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MISSING THE BOAT: BLACK AMERICANS AND THE STRUGGLE TO STAY
AFLOAT IN A NINETEENTH CENTURY OCEAN OF IDEAS

by

Jodie Salazar

B.A., Southern Illinois University, 2020

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

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in the field of History

Approved by:

Dr. David Johnson, Chair

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

Jodie Salazar, for the Master of Arts degree in History, presented on April 3, 2023, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

**TITLE: MISSING THE BOAT: BLACK AMERICANS AND THE STRUGGLE TO
STAY AFLOAT IN A NINETEENTH CENTURY OCEAN OF IDEAS**

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. David Johnson

This paper explores the effects of various social movements on Black Americans in the nineteenth century. This examination is used as an historical background of a larger Reacting to the Past pedagogical game design set in Chicago at the time of the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. The focus of this work explores ideological views on colonization, immigration, and citizenship, as well as the various laws and viewpoints which worked to oppress Black Americans after Emancipation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century was, for Black Americans, fraught with change. While the century began in enslavement and ended in freedom, that trajectory was filled with contradictions and chaos. Anti-slavery, abolition, emigration, citizenship, and legislation all met and diverged in significant ways to create a multitude of Black social movements throughout the century.

By 1893, the time of the World's Columbian Exposition, hundreds of Black social movements had arisen throughout the US, with the Black church forming the backbone of many of them. Emigration to Africa, as well as immigration to Canada, Haiti, and the American West, was often the subject of passionate debate. Citizenship, and the rights it affords, motivated a plethora of social movements, many of which were formed to directly oppose emigration efforts. This paper posits that the Black community was adversely affected by the volume and variety of the social movements which formed after Emancipation. White colonization efforts, as well as Black colonization efforts splintered the power of these social movements. The Black church and its ministers were also divided on the issue of emigration and was the topic of frequent debate throughout the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 2

LIMINAL SPACES IN BLACK LIFE DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the “space between” for Black Americans had opened into a gaping canyon. The space in which this work is situated is an existence somewhat removed from enslavement, but far from free. A massive spectrum from freed to true freedom was spreading out before Black Americans, with no clear path to follow. I posit the idea that there was no right course of action which would result in better conditions for the Black citizenry. Their experience was one in which any route was as fraught with complications and turmoil as another. Colonization or citizenship, although fiercely debated and discussed, were complicated issues which affected Black individuals very differently. The accepted scientific thought all over the world and throughout the entire nineteenth century declared Black people uncivilized savages. The US had created a situation referred to as the “Negro Problem” which was an ongoing dilemma created by White America. This perceived problem was the quandary of what to do with free Black individuals, since those in power believed there was no acceptable way for Black people and White People to live in a single communal US existence. In 1889, J. A. Cunningham described, “For there is no use to attempt to hide the fact, that neither social equality between the whites and black, nor amalgamation will be tolerated in this country; and it is the consummation of stupidity for the blacks to dream of anything tending to these ends.”¹ There was not a “Negro Problem.” There was a problem of racial divide caused by a millennium of normalized whiteness. Fear of miscegenation, as well as the fear of even living side by side with the Black community, was the problem.

¹ Joseph A. Cunningham, *Solution of the Negro Problem*, (Louisville: A. Crump, printer, 1889), 18, Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/12002600/>.

Centuries of enslavement set up systems of oppression which were not going to disappear with the passing of a law, or even many laws.

The nineteenth century opened with the illegalization of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807 and the United States federal law prohibiting importation of slaves. By 1816, the American Colonization Society had begun its efforts to remove free Black individuals and force their emigration to Liberia. In just six short years, the US established the colony of Monrovia there and began transporting Black individuals to Liberian shores. The US government encouraged Liberia to declare its independence due to the continued encroachment of European imperialist powers throughout the continent of Africa. Liberia gained its independence with a Constitutional Convention leading to the creation of its own Constitution by the middle of the nineteenth century in 1847.

The Emancipation Proclamation and the resulting Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery in 1865 brought dreams of hope, freedom and citizenry to Black formerly enslaved individuals. Radical Reconstruction, with its government sanctioned military protection and provisions, brought even greater dreams of a brighter future for Black people in the US. This new citizenry could vote, hold office, own businesses, and in a multitude of ways begin to move forward as a free people.

The year 1866 brought the Civil Rights Act, guaranteeing more rights and freedoms, 1868, the 14th Amendment; and 1870 the 15th Amendment giving Black men the right to vote. Black men were elected to political offices, Black children were being educated, and Black businesses began cropping up. Black women still lacked the full rights of citizenship but were also making progress.

However, 1871 brought the first Jim Crow laws, and by 1876, Civil Rights guarantees had been reversed and Radical Reconstruction halted. By the late nineteenth century, at least thirty

states had passed what are known as Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow was a minstrel character created by Thomas “Daddy” Dartmouth in 1828 and used in a song he authored called “Jump Jim Crow.” Over time, this phrase was used as a derogatory slang to refer to Black people. Most of these laws pertained to miscegenation, segregation of schools and other establishments as well as public transport, and voting restrictions. Many of these laws were in direct opposition to advances toward equality which had been achieved during Radical Reconstruction. Liminality continued for Black Americans who were losing their citizenship rights which had only recently been won.

By the last quarter of the century Radical Reconstruction ended, along with the safety and security it upheld. The Black citizenry found itself somewhere in between enslavement and freedom yet again. Violence against Black people in the forms of lynchings reached new highs. Legislative positions which had been held were taken away or were refused to Black potential office holders. Black business owners were run out of town, injured, and even killed by those who saw them as a “Negro problem.” Events labeled “race riots,” but more accurately described as “race massacres” increased in frequency. Funds and opportunities to emigrate were dwindling while conditions for Black individuals worsened.

Black people in the US were finding agency where it was available, and traditional notions of class do not aptly describe their existences. With that complication in mind, throughout this paper, some terminology will follow the example of Michele Mitchell in *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* to describe class distinctions within the Black community. The term “elite” refers to those who were educated, somewhat wealthy, owned homes and businesses, and were involved in national organizations. The term “working poor” refers to a working class, struggling to survive after emancipation from

enslavement.² Although many terms have been used to describe those who survived the Middle Passage and their descendants, the term “Black” is used throughout this paper.

Christopher Robert Reed, in “*All the World Is Here!*”: *The Black Presence at White City*, shared this explanation from Black Georgians about their alternatives “some considered emigration to Africa, others migration to the North, a number planned colonization to the West, and quite a few practiced ‘stayhereation’.”³ There were proponents on every side, hoping to grasp a future for themselves and those who would come after. Free Black citizens in the North, after generations of freedom, claimed a degree of social power for themselves. However, formerly enslaved people had fewer possibilities, and little to no social power. For the newly free, conditions were so dire, fulfilling basic needs of food and housing far outweighed any desire for social power.

W. E. B. Du Bois described the condition of Black Americans as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”⁴ The discussion of foreign emigration and US citizenship was seldom a binary one with no allowance for overlap. Colonizationists as well as those who worked for full citizenship resided in a liminality which was both an in-between space and characterized by a double consciousness. Two of the most prominent activists working for full citizenship of Black Americans, Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells, voiced support for individual emigration. Ousmane Power-Greene, in *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle*

² Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press; 2005), xx.

³ Christopher Robert Reed, “*All the World Is Here!*”: *The Black Presence at White City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 43.

⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2005), 3.

Against the Colonization Movement, characterized Frederick Douglass as someone who “supported individual emigration as having a rationale when it came to one’s personal safety, or as being a matter of choice.”⁵ Ida B. Wells openly argued for integration in the US and worked for the improvement of conditions for Black Americans in the US. Wells, while not choosing emigration for herself, was open to the option for others, and stated:

From what can be gleaned from current history, the great need of Liberia is a strong, intelligent citizenship, to develop her resources and evolve a government which shall command the attention and respect of the civilized world. For any faction of our eight millions of Afro-Americans to devote its talents to the work with measurable success would be an example and inspiration for Afro-Americans the world over.⁶

Although both were outspoken activists for citizenship, they supported individual agency and motivations which could entice one into the emigration movement. But there was too much at stake on American shores for either Wells or Douglass to support massive emigrationist movements. Those resources and those leaders were best served fighting in the US for the integrationist causes.

Proponents of emigration also existed in a realm of duality, with allegiance to both an American and African identity. Tunde Adeleke, writing in *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission*, described, “Black American nationalism was thus characterized by a dual national consciousness, by ambivalence on the question of identity. America was never completely out of the equation, even in shifts between demands for American and African nationalities.”⁷ Social movements like the ones supporting emigration or

⁵ Ousmane K. Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle Against the Colonization Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 130.

⁶ Ida B. Wells, ““Afro-Americans and Africa,”” *The A.M.E. Church Review* Vol. 9, No. 1 (July 1892): 43, <https://blackwomenssuffrage.dp.la/collections/ida-b-wells/ibwells-0008-009-03>.

⁷ Tunde Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 6.

citizenship, were in constant debate. However, they were also in agreement on the topic of bettering the lives of Black Americans.

The nineteenth century was a tumultuous time in the lives of Black people in the US. The freedoms expected from Emancipation brought more restraints, not fewer. Black individuals existed somewhere between chattel and citizen, never quite attaining a recognized personhood with the full rights of freedom. The closer they came to a sense of self, the more necessary it was to maintain duality in their existence. Instead of their country welcoming them into the fold, cradled in the comforts of citizenry, Black individuals in the US were met with the harsh truth of belonging nowhere. Instead of moving forward together, emancipation left Black communities scattered, impoverished, unemployed, and searching for answers to what it meant to be a Black American in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 3

CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship for Free People

Citizenship for free Black people in the North progressed at a significantly faster rate than for those who had been forced to remain in the institution of slavery in the South. It was illegal to teach an enslaved individual to read. They could not own land or their own businesses.

Slaveholders forced Christianity on them, requiring them to attend church services reminding them that slaves were to obey their masters. Even with their eventual emancipation, Southern Black people found themselves nowhere near an assimilation into the world of citizenship created by White America.

Many Northern Black people in the nineteenth century had been born into freedom. Others, like Frederick Douglass, suffered under the hands of slavery until his escape in 1838. With his hard-fought freedom, Douglass dedicated his life to working toward true citizenship in the US for Black people. Writing in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* in 1852, he had this to say, "There is not now, there never has been, and we think there will never be, any general desire on the part of our people, to emigrate from this land to any other and least of all, to the wilds of Africa."⁸

Free Northern Black people had a distinct advantage as regards social power. While always suffering under laws and rules brought with White ethnocentrism, they found ways to assimilate into the larger society. They could become educated, own businesses, earn and spend their own money, and oftentimes live and worship beside the White population. They became educators,

⁸ Frederick Douglass, "The Colonization Scheme," *Frederick Douglass' Paper* Vol. 5, No. 5 (January 22, 1852): Portland State University Library Digital Exhibits, <https://exhibits.library.pdx.edu/exhibits/show/gates/slavery-and-abolitionism/frederickdouglasarticle.html>.

doctors, journalists, orators, and ministers, among other occupations. As the nineteenth century progressed, they became the Black leaders of an elite Black class. With their status came possibilities, and when it came to the possibility to emigrate or fight for citizenship in the US, many chose citizenship.

Samuel Cornish, an abolitionist and minister proclaimed, “The secret views of the colonizationist always have been, to make a furious onset with ripened purposes and ripened means, and to DRIVE us out of the country. We exhort every Colored American to die by his birthright, and his ‘inalienated rights.’ If we must be removed, let it be as martyrs - go directly from America to heaven.”⁹ They were outspoken activists against emigration, believing the Black population had won their freedom and would achieve the full rights of citizenship. Their elite status, and oftentimes, like Cornish, their Christian faith, made full citizenship appear to be an inevitable possibility.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, not only were Black men making their voices heard on issues of citizenship, franchisement, and colonization, but Black women as well. Women such as Charlotte Forten Grimke, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Anna Julia Cooper, and Harriet Tubman were lecturing at conventions and creating their own societies. They were activists and feminists receiving national acclaim and admiration. Their focus was on the betterment of conditions for the Black community in the US.

Harriet Tubman, at a New England Colored Convention in 1859 stated it simply, “they can’t

⁹ Kwando M. Kinshasa, *Emigration vs. Assimilation: The Debate in the African American Press. 1827-1861* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1988), 82.

do it; we're rooted here, and they can't pull us up."¹⁰ Likewise, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper argued, "Resolved, That we say to those who would induce us to emigrate to Africa, or elsewhere, that the amount of self-sacrifice required to establish a home in a foreign land would, if exercised here, redeem our native land from the grasp of slavery; therefore, we are resolved to remain where we are, confident that 'truth is mighty, and will prevail.'"¹¹ In 1892, Anna Julia Cooper had this to say about colonization, "for the love of humanity stop the mouth of those learned theorizers, the expedient mongers, who come out annually with their new and improved method of getting the answer and clearing the slate: amalgamation, deportation, colonization, and all the other 'ations' that were ever devised or dreamt of."¹² Anna Julia Cooper was outraged at schemes to solve the "Negro Problem" that did not even involve the Black community in those discussions and which often involved removal from US soil. These Black women were arguing from a place of multiple impositions on their lives and freedoms and fought openly against any force that might undermine the progress which had been made. Their elite status, while not equal with White women of the time, afforded them a voice, a forum, and influence.

Conclusion

The Black elite class, made up of a free, educated leadership received many benefits of their status in the North. Many had been born free, and with that freedom brought opportunity. Men and

¹⁰ Adam McNeil, "Black Women's Anti-Colonialist Political Thoughts," February 22, 2019, *Black Perspectives aaihs.org*, <https://www.aaihs.org/black-womens-anti-colonialist-political-thought/#fnref-50884-1>.

¹¹ Preeya Waite, "Colored Convention Heartland: Black Organizers, Women and the Ohio Movement – Frances Ellen Watkins Harper," Spring 2016, *Colored Conventions Project: Bringing Nineteenth-Century Black Organizing to Digital Life*, <https://coloredconventions.org/ohio-organizing/biographies/frances-ellen-watkins-harper/>.

¹² Jeanette Eileen Jones, "'The Negro's Peculiar Work': Jim Crow and Black Discourses on US Empire, Race, and the African Question, 1877–1900," 2018, *Journal of American Studies* 52 (2): 352. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021875817001931>.

women alike were able to rise in the ranks of social activism and work toward better freedoms.

Early feminism arose and brought many Black women to the forefront. Formerly enslaved Black leaders like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman spoke to the masses on the conditions of Black Americans. For many of these elite leaders emigration was out of the question. With US citizenship, they resolved to bettering conditions for all Black people, free and enslaved, and thus vehemently worked against colonization and emigrationist efforts.

CHAPTER 4

COLONIZATION

Colonization vs. Emigration: Semantics

The semantics involved in the discussion of emigration, especially as it pertains to Liberia, is crucial and requires parsing. A common definition of colonization is the act or practice of appropriating something that one does not own or have a right to. Emigration means leaving one's country to live in another. These terms have been conflated, as well as used interchangeably in describing the removal of Black Americans to Liberia. For the purposes of this discussion, the term colonization will be used throughout this chapter.

White Colonization

Thomas Jefferson, in his autobiography from the year 1779, explained the reasoning for a bill being withheld concerning the fate of enslaved Black individuals. He argued, "Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free. Nor is it less that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government. Nature, habit, opinion have drawn indelible lines of distinction between them. It is still in our power to direct the process of emancipation and deportation, peaceably, and in such slow degree, as that the evil will wear off insensibly, and their place be, *pari passu*, filled up by free white laborers."¹³ Jefferson penned this three years after writing the Declaration of Independence guaranteeing citizenship rights to all men. Free or not, it was never the intent of the Founding Fathers to recognize Black citizenship in the US.

The American Society for the Colonizing the Free People of Color in the United States,

¹³ Thomas Jefferson, Paul Leicester Ford, and George Haven Putnam, *Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson, 1743-1790*. New York, G. P. Putnam's sons, 1914. Image 129. 77. <https://www.loc.gov/item/14013437/>.

otherwise known as the American Colonization Society (ACS), was at the forefront of the emigrationist movement which endured throughout the majority of the nineteenth century. The American Colonization Society was formed in late December of 1816 by two White brothers-in-law, Reverend Robert Finley from New Jersey and Dr. E.B. Caldwell from Washington. Many other emigration societies formed all throughout the US, including Virginia, Washington DC, Kansas, Indiana, Maryland, New York, Mississippi, and Ohio. The movement ebbed and flowed throughout the century, though it never truly produced the mass emigration to Liberia which was expected or desired by the White leadership. Regardless of how many organizations formed in order to facilitate emigration, it seldom materialized into a practical plan. Full realization of a mass emigration of Black people from the US to Liberia failed in epic proportions.

Reverend Finley and Dr. Caldwell held a meeting of like-minded individuals, claiming, “Desirous of aiding in the great cause of philanthropy, and of promoting the prosperity and happiness of our country, it is recommended by this meeting, to form an association or Society for the purpose of giving aid and assisting in the colonization of free people of colour in the United States.”¹⁴ These men, joined by others such as Francis Scott Key, author of the US national anthem, believed theirs to be a just and benevolent cause to return the free Black population to their homeland.

Although plans to forcibly remove Black enslaved people from the US South began in 1777, it was only in 1800 that talks between the governor of Virginia and the President of the United States began to move the plan forward. At its founding, the ACS was operated and funded by

¹⁴ Early Lee Fox, *The American Colonization Society*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1919. Image 52. 46. <https://www.loc.gov/item/20003100/>.

slaveholders and southerners. Fears arose surrounding emigration and the possibility of it being in opposition to the interests of slaveholders and their “property.” Reverend J.M. Pease quelled these fears with the frequently justified divine nature of enslavement, “in no sense whatever does the genius of this institution interfere with the legal relation of master and servant.”¹⁵ Enslaved Black individuals would remain in that condition, ensuring the economic gains of the slaveholders, and with the intention of leaving the institution of slavery firmly in place.

Haroon Kharem, in the book *The American Colonization Society*, described the motives of the ACS as, “The rhetoric of reconciliation, white nationalism, and patriotism gave leading proponents of colonization a language, which they used to build argumentative smoke screens in hopes of obscuring their real intentions and motivations.”¹⁶ Fear and the perceived supremacy of White US citizens formed the backbone of the colonizing efforts. The elite free Black population, with their hard-won agency, could afford to refuse and resist the colonization movement.

Kharem pointed to four sections of society from which the ACS chose to build support for colonization efforts of free Black individuals. These groups included: slaveholders who feared uprisings like occurred in Haiti, those who wished to bar Black individuals from western states in order to build up the white population, Federalists who viewed the Black population as a cause of disorder, and lastly Protestant clergy who also blamed the Black population for the disorder occurring in the US.¹⁷

¹⁵ Reverend Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Colonization*, African American Pamphlet Collection, (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1855) Image 2. 2. <https://www.loc.gov/item/11008402/>.

¹⁶ Haroon Kharem, “The American Colonization Society,” in *A Curriculum of REPRESSION: A Pedagogy of Racial History in the United States*, (New York: Peter Lang Group AG, 2006). 92.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 84-87.

With all the arrogance which can be afforded those who believe they are superior, White scholar and seminarian Archibald Alexander “castigated the Reverend Samuel Cornish, a black abolitionist, preacher, and editor of *Freedom’s Journal*, for encouraging blacks to abhor colonization. Alexander told Cornish the ACS knew what was best for blacks, that he was ‘inflicting’ great harm on the ‘posterity’ of black people.”¹⁸ While full of claims of benevolent motivations, the ACS was an organization whose intent was to move free Black Americans from their homes in the US to overseas. The ACS convinced itself of its purity of motive by its lack of support for slavery. They set up a straw man argument focusing attention on what they were *not* doing so the world could not see what they *were* doing. The New York American Anti-Slavery Society of New York painted a very different picture of the American Colonization Society motivations.

In 1855, the New York Anti-Slavery Society of New York published a pamphlet on the subject of emigration to Africa via the American Colonization Society. They believed the ACS would stand in the way of the abolishment of slavery and “With regard to the extinction of the slave trade, we apprehend Liberia, however good the intentions of its supporters, will do little or nothing towards it except on the extent of its own territory.”¹⁹ This pamphlet included quotes from various ACS representatives assuring the continuance of the institution of slavery. The signers desired that the US pay the full cost for any emigration enterprise, which was only seeking to please slaveholders and their prejudices. They believed the plan of the ACS was to move free Black Americans whether or not they desired to be transported.

¹⁸ Ibid., 88.

¹⁹ Frothingham, *Colonization*, 7.

President Abraham Lincoln, in 1858, in his sixth debate with opponent Stephen Douglas clarified his views on Black and White equality in the US. He stated:

I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and black races. There is a physical difference between the two, which, in my judgment, will probably forever forbid their living together on the footing of perfect equality, and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong having the superior position.²⁰

Lincoln did not believe he was in a position to take rights away from the states regarding racial equality. He declared White superiority which echoed that of Thomas Jefferson over half a century before.

President Lincoln, in 1862, invited a group of Black men to the White House to discuss Colonization. He explained Congress had allotted funds for colonization and desired their participation in persuading others within the Black community to acquiesce to the relocation plan:

It is better for us both, therefore, to be separated. I know that there are free men among you, who even if they could better their condition are not as much inclined to go out of the country as those, who being slaves could obtain their freedom on this condition. I suppose one of the principal difficulties in the way of colonization is that the free colored man cannot see that his comfort would be advanced by it.²¹

He followed that statement by admonishing the gathered men of the selfishness of seeking full citizenship rights as opposed to pursuing colonization. President Lincoln elaborated by suggesting both Liberia and Panama as possible forced emigration locations. He acknowledged however, “The political affairs in Central America are not in quite as

²⁰ Abraham Lincoln, “6th Debate: Quincy, Illinois,” October 13, 1858, National Park Service *nps.gov*. Sourced from: Neely, Mark E. Jr., *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia*, New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1982. <https://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/debate6.htm>.

²¹ Abraham Lincoln, “Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Negroes,” *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln Volume 5*, August 14, 1862. 372. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln5/1:812?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>.

satisfactory condition as I wish.” President Lincoln attempted to sway these gentlemen to sacrifice their hopes of full citizenship in the land of their birth. He saw them as an impossible complication to the future of the US. He appealed to their influence over their brethren as a way to solve a “Negro Problem” which only existed in the minds of White American government leaders.²²

While the American Colonization Society was not the only emigration movement or society, it was by far the most well-known. Fueled by ideas of emigration for Black individuals centuries before, the ACS formed in the early part of the eighteenth century with lofty ideas of solving the “Negro Problem” with emigration to Liberia. Although the ACS was created by, and mostly made up of, White abolitionists, they did not acknowledge their own ignorance of the Black condition in the US. Claiming benevolence, the ACS always insisted on its ability to know what was best for free Black Americans. Their solution, throughout the entirety of the nineteenth century was that removal of the Black community, separating it from the White citizenry, was best for all involved.

Black Colonization

The American Colonization Society, historically, finds itself painted as the enemy of Black Americans. Although it is true the larger Black population and its elite leaders stood firmly against the ACS and its efforts, the lower class petitioned heavily for passage to Liberia. Burrell Mann is only one example of the many desperate people, hoping, praying, and often begging for an avenue out of poverty, oppression, and in the case of Mann, enslavement. The lower class did not have the agency to stand on principle and stay in one place. For many, the American Colonization Society provided a glimmer of hope to be found in the possibility of emigration to Liberia.

²² Ibid., 373.

Many individuals within the enslaved and working poor class clamored for opportunities to emigrate to Liberia. One such example is Burrell W. Mann of Virginia. In 1847, over a period of two years he wrote at least forty letters to the ACS. Burrell served as a Southern Methodist minister while enslaved. He wrote faithfully for months, seeking a solution that would see him serving God in Africa, if only he could raise the funds for his freedom as well as what was needed for passage to Liberia. Although he was pointed in various directions to obtain funds, it is apparent he was at best being continually redirected to futile avenues for aid. At worst, he was being intentionally misled and manipulated as when his master quoted him an amount to purchase his freedom, and then increased it by one hundred and fifty dollars more than was paid for him sixteen years before. There is no indication that Mann was ever granted his freedom or his passage, and more than once signed his correspondence “in tears.”²³

Free Black Americans once again found themselves endangered with the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. Although Mann wrote as an enslaved Black individual, it was the free Black population who were courted by the idea of a new beginning in Liberia. The Fugitive Slave Act brought the debate over emigration to the forefront of Black consciousness once again. With its passing, there were no truly “free” states. Any Black individual anywhere in the US was in danger of being captured and sold into bondage, regardless of their previous status. The ACS seized this opportunity to once again place emigration at the forefront of viable options for Black individuals.

Black Clergy and Colonization

Emigrationist Alexander Crummel explained the institution of slavery and its place in God’s

²³ Burrell Mann, “Letters to the American Colonization Society,” *The Journal of Negro History*, Apr. 1925, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Apr. 1925), 180 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2713936>.

plan as, “All human events...[are] elements and instruments in [God’s] hand, for the accomplishment of the august subjects of His will...The Will of God overrules all the deeds, the counsels, and the designs of men...While men act on their own personal responsibility, they nevertheless act either consciously or unconsciously as the agents of God.”²⁴ There were many within Black Protestant Christianity in the US who believed not only in the power of Liberian emigration, but in it being a God-ordained solution. With the rise of emigration to Liberia as a viable option for a new beginning, free of enslavement, church leaders of many Christian denominations became proponents of the cause. The leaders of Black churches preached the message of US missionary efforts to Africa to bring “civilized” ways and Christian beliefs and practices. Christian denominations including Catholicism, Presbyterianism, Methodism, the Dutch Reformed Church, Episcopalism, and Baptist all supported this cause with either monetary efforts or missionaries.²⁵

Henry Highland Garnet was born into enslavement in the US and the grandson of an African chief. Garnet was a nineteenth-century abolitionist, orator, educator, and Presbyterian minister. Garnet had openly opposed emigration and the American Colonization Society but underwent a change of heart about the possibilities of success of Liberia itself and came to believe that it had a bright future. By 1849, Garnet voiced support of the practice. In a piece written for *The North Star* he explained, “In a word, we ought to go anywhere, where we can better our condition.”²⁶

Bishop Henry McNeal Turner was an outspoken emigrationist to Africa as evidenced by a

²⁴ Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans*. 121.

²⁵ Kareem, *The American Colonization Society*. 87.

²⁶ Kinshasa, *Emigration vs. Assimilation*, 139–40.

speech delivered in April 1870 on the Fifteenth Amendment: “But God intends for us to carry and spread enlightenment and civilization over that land. They are ours and we are theirs. Religion, morality, economy, policy, utility, expediency, duty, and every other consideration makes it our duty. We must, we shall, we will, we ought to do it.”²⁷ Bishop Turner, as a Free Black man since birth, argued from an advantaged space, compared to enslaved men like Burrell Mann. Turner was freeborn as well as the grandson of an African king. He was both a Bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and a chaplain in the military, appointed by President Abraham Lincoln during the US Civil War. He was twice elected to the Georgia Legislature during Radical Reconstruction but was thrown out based on his skin color. Not only was emigration to Africa an option for Black Americans, but according to Turner, it was a moral responsibility. His class status greatly contributed to his ability to support emigration. Others, born into slavery, were limited by their class status.

Conclusion

Colonization appeared in various forms during the nineteenth century. White colonization, rooted in ethnocentric systems and institutions, was upheld by governmental leaders. Their unwillingness to support Black equality in the US limited the citizenship opportunities for Black Americans. Organizations like the American Civilization Society organized efforts to fund and remove free Black citizens to Liberia. The working poor, desperate for the possibility of freedom, looked to emigration societies to fund their journeys to Africa. Black colonization was spearheaded by some within the Black clergy, many of whom were in the elite class. The topic of colonization elicited passionate reactions from Black and White

²⁷ William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive, and Rising*, (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 575.

people alike. Complications brought with class disparity divided many within the Black community.

CHAPTER 5

EMIGRATION/IMMIGRATION

Emigration vs. Immigration: Semantics

In the previous chapter, emigration was defined as leaving one's country to live in another. The description of immigration used in this chapter is moving to become part of an existing Black state/society. The terms emigration and immigration are often used interchangeably and inappropriately. Throughout this chapter, the term immigration is used to describe the voluntary migration of Black Americans to existing Black states and societies. Liberia and its acquisition by the American Colonization Society was one of the most well-known and longest lasting emigration movements in the US. However, it was not the only possibility for those who wished to search for less oppressive citizenship than what could be gained in the US. Movements arose to support Black immigration to Haiti, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, and what would eventually become the western United States. The focus of this chapter is immigration to Canada, Haiti, and migration to the state of Kansas.

Immigration to Canada

Immigration to Canada had been an option for the enslaved population as far back as the seventeenth century. However, the first wave began immigrating there during the American Revolution. Historians are divided on the total number which actually immigrated to Canada, but based on census data, at least twenty thousand has been estimated.²⁸ After the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, the northern US states no longer offered safety for the free Black

²⁸ Sharon A. Rogers Hepburn, "Following the North Star: Canada as a Haven for Nineteenth-Century American Blacks," *The Michigan Historical Review* 25, no. 2, (Fall, 1999), 91. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20173830>.

population. The irony was not lost on Philadelphia's Black citizens, one of whom commented "blacks would now be compelled to gain security in the land of a Monarchy which they could not enjoy in this Republic."²⁹ Canada was the North Star leading enslaved Black individuals to freedom via the Underground Railroad. It was believed to be the Promised Land spoken of in the Christian bible with Canada being the land of Canaan, and the Detroit River the River Jordan.

Once again, Canada was the last stop for freedom.

Immigration to Haiti

Ideas of Haitian immigration arose in the 1820s and resulted in thousands of people immigrating there. An exact number of immigrants to Haiti has been difficult to assess, but is estimated to be as high as 13,000. In 1824, an immigration organization was formed called the Society for Promoting the Emigration of Free Persons of Colour to Hayti. The movement ebbed and flowed, and arose again with force after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850.

William Seraille quite aptly summed up the situation as follows:

The question of emigration to Haiti became a hotly debated one with the emigrationists calling for self-worth through migration while the anti-emigrationists demanded that blacks stay in America to fight for human dignity and to agitate for the end of slavery. The debate involved the unknown and the famous, the denouncers of the United States and the defenders and before the question of emigration was resolved many had switched sides.³⁰

Between the years 1859 and 1862, immigration to Haiti increased again. Haiti and its revolution, led by Toussaint Louverture, inspired hope in many Black American abolitionists for

²⁹ Ibid., 104.

³⁰ William Seraille, "Afro-American Emigration to Haiti during the American Civil War," *The Americas* 35, no. 2 (October 1978), 185. <https://doi.org/10.2307/980903>.

agency for the Black community. Violent revolution or not, Haiti was a glimpse of available possible futures.

Reverend James Theodore Holly believed the US Black population particularly suited to undertake immigration to Haiti. Holly was a speaker at the Cleveland National Emigration Convention in 1854. In 1857, Holly wrote, “It becomes then an important question for the negro race in America to consider the weighty responsibility that the present exigency devolves upon them, to contribute to the continued advancement of this negro nationality of the New World until its glory and renown shall overspread and cover the whole earth , and redeem and regenerate by its influence in the future, the benighted Fatherland of the race in Africa.”³¹

John Mercer Langston viewed exodus as the only solution available to Black Americans in the late nineteenth century. In a speech delivered to the Emigration Society in 1879, he saw exodus to the North and West as a reclamation of identity and purpose, including Black manhood. For Langston, the American South held too many remnants of the old, oppressive South. Radical Reconstruction had been reversed, the Ku Klux Klan was meting out their own perverted sense of justice and patriotism, and lynchings were on the rise. Langston cast aside concerns of poverty and the Black American being ill-suited to the conditions in the northern and western parts of North America.³²

Like other proponents of immigration, Langston believed the future of Black Americans

³¹ James Theodore Holly, “A vindication of the capacity of the Negro race for self-government, and civilized progress, as demonstrated by historical events of the Haytian revolution: and the subsequent acts of that people since their national independence, 1857,” *Antislavery Pamphlet Collection*, New Haven: William H. Stanley, 1857. Pdf. 45. <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/murb003-i162>.

³² BlackPast, “(1879) John Mercer Langston, “The Exodus: The Causes Which Led The Colored People of the South to Leave Their Homes – The Lesson,”” April 23, 2011, *blackpast.org*. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1879-john-mercator-langston-exodus-causes-which-led-colored-people-south-leave-their-homes-lesson/>.

was to leave America for a place guaranteed to them by Divine decree., “I do most reverently and heartily accept the lesson contained in the words- ‘I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task-masters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good land, and large, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ ”³³ Although his views put him at odds with some of the most renowned leaders of the Black elite class, such as Frederick Douglass, Langston championed the cause of immigration.

Migration to Kansas

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Benjamin “Pap” Singleton was at the forefront of a migration movement called the “exodusters.” Singleton believed God had ordained him to lead Black southerners out of the US South and westward to Kansas. He had begun exploring locations in Kansas in the early 1870’s after his native Tennessee proved unwilling to sell productive land to Black people. In 1874, he and his associates formed Edgefield Real Estate and Homestead Association which between the years of 1877 and 1879, led twenty thousand Black Americans to the state of Kansas.³⁴ A report on the project claimed that the state welcomed them with open arms:

The distress of the 20,000 freedmen who have come to our refuge since October 13, 1879, has been materially mitigated, their urgent needs have been promptly supplied and themselves so helped to good locations, limited aid and work that with few exceptions they are already self-sustaining, and are

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ The Library of Congress, “The “Exoduster Movement,” *The African-American Mosaic: Western Migration*, loc.gov. <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam009.html#obj5>.

ambitiously laboring to secure the title to a home or farm.³⁵

Once again, a Black American had discovered their purpose in the eyes of God as a Moses-like figure, carrying the people out of the wilderness and into a Promised Land.

Conclusion

The reality of US citizenship for Black America in the nineteenth century was ever in flux, Rights were given and retracted, opportunities for advancement rare, and Black Americans were often forced into liminality. These factors and many more led to tens of thousands of the Black population leaving and searching for a life elsewhere. In each of the instances mentioned here, not only was exodus an appealing option, it was also believed to be God-ordained. Whether going over Jordan or into the wilderness, they were being led away, hoping to find their Promised Land in places like Haiti, Canada, or the West.

³⁵ Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association, "Second Report (semi-annual)," Daily Capital Steam Printing House, 05/08/1879. *Digital Public Library of America*. 8. <https://dp.la/item/083ca808a3dcf47924c553d89ccc3da3>.

CHAPTER 6

DUAL IMPOSITIONS OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

They could fly, they could fly
 They could slip the bonds of earth and rise so high
 They could fly across the ocean
 Together, hand in hand
 Searching, always searching for the promised land³⁶

Black Christianity: A Nuanced Faith

The Christian God and its Bible were introduced to enslaved Africans in the US as a tactic to encourage docility and compliance. Despite the ill intent of slaveholders, many enslaved peoples developed a true faith in the Christian God. They appropriated Biblical heroes as their own, gaining the ability to persevere from their trials and hope from their triumphs. That which slaveholders meant for evil, resulted in good for enslaved people. Harriet Tubman, leader of their exodus was nicknamed Moses. Spirituals rooted in Biblical stories renewed their spirits. This faith was their own, and one of the few possessions which could not be taken from the enslaved.

Introduction

The American Colonization Society and other colonization societies were created for the purpose of solving the Negro Problem. The accepted science of the nineteenth century, based in anthropological theories of racial categories, deemed Black individuals, amongst others, as a lesser race of humans. Black churches and their leadership, using the only agency available to them, embraced their survival of the peculiar institution of slavery and used it to move up the societal ladder. Church leaders from a variety of denominations believed Black Americans to be particularly

³⁶ Lyrics.com “We Could Fly Lyrics,” stands4 llc, 2023.
<https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/33674114/Rhiannon+Giddens/We+Could+Fly>. (Accessed April 1, 2023).

suited to emigrate to Africa and redeem their heathen brethren. Not only did they believe it was their duty, but also part of God's divine plan. The White ruling majority had deemed it unacceptable for Black and White populations to live side by side within the nation. Emancipation of enslaved individuals instilled fear of miscegenation and racial mixing in the minds of those in power in the US.

The Three C's: Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization

Tunde Adeleke described the colonization process of Europeans over Africa as a twofold approach to rid Africa of its barbarism. Adeleke explained: "The missionaries opted for evangelism. They presented Christianity as the key to Africa's salvation and civilization. The explorers advocated the infusion of intelligent and industrious skills to develop untapped resources, a solution that can also be summarized in one word: commerce."³⁷ Christianity and civilization did "humanitarian" work, and commerce flowed out of the exploration of the continent. Missionaries and explorers were at the forefront of such work.

Black American Christianity in the Nineteenth Century (A Broad Overview)

In the US, as enslaved individuals, those from the African continent, and their descendants had their Indigenous African spiritualities suppressed and forbidden. In 1861, Harriet Jacobs, writing as Linda Brent elaborated on this idea with, "After the alarm caused by Nat Turner's insurrection had subsided, the slaveholders came to the conclusion that it would be well to give the slaves enough of religious instruction to keep them from murdering their masters."³⁸ Jacobs knew

³⁷ Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans*, 24.

³⁸ Linda Brent (Harriet Jacobs), *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1861), 74.

what those slaveholders did not: the faith exhibited by Nat Turner was his own. Although a corrupted form of Protestant Christianity was forced upon them by slaveholders in the form of mandatory church attendance, enslaved formed their own relationship with God and the teachings of the Bible. As more slave uprisings and revolts occurred, fear motivated slaveholders to indoctrinate enslaved individuals with the decrees of the Bible.

However, in contrast to what was being imposed by some, at the same time, many enslaved individuals accepted these doctrines as their own and appropriated Biblical heroes, gaining strength from the characters and their actions. As illustrated in various Spirituals such as “Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho”, “I Stood on the River of Jordan”, and “Go Down Moses”, a strong Christian tradition was born within the Black community that existed long beyond the bonds of slavery. Black church denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church were formed and became a powerful force in Black communities.

Black church members left the denominations of which they were a part and began forming their own. Kwando M. Kinshasa described this with “Once established, the African church functioned as a viable social institution which helped black recognize the need to control and develop organization within their communities.”³⁹ Within these churches, they began to form social communities as well as organizations and social movements. They were cognizant of the need to create a free Black identity with its own caste and power structure. This served the individual as well as the community and is a vital element of Black activism and identity to the present day.

³⁹ Kinshasa, *Emigration vs. Assimilation*, 39.

The Role of Anthropology

To dissect the reasons Black preachers felt burdened with the “civilizing” mission of emigration, it is crucial to understand the concept of race in the nineteenth century. The anthropological field had structured a racial classification system which formed the backbone of White ethnocentrism. Terms like “savage” were a common descriptor in anthropological taxonomies for those born or descended from Africa. Most racial identity theories operated from one of two origin points, monogenism and polygenism. Monogenism posited human origins from a single pair of individuals, largely based on the Christian origin story of Adam and Eve. Monogenism also relied on the belief that differences in race occurred over time. In contrast, polygenism was centered around the concept of multiple origins which were created inherently different. Neither of these theories allowed for significant individual growth of racial groups without the assistance of European influence.

Charles Darwin and his work on the biographical evolution of animals in *Origin of Species* posited very little about humans and their evolutionary process. However, Herbert Spencer believed the same process could be applied to humans and developed the concept of “survival of the fittest.” He applied Darwin’s ideas of evolution and natural selection to humans and Social Darwinism was born. Social Darwinism created an evolutionary human ranking system in which “primitive” humans would have to evolve to survive. William Graham Sumner is known as the first sociologist and built upon the theories of Spencer. His work during the antebellum period would have devastating effects on the perceptions of Black people in the scientific world. Rutledge M. Dennis, in an article for the *Journal of Negro Education*, wrote, “Positioning the peculiar institution of American slavery within Darwinist and Spencerian frames of reference, Sumner reasoned that because slavery permitted superior groups the leisure to construct and develop more refined

cultures, it actually advanced the cause of humanity.”⁴⁰ Sumner may have been the first sociologist to present the idea, but it exploded into widely accepted scientific fact.

An article in the *Anthropological Review* from 1865 is a prime example of not only the prevalence of science based in White ethnocentrism, but the arrogance with which it was circulated and proclaimed as ultimate truth. In this particular article, the author was lambasting historian Henry Thomas Buckle who had posited alternative theories of race. When discussing the belief of humanity as a collective organism, with various races having their own function, the author responded with, “Thus, if we grant that the Caucasian represents the nervous system in the mundane man, then the Mongol, by a similar process of reasoning, must be regarded as the muscular, and the Negro as the vascular portion of this vast organism. And if so, then, as their duties are diverse, their destiny must be different; and it is perfectly absurd to suppose that the fate of one can pre-figure that of either of the others.”⁴¹ The incredulity of this author illustrates how pervasive the White ethnocentrism fueled by the accepted science of the mid nineteenth century scientific rationale was in the scholarly world.

Conclusion

Science and religion, generally bitter enemies, combined during the nineteenth century to complicate the world for Black Americans. The last half of the century brought academic and anthropological theories which only with hindsight can be seen for what they truly were: White ethnocentrism designed to place Black Americans especially beneath the feet of the White citizenry.

⁴⁰ Rutledge M. Dennis, “Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and the Metaphysics of Race,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 64 no. 3 (1995): 244.

⁴¹ “Race in History,” *The Anthropological Review* 3, no. 11 (1865): 246. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3024881>.

Some Black church leadership, embracing the Christianity gifted to them with slavery, used their faith in God to explain away their time of enslavement for a greater good. In turn, their duty, ordained by God, was to use the gifts they had been given to go and Christianize and civilize the Africans in Liberia.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The liminality in which Black Americans found themselves in the nineteenth century robbed them of any chance to gather as a collective and fight the oppression under which they lived. Indeed, freedom brought with it options, but the Black community found itself with so many options they could not gain momentum in one direction without hindering itself in another. These people who had been proclaimed property were stolen from their homes and lives on a distant continent, and placed in conditions that robbed them of personhood. Not only were they standing outside the circle, the circles had shrunk and multiplied, scattered across the US via enslavement, and tossed into a wilderness of uncertainty.

The nineteenth century was awash with an ocean of ideas to advance the condition in the US for Black Americans. Not only was their status in a constant state of flux, flowing from enslavement to freedom, oftentimes, they were forced to live in a state of double consciousness. They were continually having their condition debated for them, reflected back through the eyes of a White America convinced of the justness of it to do so.

Citizenship for Black Americans remained the strongest force throughout the nineteenth century. However, it suffered many setbacks due to the reversal of Radical Reconstruction and Jim Crow laws. Those in the elite class had distinct privileges gained via generations of Free status. Their futures contained many more possibilities than those in the class of working poor. The working poor were oftentimes torn between the dream of citizenship and the realities of living at the bottom of the social power hierarchy in the US.

Colonization efforts by both White and Black Americans fueled hundreds of social movements throughout the nineteenth century. The American Colonization Society was formed by

White abolitionists who claimed benevolence but spent much of their time appeasing White slaveholders that their endeavor would not rob them of their enslaved Black property. For that reason, free Black leaders often spoke out directly against the ACS and its intentions and was likely the largest reason for mass emigration to Liberia. White America wanted a solution to a “Negro Problem” which existed only in their own need for superiority in an ever-changing US landscape.

In time the Christian God represented all that would free them: emigration and immigration directing them to Promised Lands from the US to Canada to Haiti to Liberia. At the same time, science and anthropology were defining new ways of looking at the world, beyond the bounds of religion, and resulting in relegation to the bottom of a hierarchical social structure for those with Black bodies.

Hope prevailed. Despite all the forces which combined to deny the citizenship of Black Americans throughout the nineteenth century, they continued to resist. Though the fight is far from over, the Black community has persisted. With enslavement, they were thrown into Hell, but they journeyed through the wilderness and climbed the mountain. The bird of Sankofa has led their way, pointing them to the North Star, and reminding them they can fly....

In the cradle of the circle
All the ones that came before you
Well, their strength is yours now
You're not alone⁴²

⁴² Azlyrics.com “You’re Not Alone,” <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/allisonrussell/yourenotalone.html> (Accessed April 1, 2023).

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Missing the Boat: Black Americans and the Struggle to Stay Afloat in a
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