American tropics, there is little suggestion that they persuaded Seward. In reality, prior to the Civil War, he opposed most specific proposals for territorial aggrandizement, not only because they had so often been tied up with the expansion of slavery and with bloodshed, but also because he believed that “a masterly inactivity” would offer the growing United States greater gains in due course.¹² Whatever appeal racial homogeneity might have held, Seward had too much faith in the superiority of American institutions to worry that non-white inhabitants could disrupt the same, so long as the United States did not outrun its capacity for

William H. Seward: An Autobiography from 1801 to 1834, ed. Frederick W. Seward (New York, 1891), 92–93.

¹⁰ F. W. Seward, ed., *Seward at Washington as Senator and Secretary of State* (New York, 1891), 154, 227. See also Baker, “Memoir,” in Seward, *Works*, 5:26, and Frank Moore, *The Portrait Gallery of the War, Civil, Military, and Naval* (New York, 1865), 200.

¹¹ Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire* (Ithaca, NY, 2003), 128–29.

¹² Seward, “To the Chautauque Convention,” *Works*, 3:409.

absorption.¹³ Moreover, for Seward, few considerations trumped the United States' want of population. Characteristically, this opponent of black colonization also stood against nativism, the prewar drive to restrict Catholic immigration, and would stand against the Chinese exclusion movement after the war.¹⁴

Pragmatically, Seward also had strong grounds for resisting colonization once installed as secretary of state. Others' pursuit of the policy cluttered his desk with projects that he deemed at once undesirable, unviable, and unhelpful to other aspects of his diplomacy. Furthermore, he always feared that the treaties that would have to underpin any substantial projects would embarrass the administration by suffering rejection in the Senate. Yet assessing Seward's role in colonization policymaking is not as easy as identifying his aversion to the policy in the abstract, because we have to unpick the secretary of state from the president whose stance he was supposed to represent, and for whom he was often the first (and last) port of call for those who wanted access to the White House. Outside official sources, the record is thin: neither Lincoln nor Seward kept a diary, and whereas the former was cruelly denied any chance to write his memoirs, the latter chose to shelve his own in favor of an account of his "world tour" of 1869–71.¹⁵ Moreover, Seward's unmatched personal access to Lincoln meant that the vast majority of their interactions comprised conversations forever lost to us.¹⁶

¹³ Seward, "The True Greatness of Our Country," "Improvement of Farms and Farmers," and "Relations with Mexico, and the Continental Railroad," *Works*, 3:14, 186–88, 655.

¹⁴ Jay Sexton, "William H. Seward in the World," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 3 (September 2014): 418.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 398.

¹⁶ John M. Taylor, *William H. Seward: Lincoln's Right Hand* (New York, 1991), 192; Stahr, *Seward*, 355, 366.

Yet patterns do emerge from the evidence. Mostly, Seward was indeed the sincere opponent of colonization we have encountered, and tried to stall the policy in a manner short of outright disloyalty. To those intrigued about the prospects of black emigration, whether would-be beneficiaries of migrant labor or more disinterested parties, Seward warned of African Americans' apathy and antipathy, of the superiority of rival colonization schemes abroad and alternative sources of black employment at home, and of political divisions that would impede the movement. There was a tension, however, between Seward's avowed belief that colonization would founder on its unpopularity with African Americans and his active efforts to sabotage the policy, all the more notable in that the wartime colonization legislation stipulated emigrants' consent, a principle with which Lincoln, if not all members of his cabinet, firmly agreed. Either Seward doubted his own naysaying, feared departures from the basis of voluntarism, or at least, lacking hindsight, ultimately created more work for himself in an attempt to forestall the burden of administering colonization schemes.

There are two further complications to any account of Seward's role in colonization policy. First, the task did not fall within the exclusive purview of the Department of State. It was profoundly unclear whether colonization was more a domestic policy, through its adjustments to the population of the United States, or a foreign policy, through the diplomatic considerations involved in founding colonies. The readers of this journal may instinctively opt for the latter definition, but contemporaries used the multivalent word "colonization" broadly, usually as a synonym for "settlement." Often, they meant neither to imply nor to repudiate annexation, though that very ambiguity would indeed cause problems during the war. Most proponents of black colonization envisioned too modest an initial settlement for such a foothold to wrest control from an unwilling host state, but in an age of mass migration and fluid boundaries, they rarely ruled out such an eventuality. It was also the Department of the Interior that predominated in molding the policy until roughly the end of 1862. (Created

in 1849, the “Department of Everything Else” was likewise responsible for those other questionable beneficiaries of racial separation, Native Americans.) As the colonization efforts of 1861–62 ran into obstacles, Lincoln increasingly reassigned the policy to the Department of State, but continuing bureaucratic bifurcation, combined with the White House’s own interventions, never allowed Seward complete control. Such a situation brought him both relief and frustration. He could wash his hands of a distasteful matter and point colonization contractors to a different department, hoping that such byzantine administration would stymie them, but by dint of the same he also witnessed other agents get in over their heads.

Second, in a related point, “colonization” actually encompassed four black populations in the Civil War era: one African, three African American, and each with different political implications. The Africans were those “recaptives” rescued at sea from the international slave trade, which Britain and the United States had outlawed half a century earlier, but which persisted and landed the U.S. navy with a spate of intercepted slave ships on the eve of war. Since either selling or freeing the recaptives on American soil would have drawn the federal government into implicit commentary on domestic slavery, there was a precedent of sending them “back” to Liberia via the auspices of the ACS, regardless of their actual provenance within Africa. Despite the predictable obstructionism of many southerners by 1860, Congress once more passed appropriations by a large majority, including then-Senator Seward, to support the recaptives’ resettlement.¹⁷ By contrast, the federal government was new to colonizing African Americans, at least apart from some murky co-operation with the ACS on that front during the 1820s. Of the three domestic black constituencies, the first was a novel creation of the war itself, “contraband” fugitives who

¹⁷ Hazel Akehurst, “Sectional Crises and the Fate of Africans Illegally Imported into the United States, 1806–1860,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 9, no. 2 (June 2008): 97–122.

fled to Union lines from the outset. The second was those slaves freed (or who might be freed) with southern white consent, whether through manumission by individual owners or hypothetical acts of emancipation by the states, but potentially (or actually) on condition of their emigration. The third was those who had always been free, or free for a long time, who were evenly distributed between the slave and the free states prior to the war.

Of the above, the federal government only ever legislated for the colonization of recaptives and contrabands, with the one addition of the black inhabitants of Washington, DC, pursuant to the District Emancipation Act of April 1862. The fate of the other two groups remained a matter for some combination of the states, masters (where applicable), ACS (likewise), and African Americans themselves (to varying degrees) to work out. For his part, Lincoln entertained a more expansive view and promoted the colonization of all sectors of the black population, but Congress failed to follow his lead.¹⁸ While never stating any support for colonization in principle, Seward appears to have been amenable, beyond toeing the line, to early proposals for colonizing contrabands as well as recaptives. Indeed, despite their obvious difference in ethnicity, both groups presented a similar practical problem: how the federal government should deal with the sudden appearance of a displaced black population. Looking past the caesura of the outbreak of war, less than a year elapsed between the departure of the last wave of recaptives and the arrival at Union encampments of the first wave of contrabands. Moreover, the Department of the Interior, which administered recaptives policy, moved in to commandeer the wider colonization effort too, thus solidifying

¹⁸ Abraham Lincoln, “Annual Message to Congress,” “Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Negroes,” and “[Second] Annual Message to Congress,” *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953–55), 5:48, 372, 520, 530.

an early institutional concentration of “questions relating to Negroes,” as Seward phrased it.¹⁹ As the war progressed and seemingly better opportunities for all classes of African Americans emerged, however, the secretary ossified in his opposition to a policy that was increasingly his to execute.

¹⁹ William Stuart to John Russell, No. 203, September 4, 1862, in James J. Barnes and Patience P. Barnes, eds., *The American Civil War Through British Eyes: Dispatches from British Diplomats* (Kent, OH, 2003–05), 2:169.

Ca. 1850 to Mid-1862: Republicans, Recaptives, and Readjustments

As politicians from the North and South came to blows over slavery's expansion with ominous frequency from the Mexican-American War onward, many self-styled moderates revived the idea of colonization, which promised conciliation between the free and slave states by sending African Americans to Liberia, thus making emancipation easier for whites to accept. Meanwhile, many of the individual states endorsed the idea, especially those of a lower North that felt uncomfortably close to large numbers of blacks held in slavery, as well as those of a boosterish upper South that seemed on the cusp of finishing off the (locally dwindling) institution and removing the very same black population in the process.²⁰ The states also applied less elegant pressures, such as black exclusion laws, which mutated by the late 1850s into an expulsion-or-enslavement drive throughout southern legislatures.²¹ The tragic irony was that, while many whites tightened the racial screws from a sense that slavery's days were numbered, free African Americans perceived only the march of the "Slave Power" in such violent assaults on their status. As a result, many turned to thoughts of emigration on an unprecedented scale, an inevitably passionate debate whose very premise conceded that they might indeed not share white Americans' birthright.²² It is little wonder that the historian Allan Nevins termed the 1850s an age of "race-adjustment."²³

²⁰ Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville, FL, 2005), 27–33.

²¹ Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1974), 343–80.

²² Floyd J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863* (Urbana, IL, 1975), 93–274.

²³ Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union* (New York, 1947–71), 1:498–544.

Seward was having none of it. While many colleagues in the doomed Whig Party lauded the compromising spirit of colonization, he kept a stony silence. For more aggressive measures of racial exclusion such as Ohio's "Black Laws," he had harsh words, and he only voted for the admission of Oregon with dismay that its constitution denied African Americans entry to the state.²⁴ During the 1850s, whatever assistance Seward offered the African colonization movement was purely incidental, such as presenting a petition that included colonization as part of a larger emancipation scheme, cooperating with colonizationists in sponsoring an exploration of the Niger region, and supporting the clampdown on the slave trade, which involved sending recaptives to Liberia.²⁵

As the debate over slavery sundered former political alignments, a faction within the fledgling Republican Party adopted colonization. The prime movers were a family of border state emancipationists, the Blairs, namely patriarch Francis P. Blair, Sr., and his sons, Francis, Jr. (Frank) and Montgomery. They soon gained allies within the party, notably Senator James R. Doolittle (R-WI), the embodiment of Midwestern concerns about hypothetical black migration northward if there were any disturbance to the system of slavery.²⁶ Illinois's up-and-coming Republican, Abraham Lincoln, supported the movement from a similar stance of moderate antislavery, but, holding no office until the presidency, he

²⁴ Seward, "The Election of 1848," *Works*, 3:300; Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana, IL, 1967), 95, 124–28.

²⁵ *Glasgow Weekly Times* (MO), "Congressional," February 8, 1855; Ralph R. Gurley to Seward, February 13, 1857, reel 54, *The Papers of William H. Seward* (microfilm, hereafter WHS) (Woodbridge, CT, 1981); Cong. Globe, 34th Cong., 3d Sess., 734 (1857).

²⁶ Foner, *Free Soil*, 267–80.

lacked the rostrum of the Blairs or Doolittle.²⁷ The Republican colonizationists promised to counter white anxieties by tying emancipation (by the states) to removal (by the federal government), thus reserving the western territories for whites by sending blacks southward to the tropics. Their basic ideas were not new, but the colonization lobbyists rejected the logistical “hopelessness” of African colonization, and, in switching emigrants’ slated destination to Central America and the Caribbean, faced down proslavery expansionists by threatening to establish a cordon of free black colonies instead.²⁸

Yet there were an awful lot of questions that the colonization bloc failed to answer, many the same as had always dogged the ACS. How would the plan work if emigrants, host locales, or both proved unwilling? Would the emancipation of the slaves precede their colonization, or was the former conditional on the latter? Would their settlements undergo the normal process for admitting territories, and thus introduce wholly black states to the Union in due course?²⁹ Many Republicans were willing to overlook such imprecision in favor of the broad idea, which offered public relief from the race baiting of their opponents, vindicated strategists’ hopes that homegrown antislavery existed in the South, and stood, skeptics hoped, to eventually fall apart anyway through its own convolutions.³⁰

²⁷ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 127–29.

²⁸ Francis P. Blair, Sr., to Gerrit Smith, April 9, 1858, reel 2, *Gerrit Smith Papers, 1775–1924* (microfilm) (Glen Rock, NJ, 1974); Robert E. May, *Slavery, Race, and Conquest in the Tropics: Lincoln, Douglas, and the Future of Latin America* (New York, 2013), 181–88.

²⁹ F. P. Blair, Sr., to Smith, April 9, 1858; Cong. Globe, 36th Cong., 1st Sess., 60–61, 102 (1859).

³⁰ Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837–1860* (New York, 1976), 332.

Did Seward ever jump on the bandwagon? It is unclear. He was intrigued by Frank Blair, “the man of the West, of the age,” whom he offered the position of running mate for the Seward presidential candidacy that was not to be.³¹ Yet it also made sense for an eastern ex-Whig to balance a Republican ticket with a western ex-Democrat and a rising star at that. Following discussions between Doolittle and his own political manager, Thurlow Weed, Seward spoke to Montgomery Blair one evening in early 1860.³² “He [Seward] 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,” reported Blair.³³ It is impossible to gauge Seward’s sincerity. If he meant merely to earn the Blairs’ support for the nomination, they disappointed him by backing a more seasoned colonizationist, Edward Bates of Missouri.³⁴ If it was any consolation for Seward, who had been the frontrunner at the convention until Lincoln overtook him on the third ballot, Francis Blair, Sr., unexpectedly failed to persuade the platform committee to insert a colonization plank. Its members agreed on the merits of the policy, but were too hung up on countering the Democratic opposition on its own terms rather than seizing the initiative themselves.³⁵

³¹ Seward to James W. Webb, October 1, 1858, WHS, reel 57; Montgomery Blair to Cassius M. Clay, December 31, 1881, reel 27, *The Papers of the Blair Family* (microfilm, hereafter BF) (Washington, DC, 1988).

³² James R. Doolittle to Thurlow Weed, August 23, 1859, January 23, 1860, Thurlow Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

³³ M. Blair to F. P. Blair, Sr., January 17, 1860, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Princeton University.

³⁴ Elbert B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair* (New York, 1980), 257.

³⁵ M. Blair to John A. Andrew, February 19, 1861, reel 3, *John A. Andrew Papers* (microfilm, hereafter JAA) (Boston, MA, 1982).

As the election's result produced secession, and secession war, colonization featured in several compromise proposals over the winter of 1860–61. Some years later, the new minister to Guatemala as of March 1861, Elisha O. Crosby, named Seward as the co-instigator of a plan for Crosby to arrange for the governments of Central America to set aside a U.S. protectorate for those blacks whom the southern states wished to remove. "It was thought . . . that the slave population would be so much reduced by this movement that a compromise might be effected by which the rebellion then impending would be either averted or greatly modified," observed Crosby. Yet events in the United States outran the scheme, and the minister reported fears from Presidents Rafael Carrera and José Guardiola (of Guatemala and Honduras) that an influx of English-speaking blacks would assimilate poorly with an already mixed population.³⁶ No evidence has surfaced of any further attempts by the incoming administration to make specific colonization arrangements during the secession crisis.

It is at this juncture that the evidentiary record on Seward the individual, and hitherto the most influential member of his party, becomes one on Seward, the head of department who was supposed to follow the instructions of his superior. If historians might find that transition difficult to chart, so did Seward, who tried and failed to take control of the administration's response to the Fort Sumter crisis in his infamous memorandum of April 1.³⁷ Moreover, from the federal government's point of view, the earliest phase of the war was one of little progress toward emancipation, and, by extension, colonization. (By contrast, black migratory activity was at a fever pitch, centered on the Haitian Emigration Bureau, a Port-au-Prince-sponsored outfit run by a white abolitionist, James Redpath, in conjunction with the

³⁶ Charles A. Barker, ed., *Memoirs of Elisha Oscar Crosby* (San Marino, CA, 1945), 87–91.

³⁷ Lincoln, "To William H. Seward," *Works*, 4:316–18.

black agents Henry Highland Garnet, George Lawrence, Jr., and James Theodore Holly.)³⁸ It is accordingly hard to trace any shift in Seward's attitudes that might have occurred around this time.

Yet a window into the secretary's response to early colonization proposals is provided by the agents of European powers that had kept a close eye on the recent disposition of the recaptives and now did the same with the contrabands coming behind Union lines at Fort Monroe, Virginia, and Port Royal, South Carolina. Ever since their own acts of emancipation, the European colonies of the American tropics had been hungry for agricultural labor.³⁹ Britain in particular had a long history of looking to the prospective immigration of African Americans while always hoping to avoid southern charges of interference with slave property. Unlike the indentured Chinese and Indian laborers to whom imperial agencies increasingly turned, African Americans offered proximity, a shared language, and, recruiters supposed, superior experience with plantation agriculture.

In the fall of 1860, British and Danish officials alike had sounded out the previous administration on receiving recaptives in their West Indian colonies (which, for Denmark, meant St. Croix, the modern U.S. Virgin Islands). Although those Africans were cruder "raw material" than African Americans in the eyes of colonial planters, that brought its own advantages, and in any case, labor was labor. President James Buchanan, Secretary of State Lewis Cass, and Assistant Secretary of State William H. Trescot politely listened to such proposals, but advised that the law currently stipulated Liberia as the recaptives' destination

³⁸ Chris Dixon, *African America and Haiti: Emigration and Black Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, CT, 2000), 129–216.

³⁹ K. O. Laurence, *Immigration into the West Indies in the 19th Century* (London, 1971).

and that the political atmosphere would doom any new bill on such a sensitive issue.⁴⁰ Hearing groundless rumors that the British proposal had stolen a march on the Danish, Consul General Döllner wrote Seward, in the latter's capacity as senator, several months before the inauguration. Seward replied that "[t]he state of public affairs . . . precludes my giving attention at this time to other subjects than those immediately before the Senate and it is certain that no definite action will be taken by the Government."⁴¹

Next was Britain's turn. In May 1861, Lord Lyons, minister to the United States, asked Seward whether the new administration would agree to establish joint cruises against slave ships and to transport any recaptives deemed excessive in number to the British West Indies rather than Liberia. The secretary was amenable to a treaty for joint cruises, but resisted any provision for the resettlement of recaptives. "If the number of Negroes captured should be large, the United States might be glad to relieve themselves from the vast expense of sending them back to Africa . . . [but] it was . . . easier to pass a Law in the ordinary way through both houses, than to obtain the two thirds majority in the Senate which is required for

⁴⁰ William H. Trescot to Robert Finlay, July 27, 1860, volume 28, Instructions of the Department of State to Consular Officers, 1808–1906, entry 59, Record Group 59 (hereafter RG59/59/28), National Archives (hereafter NARA); Trescot to Louis Rothe, September 20, 1860, Immigration af arbejdere fra Italien 1884 (sic), box 910, collection 1175, Koloniernes Centralbestyrelse (hereafter KC 1175/910), Rigsarkivet (Danish National Archives, Copenhagen). For the original translations, see Michael J. Douma and Anders Bo Rasmussen, "The Danish St Croix Project: Revisiting the Lincoln Colonization Program with Foreign-language Sources," *American Nineteenth Century History* 15, no. 3 (September 2014): 311–42.

⁴¹ H. Döllner to Seward, December 24, Seward to Döllner, December 29, 1860, Sager til journal A 3284-3303, box 139, Udenrigsministeriet 1856-88, Rigsarkivet.

the Ratification of a Treaty,” reported Lyons of Seward’s reasoning.⁴² Such calculations consistently shaped the secretary’s assessment of colonization plans, for the policy had opponents on both wings of the slavery question. It was a concomitant receptiveness to arrangements that might avoid public scrutiny, however, that found Seward listening attentively to the new Danish minister, Waldemar Raaslöff, in December 1861. Raaslöff not only renewed his government’s offer to take any further recaptives, but also extended it to the mounting numbers of contrabands. “The Secretary of State answered me that . . . he had not thought of placing the above-mentioned emancipated slaves this way, but that he, without having presented it to the President, pronounced himself for the plan and assured me that its implementation would in the best way be supported by the United States government,” recounted Raaslöff.

What had caused such a change in Seward’s thinking, if indeed a change it was? Aside from the growing problem of the contrabands, the specifics of Seward’s suggestions offer some clues. Once more, the scheme would not require a treaty, and would depend on the initiative of a Danish agent, who would take ships down the southern coast and recruit only those contrabands who wanted to go, though he could expect the full cooperation of U.S. authorities. Moreover, Seward probably saw the emigrants’ departure as temporary, since he thought the offer would appeal to those “without much prospect to return home in the near future.”⁴³ In fact, the press now reported that Seward was in favor of African

⁴² Richard Lyons to Russell, Slave Trade No. 4, May 10, 1861, in D. Hunter Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America* (Washington, DC, 1931–48), 8:775.

⁴³ Waldemar Raaslöff to Foreign Ministry, December 15, 1861, KC 1175/910.

American emigration.⁴⁴ If, in private, he still rued the time and expense that obtaining territory for colonization would involve, that just increased the appeal of “hands-off” ventures such as the Danish one.⁴⁵ In a similar vein, a Union purchasing agent who sounded out Seward informed the British government that the secretary had no objections to canvassers recruiting contrabands for three-year terms. Again, the prospect of migrants taking out a round-trip ticket qualified Seward’s demographic mercantilism.⁴⁶

Whatever his rationale, it is also true that the show was not Seward’s to run. In his first annual message to Congress (what we would now call the State of the Union), President Lincoln called for the colonization of all parts of the African American population. “[T]he plan . . . may involve the acquiring of territory, and also the appropriation of money beyond that to be expended in the territorial acquisition,” admitted Lincoln, who cited the Louisiana Purchase as a precedent for the measure’s constitutionality. On Postmaster General Montgomery Blair’s advice, Lincoln also recommended that Congress recognize Haiti and Liberia, the two black republics (and most obvious locales for colonization), which had hitherto eluded recognition because of southern objections to acknowledging black self-rule.⁴⁷ It was the first in a series of presidential messages that would fill Seward’s in-tray with

⁴⁴ *The Wisconsin State Register*, “Mr. Seward...,” December 14, 1861; *The Memphis Daily Appeal*, “The Policy of Colonizing the Blacks,” December 21, 1861.

⁴⁵ Frances A. Seward to Lazette M. Worden, December 11, 1861, WHS, reel 119.

⁴⁶ Frederic Rogers to Edmund Hammond, August 12, 1862, in Colonial Office, *Correspondence Respecting the Emigration of Free Negroes from the United States to the West Indies* (London, 1863), 49–50.

⁴⁷ Lincoln, “Annual Message to Congress,” *Works*, 5:39, 48; F. P. Blair, Sr., to Andrew, March 11, 1862, JAA, reel 12.

colonization proposals, applications for the anticipated diplomatic vacancies, or combinations of the two.

Meanwhile, Seward made steady progress on the recaptives issue. Until the end of April 1862, he asked Raaslöff to delay presenting an official note, but latterly directed him to Secretary of the Interior Caleb B. Smith, who approved of the proposal but noted that, since Raaslöff had angled for contrabands, the U.S. government could not help in that the only proximate legislation to date pertained to the black population of Washington, DC.⁴⁸ If he wanted to stake a claim to black labor, the minister would have to renew Denmark's offer to take recaptives, which he duly did in late May. Seward advised him that the law still prescribed Liberia, but forwarded the matter to those legislators who could modify the relevant acts, which also reflected Lincoln's desire to avoid responsibility for what might appear a cynical substitution for Africa.⁴⁹ In mid-July, Congress obliged after perfunctory debate.⁵⁰ All involved breathed a heavy sigh of relief. "[I]t is completely impossible to predict which discussions even a seemingly utterly unimportant and inconsequential precaution regarding Negroes can cause," Raaslöff informed Copenhagen. "For this reason, Mr. Seward, who was however well disposed towards the proposal, dared not recommend it to Congress, but later sent the [diplomatic] correspondence [to Congress] which almost everywhere gave a very good impression." In fact, behind the scenes, Seward had continued

⁴⁸ Raaslöff to Vilhelm Birch, April 22, 1862, KC 1175/910; Seward to Raaslöff, May 1, 1862, reel 18, Notes to Foreign Legations in the United States from the Department of State, 1834–1906, File Microcopies of Records in the National Archives: No. 99, RG 59, NARA; Caleb B. Smith to Lincoln, May 9, 1862, S. Exec. Doc. 55, 39th Cong., 1st Sess., 9 (1866).

⁴⁹ Raaslöff to Seward, May 26, Seward to Raaslöff, May 29, 1862, H. Misc. Doc. 80, 37th Cong., 2d Sess., 10-12 (1862); Raaslöff to Foreign Ministry, June 16, 1862, KC 1175/910.

⁵⁰ Cong. Globe, 37th Cong., 2d Sess., 3358-59 (1862).

to edit the proposal with Raaslöff, substituting an informal arrangement for the original treaty and the dreaded ratification process that it would entail.⁵¹

Nothing ever came of the new provisions for recaptives. While the ACS seethed at the federal government's betrayal of its longstanding client, Liberia, a blow made all the harder by Seward's admission that he had been out to cut costs, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles failed to spot Seward's sleight of hand and disregarded the arrangement as an illegal, unratified treaty.⁵² The Confederacy also caught wind of the change to the recaptives legislation and suspected that it was somehow connected to the Second Confiscation Act, which Congress passed the same day, providing for the voluntary colonization of African American slaves—or, to put it another way, of southern masters' property.⁵³ (Following some mild threats from the Confederate envoy to Copenhagen, Denmark would not take up Seward on a separate offer later that year to apply for a share of those who came under that very category.)⁵⁴ Yet the most important check on further shiploads of recaptives was the treaty that Seward made with Lyons in early 1862, allowing British naval patrols the mutual rights

⁵¹ Raaslöff to Foreign Ministry, July 30, 1862, KC 1175/910.

⁵² William McLain to Franklin Butler, August 18, 1862, reel 203, *American Colonization Society Records* (microfilm, hereafter ACS) (Washington, DC, 1970-77); Gideon Welles to Seward, October 9, 1862, reel 5, *Gideon Welles Papers* (microfilm, hereafter GW) (Washington, DC, 1988).

⁵³ Trescot to Judah P. Benjamin, August 5, Benjamin to Trescot, August 11, 1862, reel 34, *Confederate States of America Records* (microfilm, hereafter CSA) (Washington, DC, 1967).

⁵⁴ Benjamin to A. Dudley Mann, No. 4, August 14, Mann to Benjamin, No. 27, October 18, No. 28, October 24, No. 32, November 21, 1862, CSA, reel 4; Seward to Bradford R. Wood, No. 51, January 17, 1863, reel 50, *Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, 1801–1906*, File Microcopies: No. 77, RG 59 (hereafter RG59/M77/50), NARA.

of search that they had long sought.⁵⁵ “If I have done nothing else worthy of self-congratulation, I deem this treaty sufficient to have lived for,” wrote Seward.⁵⁶ In fairness, for all his relish for saving money (in which he was not alone), the frightful mortality of the latest expeditions to Liberia offered Seward good reason to endorse the St. Croix alternative, while the administration now turned down a similar Spanish offer that failed to address recaptives’ welfare as convincingly.⁵⁷ Indeed, the Danish agreement would be the last major colonization scheme to enjoy Seward’s unqualified approval.

⁵⁵ A. Taylor Milne, “The Lyons-Seward Treaty of 1862,” *The American Historical Review* 38, no. 3 (April 1933): 511–25.

⁵⁶ Seward, *Seward at Washington*, 85.

⁵⁷ John P. Usher to Seward, August 4, 1862, in Miller, *Treaties*, 8:857–58.

Mid-1862 to Late 1862: Contract Colonies Challenged

“You assume that many slaves here are by some process or other speedily to become free, and that owing to the native and exotic augmentation of free white men the slaves so becoming freedmen will be superfluous as laborers,” recapped Seward, a lengthy dispatch from the U.S. minister to Brazil, James Watson Webb, lying before him. “[Y]ou think that you discern the finger of God pointing to the northern provinces of Brazil as the land of promise, rest, and restoration of the slaves now in the southern States of this republic.” But, warned Seward, it was not that simple: “whether [slaves’] consent shall be required [,. . . whether they shall be colonized within our own jurisdiction, and on what terms, or in some region to be purchased for the purpose . . . or whether in some central or South American country, . . . 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.”⁵⁸

The exchange between Webb and Seward is one of many examples of American (would-be) concessionaires, often U.S. diplomats and consuls who discerned no conflict of interest, rushing to sound out the Department of State on signs from Washington that mass African American colonization was fast becoming federal policy. The secretary of state and the assistant secretary, his son, Frederick W. Seward, thanked correspondents, forwarded their letters to the Department of the Interior, and sometimes hinted that they should lower their expectations. Whatever his own sentiments, Seward could hardly scorn those in the foreign service who “based all [they] wrote upon the recommendation of the President to

⁵⁸ Seward to Webb, No. 33, July 21, 1862, *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs*, H. Exec. Doc. 1, 37th Cong., 3d Sess., 713-14 (1862), hereafter *PRFA* 37-3 (1862).

colonize,” in the rather disingenuous words of Webb, who proved keen to squelch the ebullience of his original dispatch.⁵⁹

Those mere consuls who overreached themselves by raising informal conversations to the level of official negotiations earned Seward’s reprimand, however.⁶⁰ During the Civil War, Mexico (and the Texan borderlands) often caught the eye of disinterested proponents of colonization, since that country offered the easier logistics of adjacency and the compelling possibility of armed colonists fending off both Confederate and European expansion, such predation already in evidence as a multilateral debt-collecting mission that had turned into a unilateral French occupation of Mexico.⁶¹ While no such resettlement plans came even close to fruition, one of their early variants did come close to causing serious embarrassment. Conjoining a potential transit route across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to the colonizationist stance of Lincoln’s first annual message, the consul in Havana, Robert W. Shufeldt, proceeded to Mexico City, inserted himself into negotiations between the U.S. minister, Thomas Corwin, and the Mexican minister of foreign affairs, Manuel Doblado, and bargained for an African American settlement on the isthmus. Fearful for his country’s sovereignty, Doblado tied even possible acceptance of the scheme to ratification of the loan treaty that he had recently reached with Corwin.⁶² “It is . . . noticed, not without some regret, that you seem to suppose yourself clothed with diplomatic powers,” Seward wrote Shufeldt on hearing of

⁵⁹ Webb to Seward, September 23, 1862, WHS, reel 72.

⁶⁰ F. W. Seward to M. Galody, April 20, 1863, RG59/59/34.

⁶¹ Nicholas Guyatt, “‘The Future Empire of Our Freedmen’: Republican Colonization Schemes in Texas and Mexico, 1861–1865,” in Adam Arenson and Andrew R. Graybill, eds., *Civil War Wests: Testing the Limits of the United States* (Oakland, CA, 2015), 95–117.

⁶² Frederick C. Drake, *The Empire of the Seas: A Biography of Rear Admiral Robert Wilson Shufeldt, USN* (Honolulu, HI, 1984), 48–49, 56–62.

his activities.⁶³ Foolishly, the consul redoubled his efforts, drafting an unsolicited Mexican-American colonization treaty for the secretary's benefit.⁶⁴ Seward sternly replied that Shufeldt had risked "foreign entanglements," had raised expectations that the United States could not meet now that the Senate had rejected the Corwin-Doblado Treaty, and had broken a law against citizens entering into unauthorized diplomacy. Probably aware of the administration's bluntness in its own inquiries into black colonization in Mexico, Seward reassured Shufeldt that his rebuke counted as private rather than official.⁶⁵

What made the plethora of bottom-up colonization initiatives so tiresome was that, quietly, the administration was interested in just one scheme by mid-1862. In 1858, the Chiriquí Improvement Company (CIC), run by a Philadelphian shipbuilder, Ambrose W. Thompson, had offered its holdings in the Chiriquí province of Panama (then an outlying part of Colombia) to the federal government as a naval coaling station and future route across the isthmus. Opponents alleged that the proposal was a swindle, based on poor title, poor coal, and poor terrain for any railroad. Congress dropped the project in early 1861, but Thompson immediately ingratiated himself with the new administration and resumed his offer, to which Lincoln and the Blairs now appended colonization plans for recaptives and, in short order, contrabands. Whatever chance there might have been for African American colonization to escape the gravitational pull of the Department of the Interior was lost when Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase and Secretary of the Navy Welles each declined to investigate the Chiriquí proposal. At the same time, Secretary of the Interior Smith and Assistant Secretary

⁶³ Seward to Shufeldt, May 23, June 24, 1862, RG59/59/31.

⁶⁴ Drake, *Empire of the Seas*, 63–69.

⁶⁵ Thomas D. Schoonover, "Misconstrued Mission: Expansionism and Black Colonization in Mexico and Central America During the Civil War," *The Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 4 (November 1980): 611–12.

John P. Usher were both keen to pursue it on account of a secret stake arranged by a fellow Hoosier and CIC lobbyist.⁶⁶

Absent legislation for African American colonization, which materialized in the DC Emancipation Act of April and Second Confiscation Act of July 1862 (backed by appropriations of \$600,000), Lincoln only formally charged the Department of the Interior as late as September with executing the policy.⁶⁷ Yet the Department's preeminence had been obvious since much earlier in the war. There is little suggestion that Seward regretted the overall setup as he quietly forwarded any diplomatically unobjectionable proposals that crossed his desk to others who would have to pore over the details instead of him. Moreover, the secretary did not share his colleagues' enthusiasm for Chiriquí. During 1860–61, he had witnessed the bad-tempered congressional debates on what was then just the tender of a naval station, and concluded that the United States would better make any arrangements directly with Colombia than with Ambrose Thompson. Such insight might sound obvious, but it was not so in the mid-nineteenth century, when resort to contractors was the default option for government business. Moreover, Seward's inquiries left him "incredulous about the coal" that the settlers were supposed to mine, earlier samples of which had actually come from Pennsylvania, whereas the region's genuine article was liable to spontaneously catch fire once aboard ship.⁶⁸

The Chiriquí project also offered several diplomatic perils. First, the area was the subject of a longstanding boundary dispute between Colombia and Costa Rica. Second,

⁶⁶ For a full account of the project, see Sebastian N. Page, "Lincoln and Chiriquí Colonization Revisited," *American Nineteenth Century History* 12, no. 3 (September 2011): 289–325.

⁶⁷ Lincoln, "To Caleb B. Smith," *Works*, 5:418–19.

⁶⁸ Page, "Chiriquí Colonization," 309, 320n67.

Colombia had lately been embroiled in a civil war of its own, from which the rebels had emerged victorious. Pursuing the Chiriquí plan put the Union's secretary of state under the most untimely pressure to break ties with an established regime, which still considered the newly proclaimed Colombia "New Granada," and to recognize an insurrectionary one instead.⁶⁹ Third, the project risked falling foul of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty (1850), a mutual non-occupation agreement between Britain and the United States for the Central American isthmus. Yet the administration's early acceptance, in principle if not in the practical details, that the Chiriquí colony would pry no sovereign attributes from Colombia rather checked British disquiet, while Seward also maintained that Chiriquí's geographic attachment to a mostly South American state exempted it from the treaty.⁷⁰ Fourth, any insensitive treatment of such a delicate topic stood to spark a diplomatic crisis with a number of states that all too keenly remembered the prewar encroachments of the filibusters.

Publicly, it was the last of these dangers that caused Seward the most grief, though within the corridors of power it was more the question of which Colombian regime, if either, could offer legitimate consent on behalf of that state. In an infamous address of mid-August 1862, President Lincoln brought the world up to speed on his plans for Chiriquí, but managed neither to name the site, except by allusion, nor to avoid repeatedly using the U.S. idiom of "colonization" in a message destined for international consumption.⁷¹ The result was panic throughout Central America, every part of which thought itself the imminent recipient of a wave of unwanted immigration, a belief encouraged in certain places by gleeful Confederate agents. Regional protest was not absolutely racist, though it did view blacks as at the inferior

⁶⁹ Ibid., 291–92, 296.

⁷⁰ Smith to Lincoln, May 9, May 16, 1862, S. Exec. Doc. 55, 7–8, 10; Stuart to Russell, No. 302, October 18, 1862, in Barnes, *Through British Eyes*, 2:212–13.

⁷¹ Lincoln, "Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Negroes," *Works*, 5:370–75.

end of a smoother spectrum of color than in the Anglo-American imagination, but it held that the rushed introduction of a culturally foreign population would cause instability and thereby invite U.S. intervention. Up until Lincoln's address, several governments had shown interest in securing a share of the hypothetical immigrants so long as adequate safeguards were in place.⁷² But for now, Seward had to fire off a series of reassurances, albeit with some pride for the dignity of the administration. "[I]t is thought unusual to base diplomatic communications upon informal conversations of the executive head of the government as reported in public journals," he sniffed to the Guatemalan minister, straining credibility by disavowing a conference to which the White House had invited a stenographer from the Associated Press.⁷³

Indeed, Seward was quite evasive toward the one country whose objections really mattered: Costa Rica, Colombia's neighbor and border disputant. As Lincoln, Smith, and Usher pressed ahead with preparing the expedition, Seward stalled the Costa Rican minister, Luis Molina, as the latter incredulously reminded him of a number of frank conversations that they had held since June. To Molina's claims that Chiriquí comprised only a Costa Rican and a contested part, Seward responded by promising not to send the expedition anywhere but the Colombian part; to Molina's claims that canvassers were continuing to recruit for the expedition, Seward responded by promising to "take no step in the matter contrary to the expressed wishes of the governments of Central America," whatever that meant.⁷⁴ While playing for time with Molina, however, Seward also persuaded Lincoln to suspend the expedition. In an inversion of his previous stance, Seward now lobbied to base colonization policy on treaties, likely perceiving their ability to slow the juggernaut. Given the uncertain

⁷² Schoonover, "Misconstrued Mission," 611–16.

⁷³ Seward to Antonio José de Yrisarri, September 5, 1862, *PRFA* 37-3 (1862), 884.

⁷⁴ Seward to Luis Molina, September 24, October 1, 1862, *PRFA* 37-3 (1862), 903–6.

diplomatic situation over Colombia, and the tentative interest of British diplomats in hosting African Americans within their empire, Seward obtained a hearing.

On September 22, Lincoln read to the cabinet his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, which promised to declare all slaves in rebellious areas free on January 1, 1863 as well as to sustain colonization. “Seward then proposed that . . . some language should be introduced to show that the colonization proposed was to be only with the consent of the colonists, and the consent of the States in which colonies might be attempted. This . . . was agreed to,” recorded Chase. The president also asked the cabinet’s opinion on entering into treaties for colonization, a debate that continued at two further meetings that week. “Seward rather favored Treaties, but evidently did not think much of the wisdom of any measures for sending out of the country laborers needed here,” added Chase.⁷⁵ After some debate, those in favor of treaties won the day, thus placing Lincoln and Seward in the same camp for now, though the former still mocked the latter for his continued squeamishness about colonization.⁷⁶

On September 30, Seward sent a circular to the U.S. ministers to Britain, France, Denmark, and the Netherlands, outlining treaties that they should offer to their respective courts, which would enshrine specific protections and privileges for African American

⁷⁵ Entries for September 22, September 24, September 26, 1862, in John Niven et al., eds., *The Salmon P. Chase Papers* (Kent, OH, 1993–98), 1:395, 399, 402.

⁷⁶ Entry for September 25, 1862, in Howard K. Beale, ed., *The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859–1866* (Washington, DC, 1933), 262–64; entry for September 26, 1862, in Beale, ed., *Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson* (New York, 1960), 1:150–53; Jacob W. Schuckers, *The Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase* (New York, 1874), 454.

emigrants.⁷⁷ Although he did not say so, those terms would hereafter provide the model for arrangements with any other countries that sought such settlers. What did Seward hope to gain from such a move? Possibly to tie European neutrals to Union emancipation policy at a point where they looked likely to recognize the Confederacy. Yet Seward was just too forthright with British diplomats about colonization's likely failure, and he could hardly expect them to miss such obvious scope for entanglement.⁷⁸ More credibly, he might have hoped that his model treaty would channel colonization efforts away from shady contractors peddling sovereign prerogatives that were not theirs to sell, and toward arrangements with officials who could indeed speak for host jurisdictions' immigration policies. In particular, European imperial agencies were accustomed to similar regulations for African, Chinese, and Indian labor.

At least one party thought that Seward had ulterior motives, "being engaged . . . in efforts to defeat that policy altogether, by his colonization circular to the foreign powers holding colonies, who were of course not expected to accept the impossible conditions."⁷⁹ Notably, while Seward advocated treaties as long as they remained far from fruition, he forestalled one treaty that came close. In September, he excised two articles encouraging emigration from the draft of a commercial treaty submitted by Liberia, the one state that did

⁷⁷ Seward to Charles F. Adams et al., No. 360, September 30, 1862, *PRFA* 37-3 (1862), 202–4.

⁷⁸ Stuart to Russell, No. 203, September 4, No. 225, September 15, Nos. 254 and 255, September 28, No. 256, September 29, Nos. 301 and 302, October 18, 1862, Lyons to Russell, No. 78, January 27, 1863, in Barnes, *Through British Eyes*, 2:168–70, 175–77, 189–91, 212–14, 277–81, 307.

⁷⁹ Bernard Kock, *Statement of Facts in Relation to the Settlement on the Island of A'Vache* (New York, 1864), 3.

not just welcome African American immigration but was built upon it. Instead, Seward suggested that the ACS could continue to assist Liberia on that front, but he later excluded the ACS as well from making applications on the template of his circular.⁸⁰ In a similar vein, Seward proved strikingly indifferent to restrictions on black immigration passed as a result of the Latin American backlash, even where they violated existing treaties with the United States.⁸¹

During the fall of 1862, Seward's insistence on treaties had the desired effect, though given the otherwise uncanny ability of Thurlow Weed's newspaper to name interested parties, it appears that the secretary also used other means to discredit the Chiriquí scheme.⁸² His dubiously Damascene conversion to treaties was well timed, for by mid-October, representatives of both Colombian governments had each agreed to some form of black colonization, though a whiff of desperation for respectively retaining and securing U.S. recognition lingered over their offers.⁸³ Initially, Seward conceded that "the assent . . . will remove the obstacles to the promised emigration," though warned that he could not "advise the outlay of money for lands of a doubtful title, and this more especially when other governments are willing to take the blacks at their own expense and give them lands."⁸⁴ But he then backtracked, insisting to Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy (R-KS), whom Lincoln had

⁸⁰ Seward to Adams, No. 310, September 23, 1862, in Miller, *Treaties*, 8:867; McLain to James Hall, April 3, 1863, ACS, reel 204.

⁸¹ Seward to Friedrich Hassaurek, No. 66, March 10, 1864, RG59/M77/52.

⁸² *Albany Evening Journal*, "The Colonization Scheme," October 2, 1862, "The milk in Mr. Pomeroy's cocoanut," March 18, 1864.

⁸³ Page, "Chiriquí Colonization," 309.

⁸⁴ Usher to Samuel C. Pomeroy, October 13, 1862, John Palmer Usher Papers, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka.

appointed leader of the expedition, that the representatives of a government were not the same thing as the government itself, and that “nothing short of a *Treaty* will be satisfactory.” The senator was confused, because in 1846 the former New Granada and the United States had reached the Bidlack-Mallarino Treaty, which granted all settlers from the United States full citizenship. “Mr. Seward has some other way of doing it on a larger scale but in a way *not sure of success*,” thought Pomeroy.⁸⁵

With the permission of both Colombian missions secured, a ship ready, and thousands of would-be settlers on Pomeroy’s books (at least some of them free African Americans from the northern states, in a misuse of the colonization appropriations), including a crowd that turned up at the White House demanding the order to set off, it is almost certain that the expedition would have departed had it not been for Seward’s influence over Lincoln.⁸⁶ In his second annual message on December 1, 1862, the president announced that he had “declined to move any such colony to any state, without first obtaining the consent of its government, with an agreement on its part to receive and protect such emigrants in all the rights of freemen.” He also perplexed Congress by asking it to pass no fewer than three constitutional amendments in support of gradual emancipation, compensation, and colonization, all of which sat most uneasily with his imminent Emancipation Proclamation.⁸⁷ While the administration kept colonization on ice, awaiting legislators’ ultimately abortive response, it released the year’s *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs*, now known as the *Foreign Relations of the United States*, the regular publication of which had only begun in 1861. We do not know what part Seward played in selecting material, but he agreed with the openness

⁸⁵ Pomeroy to Orville H. Browning, October 27, 1862, Ambrose W. Thompson Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter AWT).

⁸⁶ Charles S. Dyer to Thompson, November 1, November 11, 1862, AWT.

⁸⁷ Lincoln, “[Second] Annual Message to Congress,” *Works*, 5:520–21, 529–37.

underpinning the *Papers*, and the public was duly treated to a thorough account of the crisis with Central America.⁸⁸ “It will be observed . . . that while Mr. Seward treats all the schemes of African colonization with diplomatic courtesy, he nowhere commits himself to them nor to the idea of expatriation,” spotted one reader.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ William McAllister et al., *Toward “Thorough, Accurate, and Reliable”: A History of the Foreign Relations of the United States Series* (Washington, DC, 2013), 22–23.

⁸⁹ New York *Evening Post*, “Mr. Seward and Colonization,” December 13, 1862.

1863 to 1872: The Best-Laid Schemes

On December 1, 1862, Lincoln had announced a departure in colonization policy: the administration would no longer deal with middlemen but instead with host polities. Precisely one month later, on the morning of January 1, 1863, he broke his own rules, signing a rushed contract with Bernard Kock, the leaseholder for a small island off southwestern Haiti, the Île à Vache.⁹⁰ The president then issued the Emancipation Proclamation, though he had deleted the preliminary version's references to colonization, likely realizing that they only stood to complicate an already controversial document. Indeed, ruling that Montgomery Blair was his "only friend" where colonization was concerned, Lincoln told Kock to hide his contract from all of the cabinet but the supportive Blair and the indispensable Seward.⁹¹ For now, the policy would operate on a need-to-know basis.

Seward had first met Kock in September 1862, when the latter approached him offering to make a contract. With little regret, he advised Kock that it would be a "breach of official etiquette" for the Department of State to infringe upon that of the Interior.⁹² The proposal bounced around the administration throughout the fall, but despite warnings about Kock's integrity, Lincoln signed a contract for 5,000 emigrants, who were to be afforded all

⁹⁰ Kock, *Statement*, 4.

⁹¹ Thomas H. Hicks to M. Blair, April 9, 1863, BF; John T. Doyle, "An Episode of the Civil War," *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 9 (1887): 541.

⁹² Kock to Usher, January 8, 1863, reel 9, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior Relating to the Suppression of the African Slave Trade and Negro Colonization, 1854–1872, File Microcopies: No. 160, RG 48 (hereafter RG48/M160/9), NARA.

the facilities stipulated in Seward's circular.⁹³ The concessionaire left the contract with the Department of State on January 2, 1863, but Seward refused to certify or even return the document, claiming that "neither I [Kock] nor the President had the right to make such a contract," and requested a word with Lincoln and the newly minted Secretary of the Interior Usher.⁹⁴ On January 6, Lincoln told Seward not to execute the agreement, but to hold it under advisement.⁹⁵ In response, Kock turned to the Blairs, who had helped arrange his contract and now disclosed Usher's interest in the Chiriquí project so that Lincoln would not switch back to that option.⁹⁶ While that revelation did not terminate the Department of the Interior's role in initiating colonization plans, it was another sign that the White House should look more to the Department of State, Seward's resistance notwithstanding.

Moreover, growing British and Dutch interest in welcoming settlers also demanded the services of a diplomat. At first, it looked like both sets of negotiations might play out on the eastern side of the Atlantic per Seward's circular to the U.S. ministers. Such was where the French and Danish options did indeed die a quiet death.⁹⁷ (The minister to Copenhagen shed no tears, writing Seward that "[w]e have certainly so far gained nothing abroad by our

⁹³ Frederic Bancroft, "The Ile à Vache Experiment in Colonization," in *Frederic Bancroft, Historian*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke (Norman, OK, 1957), 230–39.

⁹⁴ Kock, *Statement*, 5; Seward to Usher, January 2, Kock to Usher, January 8, 1863, RG48/M160/9; Seward to Lincoln, January 3, 1863, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁹⁵ Lincoln, "To William H. Seward," *Works*, 6:41.

⁹⁶ Page, "Chiriquí Colonization," 313–14, 322n118.

⁹⁷ William L. Dayton to Seward, No. 282, March 5, 1863, *PRFA* 38-1 (1863), 647–48; Daniel B. Carroll, *Henri Mercier and the American Civil War* (Princeton, NJ, 1971), 245–48; Douma, "St Croix Project," 328–32.

offer to expatriate the negroes, but a belief in our unconquerable prejudice against the race.”⁹⁸ The Hague remained enthusiastic, but only chased up the offer after seeing through a long-scheduled act of emancipation for its colonies in mid-1863, while London initially rebuffed the circular.⁹⁹ In October 1862, the U.S. minister, Charles Francis Adams, had reported that the foreign secretary, Earl Russell, had refused to implicate himself in Union emancipation policy in such manner. “[T]his government entertains no sentiment of dissatisfaction with his declination of our proposition,” replied Seward, always keen to read the last rites for colonization without first checking for a pulse. “[T]he President has thought it judicious . . . to afford facilities for experimental trial of these projects . . . some of . . . [which] are thus ascertained to be impracticable,” he added.¹⁰⁰

Yet dealings with British agents did not remain safely isolated in London, because colonial recruiters had a knack for turning up in Washington, DC: in the fall of 1862, William Walker, from British Guiana (Guyana), and in the spring of 1863, John Hodge, from British Honduras (Belize). Indeed, it was Walker’s mission that, alongside Dutch interest expressed through the proper, ministerial channels, had inspired Seward’s circular in the first place. Extensive discussions with British diplomats over late 1862 and early 1863 saw the secretary concede that the British Empire might be the least worst choice. He admitted that women and children among the contrabands, unable to do the same work as men, represented “an embarrassing influx of Negroes” for the federal government, and “that the British colonies would be far better adapted than any other destination for Negro emigrants.” At the same

⁹⁸ Wood to Seward, No. 100, 27 January 1863, *PRFA* 38-1 (1863), 1098.

⁹⁹ Michael J. Douma, “The Lincoln Administration’s Negotiations to Colonize African Americans in Dutch Suriname,” *Civil War History* 61, no. 2 (June 2015): 109–35.

¹⁰⁰ Adams to Seward, No. 253, October 30, Seward to Adams, No. 404, November 18, 1862, *PRFA* 37-3 (1862), 227–28, 236.

time, he doubted “whether it was prudent to add to the strength of nations which might not always be friends of the United States.” Lord Lyons was his mirror image, a fellow skeptic about the likelihood of black emigration who also wanted to avoid embarrassment while pursuing the policy at others’ behest. For London now took a renewed interest, so long as any provisions for emigration did not involve treaties, southern ports of embarkation (which would too easily make Britain complicit in accepting fugitive slaves), or unilateral arrangements by the individual colonies. In late January, with the Chiriquí and Île à Vache projects both suspended, Lincoln helped revive the British option by personally summoning Lyons and pleading with him to enter into an agreement. Even after such a clear demonstration of the presidential will, Seward dragged his feet. He signally failed to brief Usher for a meeting of his own with Lyons, and “begged” the minister not to proceed until Congress closed in early March, since he was sure that it would pass a law affirming the black military recruitment announced in the Emancipation Proclamation, which would affect the emigration question. Nevertheless, the delay was mostly a matter of waiting for Hodge to turn up.¹⁰¹

Meanwhile, Lincoln turned his attention once more to Île à Vache. If Seward tried to channel his superior’s urges toward other projects, the sources do not reveal as much. Ostensibly, the lease now belonged to a syndicate of New York investors headed by Paul S. Forbes and Charles K. Tuckerman, though they retained Kock as the expedition’s manager and believed that they were merely fulfilling his outstanding contract with the U.S. government. In mid-March, Forbes approached Seward on hearing that the administration no

¹⁰¹ Stuart to Russell, No. 225, September 15, Nos. 301 and 302, October 18, Lyons to Russell, No. 546, December 26, 1862, No. 78, January 27, No. 145, February 10, No. 177, February 24, No. 214, March 10, 1863, in Barnes, *Through British Eyes*, 2:175, 213, 278–79, 306–8, 328, 3:7, 20–21.

longer recognized the arrangement with Kock, but met with a frosty reception from the secretary, who thought Forbes a profiteer. Further negotiations established that Lincoln would in fact be satisfied to renew the contract with parties other than Kock, so long as they forwent payment until they presented a consular certificate confirming that the emigrants had landed. Halfway through the redrafting, Seward added a proviso that Forbes and Tuckerman obtain in advance Haiti's assent to the terms of his September 30 circular. Protesting that he was running up ship demurrage by the day, Tuckerman haggled the administration down to retroactive Haitian confirmation of Seward's terms, and in mid-April, the expedition sailed with over 400 contrabands from Fort Monroe.¹⁰²

There had been two related but distinct guarantees in Seward's circular: the first, of adequate material provision for the colonists, and the second, of the host state's consent to African American settlement as expressed in a treaty. Given his underlying lack of enthusiasm for treaties (beyond their delaying effect), Seward had now partly decoupled the two elements, merely asking the contractors to have the Haitian government underwrite the settlers' entitlements in case the contractors failed to provide them. Like Lincoln in making the original contract with Kock, Seward had thereby broken his own rules; like Lincoln, he had made a terrible mistake. In early July, Forbes and Tuckerman requested payment, claiming to have satisfied every condition bar the requisite guarantee. They enclosed a letter from the Haitian consul general, Ernest Roumain, confirming that his government could not offer preferential concessions without inflaming the population of the mainland, but that it had already naturalized the settlers, the next best thing.¹⁰³ Indeed, a serious flaw in Seward's

¹⁰² Paul S. Forbes and Charles K. Tuckerman, *Statement of Circumstances Attending the Experiment of Colonizing Free Negroes at the Island of A'Vache, Hayti, W.I.* (New York, 1864), 5–9; Bancroft, "Ile à Vache," 240–43.

¹⁰³ Forbes and Tuckerman to Usher, July 7, 1863, RG48/M160/9.

template was that emigrants were, at once, to become citizens of their host state, on an equal plane with existing inhabitants, yet to receive privileges. Such was the tension inherent in attempting to ease the transition for settlers while looking to respect the sovereignty of their new country.

Citing non-fulfillment, the administration refused to pay out, and the contractors, who had to decide whether to double down on the settlement or cut their losses, accordingly failed to support it, thus hardening the administration's resolve.¹⁰⁴ In fairness to Seward, Usher's blatant hostility toward a rival for-profit venture and Lincoln's buyer's remorse also played their part in dooming the colony to remain on a pestilential beach without shelter.¹⁰⁵ Yet Tuckerman could rightly protest that Seward's guarantee was "a simple impossibility . . . which no nation has ever agreed to and which our own Govt with regard to Irish or Chinese emigrants would never agree to."¹⁰⁶ Even as the parties bickered over the project's postmortem report, settlers continued to die on the island.¹⁰⁷

Thus it was that another colonization venture undertaken through intermediaries confirmed the superiority of direct dealings with sovereign states and their colonies. Perhaps it was such foreboding that saw Seward offer an unexpectedly warm welcome to John Hodge, the agent for British Honduras and a man acting with the blessing of the Foreign Office, on the latter's arrival in late April 1863. Hodge's discussions with the administration went well, Lincoln acceding to the British desire to avoid an emigration treaty, while his recruitment efforts received help from the New York emigrationist, Henry Highland Garnet. Yet in early

¹⁰⁴ Tuckerman to Usher, October 20, 1863, RG48/M160/9.

¹⁰⁵ Tuckerman to Usher, April 18, 1864, RG48/M160/9; Usher to Tuckerman, April 17, 1863, S. Exec. Doc. 55, 29–30.

¹⁰⁶ Tuckerman to Usher, July 29, 1863, RG48/M160/9.

¹⁰⁷ Bancroft, "Ile à Vache," 244–50.

May, Usher suddenly informed Hodge that the administration would no longer consider his proposition. While the main source of this about-face was Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, who did not want emigration agents canvassing contraband camps that could provide troops, the maneuver also enjoyed Seward's support. Usher's motivation is less clear, since he had so far only held his disappointment over the Chiriquí scheme against the Île à Vache alternative, but it seems that he was willing to sabotage colonization to be rid of James Mitchell, a rival administrator of the policy whom Lincoln had appointed to an anomalous jurisdiction within the Department of the Interior. Right on cue, Mitchell then colluded with Blair to allow Hodge to go straight to the top. In mid-June, Lincoln signed a pass allowing Hodge to canvass contraband camps, adding that it was his "honest desire" that the emigration proceed.¹⁰⁸

Yet even now, Seward hindered progress, assisted by the caution of Lyons, who knew that Lincoln had a habit of "approving papers submitted by subordinates, without coming to an understanding with his Cabinet." The minister asked the secretary of state to confirm the U.S. government's support for the plan before he would undertake the routine measure of proclaiming specific ports of embarkation. At a crucial juncture in the enlistment of an expedition, Seward simply stalled, though Lyons once more inadvertently helped him by writing Russell to check whether London really meant to include the legally controversial contrabands.¹⁰⁹ Over nearly two months, the secretary tried to sway the president against the scheme. "Mr. Seward brought me a paper the other day unfavorable to the British request for colonists, and wanted me to approve it," reported Lincoln. "I did not do so, but . . . wrote out the form of an answer myself and sent it to the State Department, but I am not sure that

¹⁰⁸ Phillip W. Magness and Sebastian N. Page, *Colonization after Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (Columbia, MO, 2011), 29–38.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 39–41.

Mr. Seward has sent it. The public locate Mr. Seward with us, but he is not.”¹¹⁰ In fact, Seward did obey, but Hodge had been forced to return to British Honduras in the meantime. Despite an emigration conference between Mitchell, Lincoln, and Garnet’s associates in November 1863, continued obstruction by Usher and Seward, as well as the time lag involved in transatlantic communication between colony, metropole, and country of embarkation, pushed the project into oblivion.¹¹¹

Indeed, faced with bureaucratic disarray, the demands of war, diplomatic complications, and inadequate congressional support, the administration stopped initiating colonization schemes over the winter of 1863–64. During 1863, Seward had allowed the minister to The Hague, James S. Pike, to negotiate a treaty, approving of the modifications that that government requested as “supplementary to, rather than conflicting with” the terms of his circular. By December, Pike had signed and dispatched the treaty, but Seward replied in February 1864 that “it is not now expected that . . . [it] 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.”¹¹² Whether following Lincoln’s orders in shelving the treaty, or merely identifying an opportunity for subversion, Seward certainly offered a most disingenuous history of colonization, which spared Lincoln’s blushes by hiding whatever change of outlook had actually happened behind a passive verb.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, “Lincoln and the Negro,” August 26, 1894.

¹¹¹ Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 39–54, 86–88.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 73–81; Seward to James S. Pike, No. 142, February 15, 1864, *PRFA* 38-2 (1864), 3:310.

¹¹³ Douma, “Dutch Suriname,” 114.

The suspension of new projects gave Seward little respite, however, for the Île à Vache fiasco looked likely to humiliate the administration. On Lincoln's orders, the expedition whimpered back in March 1864, disembarking at Alexandria, Virginia, for a local contraband camp, Freedmen's Village. One week earlier, Senator Morton S. Wilkinson (R-MN) had introduced a bill to repeal the colonization appropriations, lambasting the "hazardous and disgraceful" results of the policy.¹¹⁴ With devastating timing, an impoverished Tuckerman threatened to reveal details of his transactions with the administration unless offered redress. While Usher stood to come off worse, Seward faced embarrassment too. Forbes and Tuckerman reminded him of remarks that the scheme was "the President's child and he must father it," and dredged up his dispatch to Adams, available in *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs*, describing colonization as an "experimental" policy that would fail in some cases.¹¹⁵ Such scope for blackmail was the flipside of Seward's inveterate attempts to smother colonization with disparagement. More specifically, Seward bore responsibility for the unworkable blank guarantee form, which he admitted had placed the contractors in an "extremely perplexing" position, and for the U.S. consul at the local port of Aux Cayes, James De Long, who caused nothing but trouble during the nine months of the settlement's existence.¹¹⁶ While the nominal, departmental connection between Seward and De Long was tenuous on its own, Seward had known of a competing colonization proposal

¹¹⁴ Cong. Globe, 38th Cong., 1st Sess., 1108, 2218 (1864).

¹¹⁵ Tuckerman to Seward, January 13, to Usher, April 18, Forbes to Seward, February 19, 1864, RG48/M160/9.

¹¹⁶ Forbes, *Statement*, 14; Tuckerman to Seward, September 7, September 19, 1864, September 26, 1865, RG48/M160/9.

by De Long, which had fallen through by April 1863.¹¹⁷ The secretary was, therefore, answerable for allowing an embittered would-be contractor to assume consular supervision over victorious rivals. Well might Seward compensate Tuckerman by finding him a vacancy: ultimately the U.S. mission to Greece, in 1868, by which point the two men had moved to friendlier terms.¹¹⁸

With the proviso that the final adjustment of the Île à Vache business remained outstanding, Congress repealed the colonization appropriations in July 1864. That act represented less an ideological departure from racial separation and more an end-of-session rush to close unfinished business, such carelessness having been abetted by Usher's suppression of Mitchell's report on the more secretive, post-Emancipation Proclamation phase of colonization. While Lincoln's private secretary assumed that his boss had "sloughed off" the policy through frustration with the corruption that it had attracted, the president actually thought the repeal rider an "unfriendly" amendment to an otherwise needful budget bill, and attempted to retain Mitchell's services in order to resume colonization at some future date.¹¹⁹ The most famous evidence of Lincoln's continued affinity for the policy comes from

¹¹⁷ Proposition of James De Long, February 25, 1863, WHS, reel 183; De Long to F. W.

Seward, February 20, 1863, WHS, reel 76; Seward to Usher, February 9, 1863,

RG48/M160/9; John W. Menard to Usher, May 13-14, 1863, RG48/M160/8.

¹¹⁸ Tuckerman to F. W. Seward, March 15, December 8, 1865, May 20, July 27, October 3, 1866, April 30, 1867, to Seward, November 10, 1865, May 28, 1866, September 14, 1867, and further examples passim, WHS, reels 88-101; Tuckerman, *Personal Recollections of Notable People* (London, 1895), 1:121-23.

¹¹⁹ Magness, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 90-99, 105-17; James Hughes and J. W. Denver to Andrew Johnson, June 16, 1865, reel 225, Miscellaneous Letters of the Department of State, 1789-1906, File Microcopies: No. 179, RG 59, NARA; James Mitchell

Major General Benjamin Butler, who claimed to have looked into another resettlement scheme on the Central American isthmus at the instigation of a troubled president who asked him ““what shall we do with the negroes after they are free?”” The presumed trustworthiness of Butler’s account diminished from the mid-twentieth century as historians began to struggle with the idea that, on the very eve of his assassination, Lincoln might not have relinquished his lifelong interest in colonization. Yet, despite some lapses around the edges, including a misdating of Seward’s carriage accident, Butler’s recollections contain several verifiable points. It rings true that he took such a plan to Seward only to hear that ““I know Mr. Lincoln’s anxiety upon that question, for he has expressed it to me often, and I see no answer to his trouble.””¹²⁰ Combined with Derby and Baker’s suggestions of how much colonization continued to agitate Seward, Butler’s account hints that the secretary knew of presidential intentions to revive the policy with the return of peace.

While Seward recovered from the physical wounds of attempted assassination, his wife, Frances, deteriorated through the psychological scars that it left, and died in June 1865. Needing to recuperate, but also wanting to investigate possible naval bases for the United States, Seward and his son Frederick toured the Caribbean over the winter of 1865–66, which took them to Haiti among other places.¹²¹ “President Geffard is wisely seeking to encourage immigration . . . [y]et . . . the ‘coming African’ does not come, but prefers to remain with the whites, in the land of his birth,” observed Frederick. Indeed, the Swards encountered a black former resident of their hometown, Auburn, New York, almost certainly an emigrant under the defunct Redpath scheme, who was so eager to return that he tried to hitch a ride on their

to Hugh McCulloch, August 1865, box “M” 1864–65, Miscellaneous Letters Received at the Department of the Treasury, 1815–1914, entry 179, RG 56, NARA.

¹²⁰ Benjamin F. Butler, *Butler’s Book* (Boston, MA, 1892), 907–8.

¹²¹ Stahr, *Seward*, 438, 457.

boat.¹²² On his “world tour” of 1869–71, Seward visited a community of former fugitives at Chatham, Canada, and wondered whether the abolition of slavery would see African Americans return to the United States rather than leave.¹²³ Yet colonization would not die. In late 1866, as President Andrew Johnson’s secretary of state, Seward checked efforts by Peruvian commercial interests to exploit a resurgence of black emigrationism in the southern United States.¹²⁴ When Liberian officials tried to benefit from the same movement, Seward reminded them that Congress would have to pass new laws before the U.S. government could help.¹²⁵

Since Seward abandoned his memoirs, we will never know what significance he would have placed on his opposition to colonization. Although he mourned the president, “he attempted to belittle Mr. Lincoln” in an 1868 cabinet meeting where the history of the policy came up, hiding his own part in the Île à Vache disaster.¹²⁶ Yet at least one other contemporary recognized Seward’s role in frustrating colonization. In 1872, the Rev. Danforth B. Nichols wrote the former secretary to thank him for his frequent wartime visits to Freedmen’s Village, where the returnees from Île à Vache had arrived under Nichols’s supervision. Putting together an art gallery for Howard University of those “who labored in [the] cause of freedom,” Nichols asked Seward for his portrait, “knowing that it was through

¹²² F. W. Seward, *Reminiscences of a War-Time Statesman and Diplomat, 1830–1915* (New York, 1916), 325–26.

¹²³ Olive R. Seward, ed., *William H. Seward’s Travels Around the World* (New York, 1873), 5–6.

¹²⁴ Alvin P. Hovey to Seward, No. 40, November 28, Seward to Frederico L. Barreda, October 8, October 11, 1866, *PRFA* 39-2 (1866), 2:653–55, 669–70.

¹²⁵ Seward to John Seys, No. 7, April 4, 1867, *PRFA* 40-2 (1866–67), 2:328.

¹²⁶ Entry for September 4, 1868 in Beale, *Diary of Welles*, 3:427–28.

you that the scheme of Colonization of the blacks in Central America and Hayti was prevented even though strongly advocated by the lamented Lincoln.”¹²⁷ No evidence has turned up that the ailing Seward, six months from death, obliged Nichols. Our portrait of Seward as an opponent of colonization must remain one of words, not of images.

In the final analysis, was Seward’s relationship with colonization consistent or conflicted? It is hard to separate that question from the war that put such dichotomies so thoroughly to the test. For all the constancy of Seward’s pre- and post-war remarks on colonization, there is a tone of complacent abstraction to the former, by someone who had not yet been obliged to seriously engage with the policy, and of guilty disavowal to the latter, by someone who had contributed, through his idiosyncratic interventions, to the ignominious failure of the most controversial project of them all, *Île à Vache*.

That Seward never committed his innermost thoughts to paper during the war is a shame, though a predictable one for an exercise that required not only preternatural concern for posterity but also a generous dose of self-awareness. Did he ever resolve the cognitive dissonance of personally thwarting two expeditions, those to Chiriquí and British Honduras, that had been on the cusp of sailing with shiploads of the same African Americans who, he had always maintained, felt too rooted for colonization to succeed? Did he come to understand that the would-be pragmatism, humanitarianism, and expediency that underpinned his enthusiasm for the Danish proposal sounded remarkably like Lincoln’s rationale for colonization in general? On the latter question, yes, quite possibly: the St. Croix scheme materialized early in the war, as Seward wrestled with the newfound possibilities, limitations, and obligations of power in the context of as-yet woeful provision for uprooted black populations. By contrast, for later schemes, any notes of endorsement that he sounded were

¹²⁷ Danforth B. Nichols to Seward, April 5, 1872, WHS, reel 110.

grudging and specific, in keeping with an administrator tasked with choosing between what he deemed poor options.

More intriguing than the tensions in Seward's approach to colonization, though, are those possibilities that he seems never to have explored. It is remarkable that a lukewarm believer in racial co-existence, whose criticisms of colonization so often centered on the depletion of an undifferentiated national workforce, made no sounds in favor of internal resettlement in the more remote parts of the United States, a popular variant that pre-empted many diplomatic, logistical, and ethical concerns about overseas colonization among white and black Americans alike.¹²⁸ Ultimately, it is no less remarkable that an enthusiastic expansionist never spoke up for the Republican colonization program altogether, since it so unambiguously combined securing a greater share of the American tropics for freedom with establishing a U.S. foothold in a region in which Seward took a firm interest by 1865. A more optimistic thinker—though an unduly optimistic one, in the circumstances of war—might even have conceded the temporary loss of part of the U.S. population to countries nearby, in the belief that such emigrants would, sooner or later, be brought back into an aggrandized Union. Yet Seward simply did not shed his antebellum assumptions that, above all, black emigration threatened economic expansion and the progress of antislavery at home. While we might be distracted by the fact of the office that he held, the secretary of state himself viewed colonization not as a foreign policy, but as a domestic one—and a bad one, too.

¹²⁸ On internal colonization, see Nicholas Guyatt, “‘An Impossible Idea?’: The Curious Career of Internal Colonization,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 2 (June 2014): 234–63.