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Christian community and the development of an Americo-Liberian identity, 1824-1878

Andrew N. Wegmann

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, andrewnwegmann@gmail.com

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CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AMERICO-
LIBERIAN IDENTITY, 1824-1878

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

by
Andrew N. Wegmann
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To Dennis Alexander,
for planting the seed.

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Abstract

By the mid-nineteenth century, two separate visions of civilization and Christianity existed in Liberia. On the one hand, the settlers – the emigrants sent from the United States to Liberia by the American Colonization Society starting in 1822 – worshiped the external appearance of a Christian mind and “civilized” western body. They revered those citizens who spoke the best American English, lived in the grandest wood-framed houses, and wore the best American clothes. They required total indoctrination of natives into the “religion of the tall hat and frock coat” to maintain a stable, “civilized” American society. On the other hand, the black-led missionaries – the black Americans and frustrated settlers who broke off from the white-led missionary enterprise in the 1840s and 1850s – promoted the idea of a “civilized,” Christian mind. To them, the “religion of the top hat and frock coat” developed an exaggerated sense of “civility” both in Americo-Liberian society and the few native societies it touched. Accordingly, they worked to inject the native population with an understanding of a single benevolent God, solemn prayer, and spiritual immortality through translated scripture, and pidgin sermons. This split in cultural and religious practice gave rise to a new national and racial identity in the Liberian hinterland based on the pan-Negro principles of Edward Blyden, Alexander Crummell, and John Seys, among others. Led by the black missionaries, a new group of pan-Negro preachers rejected the “total indoctrination” practices of the Americo-Liberians, promoting a sense of racial unity and equality lost in Liberian settler society. They transplanted American-based Jacksonian individualism into the African context, allowing natives to experiment with, and learn the teachings of Christianity on their own. At the same time, however, the Americo-Liberian society, which existed strictly in the urban centers of Monrovia, and coastal settler towns, remained steadfastly American. Americo-Liberian leaders placed innate value on skin

color, ancestry, and outward appearance, creating a racialistic meritocracy that banned dark-skinned blacks, and native Africans from the highest echelons of settler society. Both societies were Americo-Liberian by nature, separated by the fundamental difference between rhetoric and reality.

Introduction

On December 28, 1816, a group of American philanthropists, slaveholders, ministers, and politicians, both northern and southern, gathered in the chambers of the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., to form a society “for the colonization of the people of color of the United States.” Their mission was in part benevolent, religious, economic, and political. It touched each member of the group in a different way. To some, like Speaker of the House Henry Clay of Kentucky, a slaveholder who presided over the meeting, it represented a chance to bring equality and racial hegemony to the United States by granting the black population freedom elsewhere, while maintaining the hegemony of white racial power in America. “What is the true nature of the evil of the existence of a portion of the African race in our population?” he asked the gathered assembly. “It is not that there are *some*, but that there are so *many* among us of a different caste, of a different physical, if not moral constitution, who never could amalgamate with the great body of our population.”¹ To others, such as John Randolph of Roanoke, a Virginia representative and slaveholder, the new society offered an organized way to thwart the social advances of the “promoters of mischief” who threatened peace within slave society by enlarging the threat of slave revolt and extending laziness among field hands.² To others, the colonization of free blacks meant the salvation of a “debased” American population. According to Elias Caldwell, a devout Presbyterian and Supreme

¹ Henry Clay, *Speech of the Hon. Henry Clay before the American Colonization Society in the Hall of the House of Representatives*, quoted in Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 194.

² See P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 29.

Court clerk, colonization toppled the “monument of reproach to those sacred principles of civil liberty” embodied by slavery and racial inequality.³

Despite the diversity of feelings within the new society’s membership, the group settled upon a single goal, one ambiguous enough to support nearly any position, yet ambitious enough attract new followers. To the national public, the new American Colonization Society (ACS) embraced “a peculiar moral fitness” in aiming to restore emancipated slaves to Africa. These “innocents,” the ACS declared, will be said to have profited from “the blessings of our arts, our civilization and our religion,” finally “extinguish[ing] a great portion of that moral debt” owed to a people who did not voluntarily come to the western hemisphere. But as liberal and generous as such language sounded, the ACS was as insistent that its benevolent mission was in fact designed to “rid our country of a useless and pernicious . . . portion of its population.”⁴

By 1825, less than a decade after its founding, the American Colonization Society had received federal funding of over \$264,000. It had purchased a 5,200 square mile strip of land on the west coast of Africa worth an estimated one million dollars, and established a settlement of over 380 settlers, called Monrovia, named in honor of President James Monroe.⁵ Over the next few decades, Monrovia came to embody the ACS founders’ quixotic dreams. It consisted of antebellum-style houses constructed of

³ See *ibid.*; *National Intelligencer*, December 31, 1816.

⁴ “The Meeting on the Colonization of Free Blacks,” *Albany Register*, January 10, 1817.

⁵ See Katherine Harris, *African and American Values: Liberia and West Africa* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 33; Sir Harry Johnston, *Liberia*, vol. I (1906, reprint; New York: Negro University Press, 1969), 128-129; and Tom W. Shick, “A Quantitative Analysis of Liberian Colonization from 1820 to 1843 with Special Reference to Mortality,” *The Journal of African History*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1971), 47. Shick’s article provides detailed information on the number of settlers who emigrated to Liberia between the years 1820 and 1843, as well as mortality statistics, causes of death, gender ratios, and the points of origin for all 4,485 emigrants during that period.

imported wood, and native stucco, mud, and reeds. The town featured wide, grand, weed-infested avenues lined with palm trees and grand “mansions,” and a society of English-speaking black men, women, and children clad in frock coats, topers, and polished shoes. Monrovia was, in essence, a tiny black American town.⁶

The settlers of Monrovia saw themselves much as the ACS members saw themselves – as benevolent missionaries of the great west, emissaries of an advanced culture, teachers, leaders, and brothers to a benighted, heathen population.⁷ In other words, the ACS successfully created a confused intermediate class of human being. The settlers were legally free from bondage, “pioneers” of a new independent black colony, though they remained under the authority of an autocratic white colonial governor, and maintained the same social and political values as the largely southern ACS leadership.

But the transference of American values and ideas to the African continent was not as clear-cut as the plantation homes and western clothing of the black settlers made it seem. By 1843, the year the ACS and the United States government conducted an official census, and more than 20 years after the founding of Monrovia, the Liberia colony was home to some 2,390 settlers, trading over \$157,000 a year in ivory, camwood, an African shrub used for dying red cloth, and palm oil, for cooking, to numerous European nations. But settler society stretched no further than 40 miles inland, encompassing only those

⁶ There are many vivid descriptions of Monrovia in the mid-nineteenth century. One of the more detailed is Tom W. Shick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), as well as Sir Harry Johnston’s masterful two-volume study of Liberian culture and society, *Liberia*, 2 vols. (1906, reprint; New York: Negro University Press, 1969).

⁷ See R. T., “Communications,” *African Repository*, vol. 1, no. 1 (March 1825), 5-7; and “Mission to West Africa,” *African Repository*, vol. 13, no. 7 (July 1837), 239-240.

areas with direct access to the ocean or a major river.⁸ The borders of the Liberian colony established by the ACS and the United States government, however, stretched far beyond the physical area called the “Constitutional Zone” inhabited by the former Americans. Liberia proper bordered the British colony of Sierra Leone, to the north, and the French colonies of Guinée and Côte D’Ivoire, to the east and south respectively. In total, the area claimed by the American Colonization Society, and unofficially, the United States government, amounted to over 43,000 square miles.⁹

The Liberia colonial government, at this time called the “Colonial Council,” claimed authority over a population of native Africans who had never seen the American settlers, nor understood the southern-based social and political practices so active in settler society at the time.¹⁰ These natives were very much the target population of the still-active ACS. They were the “barbarous tribes” which the first Liberian president, and

⁸ U.S. Congress. Senate. *Roll of Emigrants That Have Been Sent to the Colony of Liberia, West Africa, by the American Colonization Society and its Auxiliaries, to September 1843 &c.* 28th Cong., 2nd sess., 1844. S. Doc. 150 (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.); Also see Charles Henry Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, 2 vols. (New York: Central Book Company, Inc., 1947), 767-770; and Yekutiel Gershoni, *Black Colonialism: The Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1985), 30-31.

⁹ See Huberich, *Liberia*, vol. I, 83-89; and Johnston, *Liberia*, vol. I, 497.

¹⁰ Estimates of the native population in colonial Liberia vary drastically. Some scholars estimate as many as one million souls, while others estimate as low as 100,000. Unfortunately, neither extreme is more convincing than the other, as both seem either far too high, or far too low. The reality is that no information exists to give scholars a reasonable basis for estimation, but it is likely that between 250,000 and 500,000 natives lived within the unofficial claimed territory of the Liberian colony. In any case, the number of native Africans in the area was far more than settler society. For a more in-depth discussion of the native “Liberian” cultures, see Chapter II of this work.

first black ACS-appointed colonial governor of Liberia, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, wrote about in 1849 as those deserving the “blessings of civilization and Christianity.”¹¹

There were two parties at work in Liberia during the mid-nineteenth century: One that looked to the legacy of the United States in order to merge “civilization” and “Christianity” into a single standard principle of enlightenment, and another that viewed Christianity alone, both in practice and thought, as the defining factor in the success of American civilization in Africa. By the mid-1840s, Liberia was home to a relatively large contingent of white and black American Christian missionaries, many of whom viewed Liberia, and Africa, much as the ACS and the settlers did.¹² Most early white missionaries regarded service in the Liberia field as a death trap, or “the white man’s grave.” The ministers sent to Liberia by the largest national organizations, such as the Methodist, Protestant Episcopal, and Baptist churches, were of two basic kinds: young, impressionable, and easily controlled by the national board; or, older, established, and ideologically devoted to church leadership.¹³ In both cases, the early American ministers in Liberia lacked an ideological and heuristic autonomy – the freedom to learn from individual experience, and adapt their practices and ideas to the new, vastly different African frontier. They were simply the conduits through which ACS-affiliated national churches could reach the Liberian people, and promote American civilization and

¹¹ J. J. Roberts to William McLain, May 18, 1849. *Records of the American Colonization Society* (hereafter RACS), box 154, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹² *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, vol. 13, no. 7 (July 1847), 215. The *Repository* claims that 479 minister scholars inhabited the nine major settlements in Liberia. This number is a total of all denominations and does not differentiate between white, black, settler, American, ordained, lay, etc. The number of ordained missionaries was much smaller than 479. Though no exact numbers exist, the number of ordained ministers at each station most likely did not exceed four or five under normal conditions.

¹³ Eunjin Park, *“White” Americans in “Black” Africa: Black and White American Methodist Missionaries in Liberia, 1820-1875* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 32-33.

Christianity to the masses. As a result, the earliest missionaries worked alongside the settlers and ACS officials to establish a western-style regime.¹⁴

The first missionaries and settlers appear not to have distinguished the concepts of “civilization” and “Christianity.” One could not maintain a civilized life, they believed, without embracing Christianity and adopting the western appearance of the “civilized” Americo-Liberian settlers. As Sir Harry Johnston, an early anthropologist and frequent visitor to Liberia, wrote in 1906: “The Americo-Liberian still worships clothes as an outward and visible manifestation of Christianity and the best civilisation; that is to say, the European clothes of the nineteenth-century. He shares with our fathers the religion of the tall hat and frock coat.”¹⁵ In order to convert the heathen natives into “civilized” Christians, early missionaries and settlers established mission schools in the most distant Americo-Liberian settlements. At the schools, white American missionaries taught small groups of native children the English language and gave them western names such as Washington, Jefferson, and Liberty. Students also wore western-style clothing and attended church each Sunday.¹⁶

¹⁴ A prime example of this side-by-side relationship between ministers and settlers is the ministry and presidency of James Spriggs Payne, a Virginia-born Methodist minister, who, as an octoroon, worked actively in both the early Methodist ministry and the settler political organization, winning the Liberian presidency twice (1868 and 1876). Payne, though he lived until 1882 (he emigrated to Liberia in 1829 on the brig *Harriet*), exemplified the dual character of early American ministers in Liberia, constantly promoting the merger of settler social norms and Christian moral and religious teachings. See *ibid.*, 125-126, 128; and Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black & White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 169.

¹⁵ Johnston, *Liberia*, vol. I, 354.

¹⁶ Park, “White” Americans, 97-98. Also see Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 63-66 for a good, but short, description of early missionary activities mainly in Monrovia.

Rarely did settlers or early missionaries venture into the hinterland. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, the settlers required natives to travel to urban centers to receive instruction in western norms and values, demanding what settlers and early missionaries saw as a form of agency, or self-help on the part of the natives.¹⁷ Accordingly, few natives were willing to adopt the newcomers' values, or travel the distances required to attend missionary schools. In most cases, parents pulled their children out of missionary schools before the designated four-year program was complete, or the white teacher died of malaria before he could complete instruction. As a result, in the 1840s and 1850s, the Liberian mission enterprise—encompassing all active denominations—markedly changed. Previous scholars have largely ignored this phenomenon.

During this period, voluntarism emerged in the active Liberian missions. Black pastors and missionaries sought independence, and a more meaningful autonomy from the American national churches. Total indoctrination fell to the wayside as mass conversion and partial indoctrination became the primary goals of the Liberian missionary conventions. Black missionaries, on the whole, started to reject the external, and theoretical, accoutrements of settler Christian culture and practice. They abandoned the arbitrary values settler society placed on western clothing, western names, and American cultural and social imitation, as well as the apparent connection between these western images and Christian “enlightenment.” They focused on the internalization of simple Christian ideas, speaking to the natives of Adam and Eve, a single benevolent,

¹⁷ This idea is prevalent throughout the *African Repository*, mainly between 1837-1847. Many letters and accounts from both missionaries and settlers discuss the certainty of natives volunteering for “Christian enlightenment.” See, for example, “Prospects of Western and Central Africa,” *African Repository*, vol. 13, no. 7 (July 1837), 252-254; and Joseph Mechlin to Ralph R. Gurley, May 15, 1833, box 153, *RACS*.

omnipotent God, and Jesus as humanity's savior and God's only son. To the black Liberian missionaries of the mid nineteenth century, the natives needed only to understand the simple fundamentals of Christianity to escape the stranglehold of "barbarism" and "paganism" that kept the "Dark Continent" dark.

As a result, black itinerant missionaries took over, traveling more routinely through the hinterlands, speaking to entire villages about the nature of Christian morality and worship.¹⁸ Meanwhile, settler society remained steadfastly American, continuing to model its way of life on the U.S. South.¹⁹ In less than a decade, two distinct Liberian societies emerged: that of the Americo-Liberians, those black Americans who sought "freedom" and "liberty" on the west coast of Africa by way of the American Colonization Society; and that of the black Christian missionaries (both Americans and native Liberians alike), who volunteered to spread "salvation" throughout Dark Africa. The two societies found providential means by which to justify their actions. But if both promoted American values, it is also true that their different systems of promoting, or instilling, those values produced a century-long ideological conflict that erupted into civil war in 1980 and again 1999.

¹⁸ An excellent account of itinerant missionary work can be found in John Leighton Wilson (attrib.), "Teddah's Visit to Cape Palmas – Karvah's Country," *African Repository*, vol. 13, no. 7 (July 1837), 240-243.

¹⁹ During the mid-1840s, in order to save money and men, the white-led national organizations of the Methodist, Baptist, Protestant Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches, all within a few years of each other, voted to appoint black missionary bishops to the Liberian field. As a result, the white Americans largely washed their hands of the Liberian field, and allowed the blacks relative autonomy. Although this autonomy was due mainly to the distance between the United States and Liberia, it nonetheless allowed for total reform within the system of values and interpretation of western thought active within the Liberian missionary societies. For more on this shift, see Chapter III of this work.

On the one hand, the settlers, as Harry Johnston explained, worshiped the external appearance of a Christian mind and “civilized” western body. They revered those citizens who spoke the best American English, lived in the grandest wood-framed houses, wore the best American clothes, and ate the most expensive imported foods. They required total indoctrination into the “religion of the tall hat and frock coat” in order to maintain a stable, seemingly civilized, American society. They oppressed the heathen in action, yet spoke of him as a lost child, or a victim of an ignorant continent and pagan beliefs. For example, Daniel Bashiel Warner, a future president of Liberia born in Baltimore, Maryland, wrote in 1850 that he “look[ed] forward to the day when Civilization and Christianity” conquered the African continent, so that the “Sons and Daughters of this now benighted land, ‘shall own Jesus Christ as Lord to the honor and glory of God.’”²⁰ But this “ownership” of “Jesus Christ as Lord” was but one half of true Americo-Liberian “civility.” Membership in the “religion of the top hat and frock” – or, as it were, acceptance into the citizenship of the civilized “Black Republic” – required both acceptance of the Christian dogma, and maintenance of a western lifestyle, completed through the material, linguistic, and ideological imitation of American high society.²¹ Although the Americo-Liberians believed that the natives *deserved* to learn and adopt western social, religious, and cultural practices, as Warner expressed, citizenship, voting rights, and social equality were by no means guaranteed to those natives who did

²⁰ Daniel Bashiel Warner, December 31, 1850, quoted in Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 60.

²¹ See Johnston, *Liberia*, 354-358; Joseph Jenkins Roberts, “First Inaugural Address,” in *The Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of Liberia: From Joseph Jenkins Roberts to William Richard Tolbert, Jr. 1848 to 1976*, edited by Joseph Saye Guannu (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1980), 1-9; and James Fairhead, Tim Geysbeek, Svend E. Holsoe, and Melissa Leach, eds., *African-American Exploration in West Africa: Four Nineteenth-Century Diaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 27-29.

assimilate into settler society. In fact, it was not until May 1951, under President William V.S. Tubman, a descendent of South Carolina emigrants, that indigenous Liberians gained the right to vote and become citizens of the republic.²²

The missionaries, on the other hand, promoted the idea of a “civilized,” Christian mind. To them, the “religion of the top hat and frock coat” was too much. It developed an exaggerated sense of “civility” both in Americo-Liberian society and the few native societies it touched. Thus, they worked to inject the native population with an understanding of a single, benevolent God, and solemn prayer and spiritual immortality through translated scripture, and pidgin sermons. They discussed the basic fundamentals of heaven and hell, Christian virtue, and Jesus’s ascension into heaven using simple terms like “good” and “bad,” “happy” and “sad.” They tried to reverse the “pagan, false, and uncivilized” practices of witchcraft, ancestor worship, sacrifice, and the donning of pagan amulets known as “gree-grees,” believed to keep the “devils” away. The missionaries’ motivation was not political, or even social. Rather, it was seen as the fulfillment of a sort of Americo-Christian manifest destiny. It was their duty, their providentially decreed mission to save the vast continent of “benighted Africa.” Rather than fundamentally, and outwardly, American, as the Americo-Liberians viewed their own society, the missionaries’ message was spiritually American, the product of a relatively small, but highly influential group of white and black Americans inspired by the second Great

²² See, among many others, John N. Lewis to William McLain, January 7, 1848, *RACS*; Roberts, “First Inaugural Address,” 1-9; Abbe Gregoire, “Moral Qualities of the Africans,” *African Repository*, vol. 1, no. 4 (June 1825) pg. 111-115; Amos J. Beyan, “The American Colonization Society and the Socio-Religious Characterization of Liberia: A Historical Survey 1822-1900,” *Liberian Studies Journal*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1984-1985) 1-12; and J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 156-157.

Awakening of the 1830s and 1840s and its providential calling to spread American, and African-American, values through the light of Christian thought.²³ In short, the missionaries rejected the material aspects of civilization that the Americo-Liberians *required* for social, cultural, and religious acceptance.

The missionaries viewed Christianity as the path by which one may attain a new understanding of the human race, a new view of humanity as a single population ruled by a single God. Emphasis on outward appearance, and civility expressed through expensive clothing and American English, gave way to a latitudinal vision of a unified Gospel. To men like Edward Wilmot Blyden, one of the foremost Liberian scholars of the nineteenth century and an ordained Presbyterian minister, the Word of God was not something expressed through rigid doctrine and incontrovertible Truth, nor was it to be dominated and disseminated by a single race of humans. Rather, the “Christian dogma,” as Blyden called the Gospel, must be adapted and modified to meet the conceptual abilities and traditional practices of the target audience. “Let the boys and girls in the schools eat the simple, wholesome food of their country,” he wrote in 1872. “Let them wear the clothing of their country made in the best style, clean and neat, that in the process of their training they may not receive the impression that the external accidents of European civilization

²³ See J. R. Oldfield, “The Protestant Episcopal Church, Black Nationalists, and Expansion of the West African Missionary Field, 1851-1871,” *Church History*, vol. 57, no. 1 (March, 1988), 31-45; Park, “White” Americans, 103-108, 178-182; Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 71-73; and John Leighton Wilson (attrib.), “Journal of Mr. Wilson on an Expedition from Cape Palmas to Bolobo, Performed in the Latter Part of October, 1836,” *African Repository*, vol. 13, no. 7 (July 1837) pg. 243-246. From this emerged the ideas of pan-Negroism and Black Nationalism, both of which focused on a separatist belief of black equality and capability. For more on these two concepts, see Chapters II and III of this work.

are the essentials of Christianity.”²⁴ The Americo-Liberians, Blyden and other missionaries believed, lacked the civic virtue promoted in the literature of their beloved America. They acted, Blyden claimed, “without the remotest reference to the public good,” ignoring the “spirit of patriotism, self-sacrifice, and independence... which Negroes need if their race [is] to advance.”²⁵

Blyden’s ideas were central to the missionary enterprise at work in Liberia between the 1840s and the 1870s. The missionaries adopted a “pan-Negroism,” or Black Nationalism, that saw Christian morality and racial virtue as intertwined. They believed that the experience of slavery, though ideologically immoral, instilled within western blacks a newfound understanding of God’s divine plan for the Negro race. To the missionaries, western society and culture stained the “liberty” upon which the Liberian experiment, they believed, was founded, and served only as a “distraction” to advancement of black Christian unity. They gained respect for Africa, as well as the African, yet promoted the Christian ideals that they believed God, through slavery, allowed to develop in the United States.²⁶

Of the many histories written about the American colonization movement and the creation of the Liberian state, few have focused on the transference of American values to all parts of Liberian society, settler and indigenous. Tom W. Shick’s *Behold the Promised*

²⁴ Edward Wilmot Blyden quoted in D. Elwood Dunn, *A History of the Episcopal Church in Liberia, 1821-1980* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 112.

²⁵ Lynch, *Blyden*, 142; also see *ibid.*, 124. Scholars refer to Blyden’s theories, though they are not original to him, as “Pan-Negroism.” This idea focused on the capability and unity of the Negro race. In extreme cases, like the form promoted by Marcus Garvey in the 1920s, Pan-Negroism evolved into a racial separatist movement, promoting hatred of the Indo-European culture and society. For more on Pan-Negroism, see Chapter III of this work.

²⁶ See op. cit. 22. Also, Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 108-109; Park, “White” *Americans*, 66-70; and Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad*, 232-234, 236.

Land is the best work on the society and culture of the American settlers. Shick provides a rare look at the inner workings of the Americo-Liberian settlement as it grew from a small settler town on Cape Mesurado to an independent republic of over 1.5 million citizens. But like so many others, Shick fails to provide much detail concerning settlements outside of urban Monrovia, Buchanan, and other settler villages and cities. To Shick, as well as most others who have researched the Liberian experience, western missionary work was a miserable failure and had little lasting effect on Liberian society.²⁷

Yekutiel Gershoni's *Black Colonialism: The Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland* is a short, rough survey of Americo-Liberian expansion into the Liberian hinterland. The author focuses on Americo-Liberian interaction with three large native Liberian ethnic groups (the Vai, Grebo/Glebo, and Gola) during the late nineteenth century, ignoring entirely the American religious organizations active in these areas, and the effects of western religious missionaries on other, equally populous tribal and ethnic groups. Though his book provides maps, charts, and analysis of governmental expansion, and valuable information on Liberia's more recent economic debts to the United States, Gershoni pays little attention to Liberia's cultural or religious development and the growing rift between settlers and the interior tribal groups.²⁸ Most importantly, Gershoni describes Americo-Liberian expansion as a form of European colonialism, like that which dominated settler society in Sierra Leone, the Belgian Congo, and Côte D'Ivoire. But

²⁷ Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 63-65.

²⁸ Gershoni does discuss the failure of Americo-Liberian expansion into the northeastern portion of the country inhabited primarily by the Vai people due to the influence of "Mohammedanism," or Islam, in the area. He does not, however, fully explore the different strains of indigenous Christianity active in other parts of the country, and the potential religious explanation behind the failure of Americo-Liberian influence among many "Christianized" native groups.

Gershoni, like most other scholars, views the collapse of the white missionary leadership and their dedication to total conversion as a total failure rather than the catalyst for a successful, black-led departure from a western-dominated approach.

Liberia's religious history commands little attention from modern scholars. Most are altogether brief in their survey of the role of American ideologies on white and black missionaries in the Liberian field. The best of these works are Eunjin Park's *"White" Americans in "Black" Africa*, a detailed history of the Methodist missionary convention of Liberia, and D. Elwood Dunn's *A History of the Episcopal Church in Liberia*, a lengthy treatment of all Episcopal denominations in Liberia between 1821 and 1980. Though invaluable to any scholar exploring the history of American churches in Liberia, neither work examines the relationship between the western churches and the Americo-Liberian settler leadership.

The present study seeks to fill a gap in the historiography of Liberian-American cultural relations. The evolution, or, some would say, stagnation, of Liberian settler society, and its unyielding reverence for the antebellum American South is but a single example of the transference of American social values and cultural practices to the Liberian colony and the African continent. Although Americo-Liberian settler society provides a fascinating illustration of ideological retrogression and irony in its race-based social structure and rigid cultural traditions, American ideological patterns had influences far beyond the reclusive settlements of Liberia's southern-themed towns and villages. Seen in a transatlantic context, the reception and subsequent split of American influence between settler society and the missionary enterprise in Liberia can shed new light on American race relations, political theory, and cultural expansion abroad, as well as the

complex, and at times tragic, fusion of American-based racial nationalism, republican morality, and colonial power structures that may shed light on the American origins of Liberia's recent social upheaval.

Chapter I:
“A Debt of Patriotism and Humanity”

The idea of black removal and African colonization in the nineteenth century was nothing new. As early as the late seventeenth century, the white fear of a growing free black population led colonial legislatures to enact protective deportation laws for emancipated slaves and black criminals. In 1691, the Virginia legislature required the deportation of any slave emancipated within the borders of the state. In 1705, Pennsylvania passed a similar law requiring deportation of all black criminals, free and slave. By 1707, both Virginia and South Carolina had adopted similar legislation.²⁹ But neither the deportation of emancipated slaves, nor the expulsion of black criminals made much progress in quelling white anxieties. Over the next century, the white population’s fears of free blacks, and the mixture of African blood and culture with that of the Indo-Europeans, grew more intense, and both blacks and whites in the Northeast and border South searched for a viable solution.

The first African colonization scheme emerged in Quaker-dominated Germantown, Pennsylvania, in 1713. Under the leadership of George Keith, the Germantown Quakers published letters and circulars promoting African colonization as a Christian duty and a moral and benevolent cause to end oppression and slavery. “We judge it necessary,” Keith wrote in 1693, “that all faithful Friends should discover themselves as true Christians, by having...Love, Mercy, Goodness and Compassion

²⁹ See Harris, *African and American Values*, xiv; and Henry Noble Sherwood, “Early Negro Deportation Projects,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 2, 4 (March 1916): 484-485.

towards all in misery...and bondage.”³⁰ Although the Quakers’ plans for colonization collapsed with Keith’s death in 1716, their message presaged a number of movements later in the century.

By the late eighteenth century, pockets of colonizationist thought had emerged throughout the Northeast and border South. Slaves, free blacks, and whites alike began to recognize, and take action against, the growing threats of interracial violence and inequality. In 1773, a group of Massachusetts slaves unsuccessfully petitioned the colonial legislature for the right to immigrate back to Africa after a few years of indentured labor. Seven years later, free blacks in Rhode Island, under the leadership of Solomon Nubia and Bristol Yamma, two freed slaves, founded a volunteer society to advertise and promote African emigration and settlement.³¹

The most important and successful of the early colonization activists, though, was Paul Cuffe, a half American Indian, half African Quaker merchant of independent wealth, from Massachusetts. For nearly three decades, between 1787 and 1815, Cuffe investigated and tested the feasibility of a successful black emigration and colonization scheme. He traveled frequently between the United States and England, aboard coasting vessels, traders, whalers, and fishing ships. He became fascinated with the then-independent colony of Sierra Leone, founded in 1787 by a group of English philanthropists for freed American slaves and English blacks left over from the American Revolution. According to historian P. J. Staudenraus, Cuffe was “shrewd, brawny, and accustomed to hard work,” and by the early 1800s, had fallen upon the ownership of a

³⁰ George Keith, “An Exhortation & Caution to Friends Concerning buy or Keeping of Negroes,” in David Turley, ed., *American Religion: Literary Sources and Documents*, Vol. I (New York: Routledge, 1998), 273.

³¹ Harris, *African and American Values*, xv.

small fleet of ocean vessels and a prosperous trade network.³² With this newfound success, Cuffe began to see Africa, especially Sierra Leone, as a potential new commercial venture.

But Cuffe's connection to Africa stretched further than just commerce and trade. He saw Africa in much the same way as George Keith and his fellow Germantown Quakers did in 1713. To him, Africa was a mystery, an ancient land of pagan tribes and natural resources starving for the light Christian thought and the benefits of western civilization. He believed, as many other Quakers and thinkers of the time did, that not only would the black populations of the United States and Canada benefit from a new life of freedom and equality in Africa, but they could also establish new trading posts along the Atlantic seaboard, introduce new products to the Atlantic trade, and install a firm, permanent base for Christianity to expand into the benighted continent. Cuffe thought that civilization, happiness, and freedom all required a Christian foundation, a love for others, and a dedication to the betterment of man. This, he believed, had been lost in the United States and parts of Europe. Previewing the widely read ruminations of Edward Blyden 70 years later, Cuffe saw the white population's domination of American society as contradicting its own pronouncements of republican virtue and the equality of man. He, like so many after him, believed that American blacks could never possibly achieve equal status or even respect in white America, but felt oddly appreciative for the introduction of Christianity to slaves and freedman alike.³³ "Without hope of a

³² Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 9.

³³ See *ibid.*, 9-10; Claude A. Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 22-24; Lamont D. Thomas, *Rise to Be a People: A Biography of Paul Cuffe* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 12-30.

providential hand we must ever been miserabal [*sic.*],” he wrote to James Pemberton in 1809, expressing the blight of America’s black population, and his ideological connection between happiness, freedom, and religion.³⁴

In 1811, Cuffe traveled to Sierra Leone for the first time. There he took notes on the inhabitants, both native and settler, examined the port, and judged the practicability of transporting American blacks to the then-Crown colony. After nearly a year traveling and exploring Sierra Leone and its coast, Cuffe returned to the United States, describing the people of Sierra Leone as “good sober steady characters” of “prosperous” means and a voluntary spirit.³⁵ Upon his arrival back in the United States, he immediately founded his own version of Britain’s African Institution, the philanthropic organization and anti-slavery society that controlled many of Britain’s African colonial holdings, called the Friendly Society of Sierra Leone, a group of benevolent Quakers dedicated to the education and training of American blacks for their providential mission to the African continent. As historian Claude A. Clegg III explains: “[Cuffe] believed that blacks like himself, tutored in the English language, Christian theology, Euro-American notions of social etiquette, economic organization, and political thought, had much to offer Africa and Africans, whose development had supposedly been stymied by heathenism, illiteracy, and the depredations of the slave trade.”³⁶ With some financial support from his own Westport (Massachusetts) Friends, and ideological support from Friends throughout the entire state, Cuffe prepared to petition Congress for enough money to ensure his commercial and moral success.

³⁴ Henry Noble Sherwood, “The Redemption of Africa,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 8, 2 (April 1923): 167.

³⁵ Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 9.

³⁶ Clegg, *Price of Liberty*, 24.

Cuffe's plans were cut short by the War of 1812, and the increasing danger of transatlantic travel, especially for people of color. His plans to transport "the greater part out of Boston," as he wrote to Samuel J. Mills, a young white colonizationist of growing influence, collapsed with the British invasion of North America, and the burning of Washington, D.C. Though Cuffe tried to fund the voyage personally and with the small financial support of the Westport Friends, many volunteers, fearing British Atlantic patrols, impressment, and the uncertainty of acceptance in Sierra Leone, rescinded their applications, and refused to travel. Desperate, and fearful of almost certain failure, Cuffe turned to war-torn Congress with a memorial, a plea, for government support.³⁷

In his memorial, read to the House of Representatives on January 7, 1814, by Congressman Laban Wheaton of Massachusetts, Cuffe focused on preventing "the practice of his brethren of the Africa race in selling their fellow creatures into a state of slavery." He claimed that this practice, though distant from and illegal in the United States, was "'inconsistent' with [the] divine principle of equality and justice" promoted in the New World, and that his "faithful" scheme of transportation and colonization would, with all certainty, "promote the improvement and civilization of the Africans." In closing, Cuffe asked for Congressional approval to "transport such persons and families...also some articles of provision, together with implements of husbandry, and machinery for some mechanic arts, and to bring back such of the native productions of that country as may be wanted."³⁸

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-25; and Henry Noble Sherwood, "Pathfinder in Negro Colonization," *The Journal of Negro History*, 8, 2 (April 1923): 194-196.

³⁸ Sherwood, "Pathfinder of Negro Colonization," 195; *National Intelligencer*, January 11, 1814; and *Long Island Star*, January 26, 1814.

In essence, Cuffe fruitlessly tried to play on the emotions and commercial wants of a group of career politicians, white slaveholders, and panicked Americans in the middle of a second war of independence. Cuffe's timing was off from the very beginning. The slavery question, though not as divisive as it would be a few decades later, had begun to split the nation in two. According to historian Eric Burin: "Natural rights rhetoric, with its exaltation of human freedom, placed slavery's proponents on the defensive, as did the egalitarianism of evangelical Christianity."³⁹ By the War of 1812, most northern states had abolished slavery, or passed gradual emancipation laws. The Vermont legislature abolished slavery in 1777, followed closely by Massachusetts (1780), Pennsylvania (1780), Connecticut (1784), Rhode Island (1784), and New Hampshire (1807). Meanwhile, in addition to natural rights rhetoric and the growth of evangelism, the purchase of the Louisiana territory in 1803, the admission of the Territory of Orleans (Louisiana) as a slave state in 1812, and the South's increasing economic and social dependence on slavery, increased the sensitivity of slaveholders, and further polarized the American public as a whole.⁴⁰

Furthermore, during the early 1800s, following the Louisiana Purchase, colonizationists and early racial separatists alike, started to view the West as the most suitable location for any conceivable black colony. Although, as Eric Burin explains, "these westward-looking colonization proposals went nowhere," Africa had essentially

³⁹ Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 7.

⁴⁰ Many historians have discussed the causes of antebellum American polarization. See *ibid.*, 11-13; and William J. Cooper, Jr., *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), 101-104, among many others. The latter citation contains one of the most detailed, condensed treatments of Southern politics and ideology in existence, and offers a highly accessible history of the causes of America's civil war.

fallen from the minds of America's growing colonizationist population. Paul Cuffe and his small band of Westport Friends thus maintained little influence outside of Massachusetts, and almost nothing across the Atlantic. Cuffe's scheme was simply preposterous, regardless of funding, moral value, or actual practicability, to the Congress of 1814, who, if anywhere, looked west rather than east for a possible destination of removal.⁴¹

By the outbreak of war in 1812, the American population, and thus Congress, was becoming more and more polarized between anti-slavery advocates, or emancipationists, mainly in the North, and pro-slavery southerners and wealthy farmers. But those representatives and senators left in the middle, those seemingly undecided Republicans upon whom Cuffe unleashed his most emotional, moralistic pleas, fell decisively silent on the issue of black removal, and, in the end, voted against it.⁴² In order to understand the possible reasons behind the Republican silence and subsequent rejection of Cuffe's petition, we must look briefly at its leader, and perhaps the most interesting and well-known figure in the early history of the African colonization movement, Thomas Jefferson.

In many ways, the indecisiveness of congressional Republicans in 1814 over black removal mirrors that of Jefferson some two decades before. Although Jefferson proposed black colonization and removal as early as 1787, in Query XIV of his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, his opinions never reached Capitol Hill. He seemed torn between the virtue of emancipation and the "boisterous passions" of southern men dedicated to the

⁴¹ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 9-12; and Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 10-11.

⁴² Sherwood, "Pathfinder of Negro Colonization," 197.

ease and profit of slaveholding.⁴³ “I advance it therefore as a suspicion only,” he wrote in Query XIV, “that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to whites in the endowments both of body and mind.” “This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty,” he continued, “is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people.”⁴⁴ To Jefferson, echoing Virginia’s 1691 deportation law, blacks and whites, based upon their history together, could not live safely in a single society. In fact, he believed that emancipation without removal would result in “convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race.” The only option, it seemed, left open to Jefferson was “to declare them a free and independent people, and extend to them our alliance and protection, till they shall have acquired strength.”⁴⁵

Before Paul Cuffe visited western Africa, and organized his ill-fated Friendly Society of Sierra Leone, Jefferson wrote of a similar proposal for black education, preparation, and removal to a land bereft of western civility and thought. “[Emancipated

⁴³ See Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 162. Also see Andrew Burstein, “Jefferson’s Rationalizations,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 57, 1 (Jan. 2000): 187-188, for an interesting discussion of Jefferson’s philosophical ideas regarding a “life of reason,” and regulated intellect. The denial of virtue and personal freedom arises when, according to Burstein, the intellect fails to regulate these “boisterous,” or “unruly,” passions.

⁴⁴ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, edited by Frank Shuffelton (1787 reprint; New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 150-151.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 145; Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 2. Also see, Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire*, 147-189. Onuf provides one of the best treatments of Jefferson’s thoughts concerning colonization and emancipation, focusing primarily on Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, and his letters from Monticello later in life. Though Jefferson was not a major figure in the history of the Liberian colony, or the American Colonization Society (Jefferson died in 1824 just two years after the founding of Monrovia), Onuf’s treatment, though relatively short, remains the most complete account of Jefferson, colonization, and the early ACS.

slaves] should continue with their parents to a certain age,” he wrote in *Notes*, “then be brought, at the public expence, to tillage, arts or sciences, according to their own geniusses,” and then “be colonized to such a place as the circumstances of the time should render most proper.”⁴⁶ By 1811, at least in Jefferson’s eyes, that place was Africa. In a letter to John Lynch, a Quaker from Virginia, dated January 21, 1811, Jefferson adopted the same arguments and beliefs that drove Liberian settler society almost 30 years later. “Going from a country possessing all the useful arts,” he wrote, “[the slaves] might be the means of transplanting them among the inhabitants of Africa, and would thus carry back to the country of their origin, the seeds of civilization which might render their sojournment and sufferings here a blessing in the end to that country.”⁴⁷

Jefferson, though he often wrote of colonization as requisite for morality and peace in America, never promoted, or even considered, any such action while president of the United States (1801-1809). Even when Governor James Monroe of Virginia asked President Jefferson to support a bill calling for the creation of a free black colony west of the Mississippi River in 1802, Jefferson made little indication of support, and watched quietly as the House of Representatives quickly voted it down.⁴⁸ As historian Marie Tyler-McGraw writes, Jefferson’s name was more active in the colonization movement than his actual person. According to Tyler-McGraw, Jefferson’s many references to colonization, both before and after his presidency, “made him the most selectively

⁴⁶ Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 2; Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 264.

⁴⁷ Thomas Jefferson to John Lynch, January 21, 1811, in Peterson, *Jefferson: Writings*, 1240.

⁴⁸ Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 4.

quotable founding father used by African colonizationists in Virginia, but in his lifetime he resisted their embrace.”⁴⁹

To Jefferson, it seems, colonization was not an immediate, voluntary, or restrictive plan, as most colonization activists, including Cuffe, proposed. It required time, preparation, and education, gradual emancipation followed by forced emigration, and a long-term financial plan. Compromise was not an option, as anything else would lead, inevitably, to disaster, or at least intensify the threat of America’s race problem. “After all,” historian Peter S. Onuf explains, “slavery itself constituted a state of war, and only by one final, massively coercive act – the forced removal of the captive [black] nation – could a lasting peace be secured.”⁵⁰ This offers a possible explanation as to why congressional Republicans voted against Paul Cuffe’s petition in 1814, and why Jefferson, even though he argued for the colonization cause up until his death in 1824, never fully supported any act of legislation, or any colonization society organized during his lifetime. Nothing seemed to meet Jefferson’s, and his followers’, standards.

Although the congressional Republicans put an end to Cuffe’s dreams of federal funding, the small success he eventually achieved inspired the creation of a successful colonization society just a few years later that remained active throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. With the waning support of his Westport colleagues, and the moderate personal fortune he amassed through Atlantic trade, Cuffe, in November 1815, organized the first American emigration voyage. Loading his own barque, the *Traveller*, with thirty-eight American and Nova Scotian black laborers, women, and children, along with “iron to build a sawmill, a wagon, grindstones, nails,

⁴⁹ Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic*, 14.

⁵⁰ Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire*, 175.

glass, and a plow,” Cuffe, and his pioneering crew, set sail for Freetown, Sierra Leone, in December 1815.⁵¹ But despite the relative success of dropping anchor in Freetown harbor on February 3, 1816, and the cordial reception of the new settlers from the white British colonial leaders in Freetown, Cuffe viewed the venture as a general failure. Although the British government issued land grants to the settlers in Fourah Bay on the outskirts of Freetown, and accepted them into colonial society, the reality of the situation struck Cuffe for the first time. The Treaty of Ghent⁵² banned the trading posts he envisioned would bring African products to the United States, and in return, build the wealth of Africa’s Atlantic traders; high anchorage fees and colonial duties on native exports discouraged the entrepreneurial spirit Cuffe so sincerely advocated; and, perhaps most importantly, Freetown, as a Crown colony under white British leadership, lacked the racial freedom and equality that Cuffe, and his group of settlers, hoped to encounter in Africa.⁵³

⁵¹ See Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad*, 94-95; and Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 24. Interestingly, there is little agreement over the exact date, or even the exact month, of Cuffe’s final, and most successful, voyage. Lamin Sanneh, in *Abolitionists Abroad*, claims that Cuffe and his group set sail in November 1815, while Claude A. Clegg III, in *The Price of Liberty*, cites December 1815 as the general date of departure. Most other accounts refer to the date as either “early 1816,” or “late 1815.” The arrival date, as cited by Sanneh and others, was February 3, 1816. Accordingly, if the average transatlantic voyage between New York and Monrovia lasted roughly 42 days, December 1815 appears to be the most logical estimate for the time of departure.

⁵² The Treaty of Ghent, signed by both the United States and Great Britain on December 24, 1814, in Ghent, Belgium, officially ended the War of 1812. Largely considered a draw, the war, and treaty, resolved but few issues. Because of the strength of Great Britain’s navy, American trade with “neutral” British colonies, such as Sierra Leone, became nearly impossible, as the Treaty provided no legitimate hindrance to British naval dominance. Equally important, British bitterness largely disallowed colonial trading with the United States and its allies.

⁵³ Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad*, 96-97; Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 11.

Cuffe's perceived failure led to the shaping of his legacy. As Claude A. Clegg writes: "Notably, the trip...included passengers who were literally going 'back to Africa,' the symbolism of which was not lost on those who believed that continent should be the natural focus of colonization energies in the United States."⁵⁴ Influenced both by Cuffe's words and actions, emerging colonizationist Robert Finley, a New Jersey born Presbyterian minister and future president of the University of Georgia, began thinking of a new solution, a new plan for both the heathens of Africa and the down-trodden blacks of the United States. Through a lengthy correspondence with Cuffe upon his return to the United States in late 1816, Finley, and fellow colonizationist Samuel J. Mills, began to consider the potential of creating an independent Christian colony on the coast of Africa. Reading of Cuffe's disgust with the Sierra Leone colony, Finley and Mills, two of the founding members of the American Bible Society, realized that they could use Sierra Leone as a model to create a colony that lived up to both African, or what the westerners conceived to be African, and African-American standards.⁵⁵

Finley, though active in philanthropic ventures like the Bible Society and the Presbyterian Church, felt guilty for avoiding outwardly benevolent organizations for most of his life. He wrote: "When I consider what many others have effected for the benefit of their suffering fellow-creatures at an earlier age than mine, I am humbled and mortified to think how little I have done."⁵⁶ The concept Finley and Mills drew up was an essential hybrid of those ideas advanced by Cuffe and Jefferson. Modeling the conceived colony around Sierra Leone, they would ideally build a trading port and harbor with regular

⁵⁴ Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 25.

⁵⁵ Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad*, 97.

⁵⁶ Robert Finley quoted in Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 17.

“packet lines” between New Orleans, New York, and this new Africa coastal port. They would gather a group of religious philanthropists from an assortment of denominations and societies to teach both the potential settlers, and, once in Africa, the heathen Africans, Christian values and western education, such as philosophy, American history, and science.⁵⁷

To Finley and Mills, according P. J. Staudenraus, “colonization would have a threefold effect: ‘We should be cleared of [the blacks],’ Africa would receive ‘partially civilized and Christianized’ settlers, and the Negroes could enjoy a ‘better situation.’”⁵⁸ The envisioned society would include both free black volunteers and, more importantly, emancipated slaves. This way, at least to Finley and Mills, the colonization effort would not alienate, or exclude any region or population. Neither volunteers nor slaves were required for the success of the venture. If southern slaveholders refused to emancipate their slaves at first, the new society would transport northern and southern free blacks, of which, Finley and Mills assumed, there were seemingly infinite numbers.⁵⁹

Word spread quickly about a new benevolent enterprise focused on African colonization. During the last half of 1816, Mills traveled up and down the Atlantic seaboard reconnecting with friends, colleagues, and associates from his days as a traveling spokesman for benevolent societies during the past decade. Finley continued his correspondence with Cuffe, who provided names of sympathetic natives and settlers

⁵⁷ See Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad*, 97-98; Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 17-18; Christopher Castiglia, “Pedagogical Discipline and the Creation of White Citizenship: John Witherspoon, Robert Finley, and the Colonization Society,” *Early American Literature*, 33, 2 (1998): 192-194; and Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic*, 20.

⁵⁸ Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 17.

⁵⁹ Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 90-91.

on the African coast, as well as possible locations for the settlement. By the Fall of 1816, Finley and Mills had attracted the attention of some of America's most recognizable names: Justice Bushrod Washington of the United States Supreme Court, and the current keeper of Mount Vernon, Speaker of the House Henry Clay of Kentucky, well-known lawyer and author of "The Star-Spangled Banner" Francis Scott Key, and Congressman Charles Fenton Mercer of Virginia, among many others.⁶⁰

After publishing one last circular announcing the formation of a new national colonization society, Finley, Mills, Key, and new recruit Elias B. Caldwell, announced the first meeting of the society, set for December 21, 1816.⁶¹ Over the next week, from December 21 to December 28, the group of Washington nobles, ministers, philanthropists, and politicians debated over the exact meaning of their newly adopted scheme. Finley and Mills tried to frame the society in a way that satisfied nearly every opinion and belief active in America at the time. But when the feasibility of the enterprise became apparent, and the previsional debates became actual debates, it was clear that the new "Society for the Colonization of the Free People of Color of the United States," soon shortened to the American Colonization Society (ACS), would have to span the gap between two emerging factions in the colonization debate: the emigrationists, and the colonizationists.⁶²

⁶⁰ See Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 19-21; Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 5-7; and Harris, *African and American Values*, 2-3.

⁶¹ *National Intelligencer*, December 18, 1816.

⁶² These terms are adopted from Katherine Harris, *African and American Values*. The ideas behind the specific terms, though, are not original to her work. Most, if not all, of the literature concerning the founding of the ACS and the colonization debate of the late 1810s and early 1820s, discusses a split on the pro-removal side. Many, however, do not distinguish between the two sides using different terms. Most simply explain the differences in opinion, and reduce the debate to black versus white

The divide seemed to form on sectional lines more so than political lines. On one side, mainly throughout the North and Northeast, stood the emigrationists, a group of largely religious clergy and staunch abolitionists who viewed any scheme of true colonization as a form of expanded slavery, a scheme for white lawmakers and slaveholders to maintain control over the already oppressed, degraded black population.⁶³ This was not to say, however, that emigrationists did not believe in black removal. Rather, they believed in a more free, voluntary, generally anti-slavery approach to the matter. They hoped that a successful, well-organized emigration scheme would provide for the free blacks of the United States a new start at life, a new opportunity to achieve the freedom, liberty, and sense of self-worth denied them in America's racist society. They sought a black-run settlement in West Africa, organized, inhabited, and built by the hands and minds of America's blacks; voluntary, not compulsory, for they believed only the oppressed and miserable could understand the essence, the reality, of oppression and misery. Quoting an anonymous anti-colonizationist letter from the December 30, 1816, edition of the *National Intelligencer*, P. J. Staudenraus writes: "[The author] challenged the colonizationists' motives and sneered that the 'self-styled benefactors' had arrogated the right to 'decree that other men are miserable.' Despite their gentle assurances, he warned, they would not hesitate to make colonization compulsory."⁶⁴

The emigrationist stance on colonization and the ACS was, in essence, the beginning of Pan-Negro, or Pan-African, thought. Emigrationists, though by no means universally black, came primarily from the large free black communities of Philadelphia,

⁶³ See Harris, *African and American Values*, 4; Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 31-32; and Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic*, 60-61.

⁶⁴ Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 31-32.

Washington, D.C., and, to a lesser extent, northern Virginia.⁶⁵ Their ideas were founded upon a sense of racial pride imbued with Christian morality and republican virtue. While they often wrote of the unity of man, or as William Crane, a white emigrationist and devout Baptist, wrote in the early 1820s, “that ‘God has made of one blood all nations of man,’ that ‘all men are born free and equal,’ and without any regard to complexion, all naturally possess the same inalienable rights,” they just as frequently advocated separatist notions of black expatriation and freedom on the coast of Africa.⁶⁶

Colonizationists, on the other side of the debate, saw the creation of a white-led, government funded American colony, whether official or unofficial, as the only option for success. To the colonizationists, most of whom came from the slaveholding border South, American blacks, though roughly educated in the manners and norms of “civilized” American society, required the help of white benefactors who could further educate them in republican political and moral standards, as well as promote peace and sustainability in American society, primarily in the area of slavery and race relations.⁶⁷ Echoing Thomas Jefferson, they generally feared the free black communities of the border South and viewed colonization as a panacea to America’s race problems. According to Claude Clegg, “the concept of irremediable difference, indeed dysfunction” stood at the heart of colonization ideology. “Not a problem amenable to conventional reformism,” he writes, “many proponents of black removal viewed antagonistic race

⁶⁵ Harris, *African and American Values*, 3-4; Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 15-16; and Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic*, 47-48.

⁶⁶ William Crane, *Antislavery in Virginia*, quoted in Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic*, 48

⁶⁷ See Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 14; Clegg, *Price of Liberty*, 32-33; and *The African Intelligencer*, 1, 1 (July 1820): 1-5.

relations as redressable only through the asylum version of correction – that is, the separation of the (black) deviant from the (white) mainstream.”⁶⁸

White control over colonization would ensure both the separation of the two warring races as well as the preservation of western social and political norms in the Dark Continent. With this idea in mind, colonizationists could create a benevolent, or even philanthropic, image of themselves. They were, in the words William Thornton, an early English colonizationist and “wet” Quaker, creating a “most valuable country [that] would soon become the seat of commerce, of arts and the manufactures, of plenty, of peace, and happiness.”⁶⁹ They were doing the world, and the United States, a favor, freeing the American white community of a rebellious, dangerous population, while spreading civilization, democracy, and commerce to the African continent.

The ACS adopted as its foundation the perfect compromise. Without mentioning slavery in any way, the ACS memorial to the American public offered ambiguous language that quelled the anxiety of both northern abolitionists and southern slaveholders. To the ACS, the colonization venture would universally benefit all those involved with the organization, black and white, American and African. While providing a safe haven for the “peculiarly situated” blacks of North America, the colonization enterprise would likewise rid the United States of a “useless and pernicious portion of its population,” who, for reasons outside the control of any individual, could never enjoy “equal rights

⁶⁸ Clegg, *Price of Liberty*, 33.

⁶⁹ William Thornton to Brissot de Warville, November 29, 1788, quoted in Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 7; also see Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad*, 187. The *African Repository* during the 1820s is full of humanitarian rhetoric like that of Thornton. Every issue opens with an essay about the benevolent pursuit of bettering the lives of American and African blacks, often written by the editor or another white ACS member.

and privileges with those around them.”⁷⁰ Quoting Charles MacKay, a noted scientist and opponent of alchemy during the 1840s, Marie Tyler-McGraw perfectly summarizes the striking, though successful, ambiguity of the ACS constitution and memorial: “This unprofitable pursuit [attracted] men of all ranks, characters, and conditions,” she writes, quoting MacKay. “[To] the...needy, noble, the designing charlatan,...the delusion was not altogether without its uses. Many valuable discoveries have been made in that search for the impossible which might otherwise have been hidden for centuries yet to come.”⁷¹ These discoveries, whether of the violent racial war found in the writings of Thomas Jefferson, or the plight of a defeated, captive, degraded people at the hands of white masters, all led to the same general conclusion: that the blacks and whites could not, or should not, live together in the same republican society.

By the early 1820s, the ACS had grown into a major national benevolent society. With the Slave Trade Act of 1819, Congress authorized the president to employ an agent and build a boardinghouse on the west coast of Africa to house and care for slaves recaptured by the U.S. Navy on the Atlantic. President James Monroe, a fan of colonization, and a follower of Thomas Jefferson concerning the subject, adopted a liberal reading of the Act, and, ignoring the objections of Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, provided \$100,000 to the ACS in order to pay and house a group of black “government laborers,” complete with families, children, and a year’s worth of rations.⁷²

⁷⁰ “The Meeting on the Colonization of Free Blacks,” *Albany Register*, January 10, 1817, 4-5.

⁷¹ Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic*, 27.

⁷² See Harris, *African and American Values*, 9; Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad*, 198-200; Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic*, 28; and Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 50-53. The debate within Monroe’s cabinet is mentioned in nearly every work on the origins of both Liberia and the colonization movement. Other than James Monroe, Secretary of War

On January 21, 1820, the merchant ship *Elizabeth* set sail from New York harbor. It carried aboard a group of eighty-six African-American volunteers, workers, children, wives, and mothers, along with government agents Samuel Bacon and John P. Bankson, ACS agent Samuel Crozer, and provisions necessary for building and maintaining a settlement.⁷³ In many ways, the voyage of the *Elizabeth* marked the very first moment in Americo-Liberian history. Although the eighty-six blacks huddled aboard the deck of the *Elizabeth* as it sailed slowly away from their shared American home knew they were part of a pioneering expedition, a new beginning of a new history, a new future, they could not have realized the historical magnitude of their nascent journey. The reverence with which an entire nation, over the next century and a half, would gaze upon their story, how, in the words of Liberia's first president, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, that "mere handful of isolated Christian pilgrims, ... inspired by the love of liberty and equal rights, ... succeeded in laying here the foundations of a free government," had yet to be written of and understood by generations of patriotic, jaded Liberians.⁷⁴ From the moment the *Elizabeth* docked at the port of Freetown on February 19, 1820, the Americo-Liberian community started to take form, and the seeds of American politics, society, and culture began to grow.

John C. Calhoun and Attorney General William Wirt were the only two cabinet members who supported federal funding for the ACS. By the end of the debate, however, Adams had convinced both Calhoun and Wirt that the ACS was just a ploy to establish a government funded and supported colony in Africa, which, at the most basic levels, was unconstitutional. Monroe acted anyway, and granted the ACS \$100,000. It was not until 1821 that Congress repelled the necessary provision of the Slave Trade Act, halting all federal funding to the ACS.

⁷³ Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 20-21.

⁷⁴ Joseph Jenkins Roberts, "First Inaugural Address, January 3, 1848," in Guannu, *Inaugural Addresses*, 2.

With the founding of the American Colonization Society on ambiguous grounds, and the apparent split between emigrationists and colonizationists, another group of Americans, both white and black, began looking to Africa for a noble cause. Seeing the ACS as a valuable, worthwhile enterprise, and a possible American-based opening to the African continent, many American churches, during the late 1810s and early 1820s, started organizing the first eastward-looking foreign missionary societies in the United States. Of the major American churches active at time, most, such as the Methodist Episcopal, Protestant Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches, were most popular and active in northern states, like New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts, and thus tended to fall on the emigrationist side of the colonization debate.⁷⁵

To most white and black Methodists, Protestants, and Presbyterians, the primary function of colonization was to spread the word of God to a heathen, pagan population. Most northern churches did not view African Americans as a threat to American safety, nor did they see slavery as a moral act. Rather, many preachers and ministers throughout the North and Northeast saw colonization and missionary work as outwardly benevolent. The colonization enterprise allowed American Christian missionaries both to preach and educate the colonists during the voyage to Africa, and spread the “light” of Christianity once in dark Africa.⁷⁶

From the beginning of the African missionary movement, all national American churches were segregated, at least in regard to ordained ministers and church officials.

⁷⁵ See Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad*, 132-133; Park, “White” Americans, 4-5; and Peter Duignan and L. H. Gann, *The United States and Africa: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 91-92.

⁷⁶ T.R., “On the Early History of the Negro Race,” *African Repository*, 1, 1 (1826): 7. Also see Duignan and Gann, *The United States and Africa*, 91-96.

Although congregations, depending on location and tradition, tended to be biracial and desegregated in the North, every national American church disallowed blacks from holding church offices, or even being ordained into the episcopacy or presbytery.⁷⁷

Before American missionary ventures started looking eastward towards Africa, there were no black missionaries active in the United States. Most African-Americans active in the national churches, many of whom adopted Christianity once in the United States as slaves, held the position of “local preacher,” an unpaid, often unrecognized position of purely local authority. These “local preachers” would often use their homes, a community center, or a village meetinghouse to hold makeshift prayer services throughout the week, and mass on Sundays.⁷⁸

Nearly all black preachers were volunteers, and acted under an apparent divine authority, claiming to have been called by God to spread His Word throughout the community. They were zealous, active, and hard working, often working secular jobs during the day, and preaching in the evenings and on weekends. They often adopted the nominal and scriptural designation of the church most active in the area, or in the closest town or city. Accordingly, these preachers gained recognition from the national church, not as official pastors or ministers, but as recognized parishes, or church communities.⁷⁹

When American national churches first started seriously considering African missionary work after the founding of the ACS in 1816 and the establishment of Liberia in 1822, the black “local preachers” jumped at the opportunity to lead this noble,

⁷⁷ Park, “White” Americans, 47-49.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷⁹ See *ibid.*, 51-54.

providential mission.⁸⁰ But, in the beginning, white church leadership, in nearly every American denomination, viewed the African mission as a humanitarian effort specific to white Americans. Regarding slavery “as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature,” white American churches, in general, saw colonization, and the open-ended intentions of the ACS, as a perfect vehicle by which to redeem both the heathen African and the white American population for the sin of slavery.⁸¹ To avoid any confusion in the eyes of God, church leadership chose only white men as potential missionaries in the African field. African-American Christianity, they believed, was too much infused with traditional African practices to have the desired effect on the target African population.

Most American churches also feared that black preachers, and black Christians in general, only nominally attached their beliefs to the national church, and thus practiced a form of Christianity out of line with specific church doctrine. For example, in 1830, the managing committee of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society (DFMS) of the Protestant Episcopal Church denied the missionary application of a black preacher, Edward Jones, because “his desire to go to Africa was motivated *solely* by a sense of duty to God to promote the spiritual welfare of the people of the country [Africa],” not to enforce and instill the teachings and practices of Protestant Christianity.⁸² In other words, the African mission was not a joint Christian effort. Rather, it was a new frontier upon which all American churches wished to gain a strong foothold, and expand outside

⁸⁰ D. Elwood Dunn, *A History of the Episcopal Church in Liberia, 1821-1920* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1992), 20-21.

⁸¹ “General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church,” *African Repository*, 1, 9 (November 1825): 272-273.

⁸² Dunn, *Episcopal Church in Liberia*, 38.

the borders of the United States. Although the American churches tended to view African expansion and missionary work as a benevolent, humanitarian cause, and a chance at white redemption for slavery, the effort, it seems, was equally founded on a desire for denominational growth, and the spread of the church's teachings, rather than the expansion of the Christian religion as a whole.

Although the Protestant Episcopal and Presbyterian churches allowed full ordination of black ministers and preachers by the end of the 1820s, blacks in all denominations began to react to their second-class status in the churches. As early as 1816, mainly in the South, African-Americans seceded from the Methodist Episcopal Church, and founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), a black-led, black-run, fully independent church, complete with black bishops, deacons, and priests. The independent black churches, however, lacked the financial support and followings of large congregations. Though Richard Allen, the founder of the AME Church and noted black Christian leader, sought to create a national black church, the communities and organizations that adopted the AME tag tended to act independently from both each other and the national organization, creating a series of locally independent village churches with small congregations and even smaller coffers. Thus, the large national churches, though slightly weakened from the secession of numerous black communities, remained the only active American churches capable of sending missionary expeditions to Africa during the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s.⁸³

As the AME Church slowly grew, and the national churches' refusal to send black missionaries to Africa continued, black Christian leaders began to speak out in favor of

⁸³ Park, "White" Americans, 48-49; "African Methodist Episcopal Churches," *African Repository*, 40, 7 (July 1864): 209.

black missions. Their logic was clear and vehement, looking to slavery as the foundation of black ignorance, and African missionary work as the chance for racial, intellectual, and religious growth. To the young Alexander Crummell, who would eventually become one of the most influential black Christian leaders in Liberia and the United States during the 1850s, black missionary work allowed American blacks to work side-by-side with their heathen brethren “to improve and elevate their character[s],” both as individuals and as a race. The arrival of black missionaries on the coast of Africa, Crummell continued, would pacify the natives, who “despised” the work of the whites, and would take joy in learning and growing with fellow blacks.⁸⁴ But the black-run churches of the United States still lacked the funding and the organization to produce any realistic missionary enterprise and the national churches remained steadfast in their declarations of white redemption. Black missionary work simply had to wait.

Between 1822, the year the ACS settlement in West Africa gained the name “Liberia,” and 1833, when the first official Liberian missionary societies were strong enough, and wealthy enough, to affect even moderate change in the religious fabric of both Monrovia, by then a growing western-style urban center, and colonial Liberia as a whole, not a single official black missionary arrived in Liberia from the United States.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Discontent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 84.

⁸⁵ Many charts, such as those found in the appendices of Park, “*White*” *Americans*, 198-204, provide the dates of arrival for many black settler-missionaries – those missionaries who, after arriving in Liberia as settlers decided to join a western missionary society. Accordingly, many black settlers who eventually became missionaries arrived in Liberia years before 1833, but none of them became missionaries before that year. According to both Park and Dunn, the two scholars who have, at any meaningful length, studied this trend, no western church sent any official black missionaries before 1833, and only started employing American blacks as missionaries in relatively large numbers in the early to mid 1840s.

As we will see in subsequent chapters, however, white American men were not the only religious clergy active in Liberia before, and certainly after, 1833. When Melville B. Cox, the first official white “missionary-in-charge” of the Liberian Methodist Missionary Convention, arrived in Monrovia on March 9, 1833, it marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of Liberian-American relations.⁸⁶ Thenceforth, western religion, and official American religious doctrine, engrained itself both in the political machinations and thoughts of the Liberian leadership, and the sense of purpose felt by all Liberian settlers, both within and without Monrovia. The rhetoric of Liberian independence, Black Nationalism, and Americo-Liberian cultural and social pride all adopted a sense of providential meaning and guidance. The positions of ACS agent and United States government agent quickly merged into a single, ACS-run autocratic governorship supported by white western religious leaders and the light-skinned Americo-Liberian elite.⁸⁷

The latent Christianity practiced in Americo-Liberian society before and immediately after 1833, when mixed with zealous white missionary work in the urban capital, created a religion-infused, providentially decreed notion of cultural, social, and, in some cases, racial superiority in Liberian settler society. They, the Americo-Liberian elite believed, were the vessels through which God chose to do His work. Although they were ethnically the same as their heathen “brethren,” they had become civilized, educated

⁸⁶ See Park, “White” Americans, 19, 198; and D. Elwood Dunn, Amos J. Beyan, and Carl Patrick Burrowes, *Historical Dictionary of Liberia*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2001), 229.

⁸⁷ Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 63; Beyan, “The American Colonization Society and the Socio-Religious Characterization of Liberia,” 2-4; and Yekutiel Gershoni, “The Paradox of Church-State Relations in Liberia, 1847-1930,” *Liberian Studies Journal*, 10, 1 (1982-1983): 68.

in the norms and practices of an advanced, forward-looking society. They had God on their side, or so they believed, and as a result, they knew better than their lost, benighted “children.” “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands unto God,” they repeated, quoting Psalm 68 of the Old Testament.⁸⁸ They were the princes of Egypt. They were Ethiopia’s hands.

But as we will see, the growth of Monrovia, and the expansion of white ecclesiastical influence in Liberian leadership, and the interior, led to an ideological split, or rebellion, similar to, and certainly founded upon, the emigrationist-colonizationist divide surrounding African colonization two decades earlier. As voluntarism emerged within the black religious community in Liberia, and ACS manumissions and emigration picked up during the late 1840s and 1850s, following Liberian political independence, American churches started to recruit both American and Liberian blacks as missionaries, and Liberia began to expand inward, away from the coast.

All of this, the expansion of Liberian society, the sense of social, cultural, and racial superiority, the split within the American missionary enterprise, and the development of black-led missionary voluntarism and racial-religious separatism in the lower echelons of Liberian colonial society, originated in the debate surrounding black removal, and the difference between emigrationism and colonizationism. By the end of the 1870s, after a half-century of existence, the true founders of Liberian society, the ideological fathers of that small Americo-African republic, remained the likes of Jefferson, Cuffe, Monroe, Mills, and Finley. But Liberia had two parts, both as innately

⁸⁸ All of the first five Liberian presidents quote Psalm 68 in their inaugural addresses. See Carl Patrick Burrowes, “Black Christian Republicanism: A Southern Ideology in Early Liberia, 1822 to 1847,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 86, 1 (Winter 2001): 34.

American as emigrationists and colonizationists, northerners and southerners, Jefferson and Cuffe. The next two chapters will look at the details of these respective parts, explaining how each remained as ideologically American as the other, while drifting further and further apart socially and culturally.

Chapter II:
“Upon This Rock We Shall Build Our Hopes”

From the very beginning, Liberia grew slowly. When the eighty-six emigrants aboard the *Elizabeth* first landed at the port of Freetown in February 1820, they saw a growing, thriving West African port town under British colonial rule. The inhabitants spoke English, wore well-tailored European clothing, and lived in framed houses with shingled roofs. They had established churches in the western style, complete with bell towers, steeples, and crosses of silver and gold. This was not the place, at least to the ACS and government agents, about which Paul Cuffe had written so negatively a half-decade earlier.⁸⁹ In his diary, Samuel Bacon, one of the two government agents, wrote that the “productions...[of] no country are more various...[and] spontaneous” than those of Africa. The English, he wrote, had created “a state of civilization above the savage life,” the likes of which would undoubtedly attract “one half of the coloured population” of America “if we [could] receive them.”⁹⁰

But Freetown was not the final destination of the *Elizabeth* and its crew. When Paul Cuffe traveled to West Africa in early 1816, he made contact with John Kizell, a former American slave who earned his freedom by siding with the British during the American Revolution, who promised to aid any colonization venture or settlement arriving from the United States. Kizell lived in a town called Campelar, on Sherbro Island, a large peninsular island about 75 miles south of Freetown. Kizell was one of the

⁸⁹ Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, 58-59; A. B. C. Sibthorpe, *The History of Sierra Leone* (London: Frank, Cass, and Company, 1970), xiv; and see Diary of Daniel Coker, February 20-25, 1820, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁹⁰ Diary of Samuel Bacon quoted in Jehudi Ashmun, *Memoir of the Life and Character of Rev. Samuel Bacon* (Washington: Jacob Gideon, 1822), 254-255.

first people Robert Finley contacted on the African coast, and, upholding his promise to Cuffe, he assured Finley that Sherbro Island was the best place for a new settlement. Kizell explained to Finley that he was the son of “a chief of some consequence,” and had “prospered in trade, built a church, and was preaching to his country men.”⁹¹ Once the *Elizabeth* expedition took form, Bacon, and his fellow agents, John P. Bankson and Samuel Crozer, were instructed to contact John Kizell, and follow him to Sherbro Island “for the purpose of establishing and organizing a colony in that place.”⁹²

On Sherbro Island, the settlers found nothing but “a village of about twenty houses built in native style, situated on nearly the east end of [the] island.”⁹³ Although Kizell built the makeshift village, and, according to Bacon, was “staunch as a rock in our favour,” his assurances of peaceful relations with the natives, healthy lands, and fertile fields appeared greatly exaggerated. Even Samuel Crozer, who, it seems, viewed the location with surprising optimism, allowed subtle disappointment to emerge in his letters. At the start of a letter to Elias Caldwell in March 1820, Crozer wrote of the land “produc[ing] fruit of all kinds in the greatest abundance,” and the untilled earth “clothed with the most exuberant vegetation...and refreshing breezes.” But he quickly warned Caldwell, by then a vice-president of the American Colonization Society, not to send any more emigrants to Sherbro without “*present[ing] to every emigrant before his leaving*

⁹¹ Frederick Starr, *Liberia: Description, History, Problems* (Chicago, 1913), 55-56. Starr, an early anthropologist, wrote one of the most complete first hand accounts of the Liberian culture around the same time Sir Harry Johnston completed his two-volume study of the West African nation. Johnston’s work has largely overshadowed Starr’s, but the latter remains a valuable look into Liberia’s history, as seen by a visitor at the height of Americo-Liberian power.

⁹² *Instructions of the Board of Managers to Samuel A. Crozer* in Huberich, *Political and Legislative History*, 95.

⁹³ Samuel Bacon to Smith Thompson, March 21, 1820, *RACS*; also quoted in Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 22.

America...an epitome [i.e. summary] of the regulations of the colony” and Society. “The Society,” he continued with emphasis, “should keep the government of the colony strictly in their own hands until it be thoroughly organized...so as not to leave too much to [the colonists’] own discretion.”⁹⁴

Crozer’s warnings did not result from concern for the people under his command, the eighty-six free black “workers” from New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Rather, Crozer was looking out for himself, the government agents, and the Society as an organization. His fear of allowing popular political power, however nascent and modest it was in the early settlement on Sherbro, stemmed from a rift that developed during the initial voyage to Freetown between the white agents and the black colonists. According to Jehudi Ashmun, a young white Baptist minister who left the priesthood to engage in coastal trading in Africa, “it was but too apparent that a mutinous spirit was secretly working in the minds of some of the people on board.”⁹⁵ Though Ashmun, who would grow to be one of the leading characters in the founding of Liberia, never specifically mentioned the causes of this “mutinous spirit,” the diary of Daniel Coker, an erudite mulatto emigrant from Baltimore, Maryland, supports its existence. “I served as a kind of middle link between the white and colored,” Coker wrote on February 25, just six days after the *Elizabeth* landed at Freetown. “If [the emigrants] had not confidence in them (the Agents),...they had [it] in me.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Samuel Crozer to Elias B. Caldwell, March 31, 1820, *RACS*. Portions also quoted in Huberich, *Political and Legislative History*, 98-99.

⁹⁵ Ashmun, *Rev. Samuel Bacon*, 249. Ashmun also explains how “indications of strong disaffection were, on [one] occasion, manifested by a few individuals; but a large majority acquiesced in the authority of the agents, at the time.” Still, he does not offer any explanation as to what caused the “disaffection.”

⁹⁶ Diary of Daniel Coker, February 25, 1820.

The reasons for the emigrants' "mutinous spirit" are not entirely mysterious. In fact, a feeling of detention, or oppression at the hands of the white agents most likely grew as a result of Kizell's exaggerations, and the hardship of life on the West African frontier. While the ACS agent, Samuel Crozer, traveled to West Africa to establish a colony for free blacks, those same free blacks traveled to West Africa to escape the degradation and inequality they felt in the United States. But much like Paul Cuffe on his voyage to Sierra Leone in 1816, many of the eighty-six black emigrants aboard the *Elizabeth* discovered that under the constant watch of a white-led benevolent society, and the leadership of three white government and Society agents, blacks remained, at best, second-class citizens.

Between February and May 1820, the settlement at Sherbro witnessed the death of all three white agents, and twelve black emigrants. They had fought off attacks from unfriendly natives, weathered multiple bouts with the "African Fever," or malaria, and run out of foodstuffs, all within the first six months of their new African lives.⁹⁷ By the time the first supply ship, the *Nautilus*, arrived at Freetown, on March 8, 1821, with thirty-three Virginia and Maryland blacks, and a new supply of rations, the original *Elizabeth* party had abandoned Sherbro for Freetown, taking up temporary residence in Fourah Bay. Though it is unclear how and when the *Elizabeth* party ended up in Freetown, it is clear that they arrived a divided, embittered people. "Moses was I think

⁹⁷ See Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 22; Johnston, *Liberia*, vol. 1, 126; and "Information relative to the operations of the United States squadron on the west coast of Africa, the condition of the American colonies there, and the commerce of the United States therewith," 28th Congress, 2d. Session, S. Doc. 150, Law Library, Library of Congress. This document, though the title may cause confusion, lists every emigrant that traveled to Liberia and the ship and date upon which he or she traveled. Much of the information in this study concerning arrival dates, ages, names, and ships comes from this document.

permitted to see the promised land but not to enter in,” Daniel Coker wrote in his diary. “I think it likely that I shall not be permitted to see our expected earthly Canaan.”⁹⁸

The division within the original settler community previews much of Liberia’s history. With the quick collapse, or death, of white ACS leadership, and the retreat back to Freetown, the infantile American settlement in Africa had already split between those settlers who wished to create their own lives in Africa, and those who sought the knowledge and protection of ACS leadership and government aid. In other words, some settlers sought to *emigrate* to West Africa and start a new life, while others planned to *colonize* West Africa, and live, as free as possible, under the safe and presumably stable watch of the ACS and the United States government. The settlers, though, understood that their lives, and the future of the American black population, depended upon a consistent, cooperative effort. After all, they had no money, and the ACS, regardless of what the settlers thought of it, could provide them, at least immediately, with land, food, and protection.⁹⁹

The land that would eventually become “Monrovia” was purchased by Dr. Eli Ayres, the newest ACS agent in West Africa, and Lieutenant Robert F. Stockton of the United States Navy, on December 15, 1821, nearly two years after the *Elizabeth* landed at Freetown for the first time. With the help of Lt. Stockton’s drawn and loaded pistol, the two men purchased the 5,200 square mile Cape Mesurado, located some 220 miles south of Freetown, and 145 miles south of Sherbro Island, for just over \$300 worth of iron bars,

⁹⁸ Diary of Daniel Coker, April 21, 1821; also see Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 22.

⁹⁹ Though few emigrant letters from the early 1820s exist, the majority of letters sent to the ACS from settlers in Liberia over the following decade exhibit a growing reliance upon ACS supplies, tools, foodstuffs, money, and people.

muskets, and powder.¹⁰⁰ The men signed the treaty with King Peter, an elderly Dey chief who lived in the Dey capital, Bopolu, fifty miles inland. To King Peter, Sir Harry Johnston, an early twentieth century anthropologist close to Liberia, writes, the Cape was a distant portion of the Dey kingdom of little value to the natives. The lone promontory, called Mamba Point, descended quickly into dense, wet, malarial mangrove swamps in the east, and to the west, dropped off into the Atlantic Ocean, creating tall, steep, rocky cliffs.¹⁰¹

The settlers, who lived in Freetown for almost a year, arrived at Cape Mesurado on April 25, 1822. They named their new home “Providence Island,” clearly feeling as though they had arrived, at last, at their “earthly Canaan,” their promised land. Though divided, weak, and tested by unrelenting misfortune, the free American blacks drawn to West Africa by “the power of hope, a power to inspire and delude,” maintained a firm belief in a providential quest, a charge to bring freedom and life to the black race, both in Africa and America.¹⁰² In a letter published nearly four years after its writing, an anonymous emigrant wrote of this providential charge. “Upon this rock we shall build

¹⁰⁰ Liebenow, *Liberia*, 4; Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 37. See Johnston, *Liberia*, vol. 1, 129, for a full list of items sold in return for the land.

¹⁰¹ See Johnston, *Liberia*, vol. 1, 129; Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 26-27; and Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 52. Few detailed descriptions of Cape Mesurado exist outside of secondary sources or memoirs. One of the few extant firsthand accounts appears in full in “A Dutch Account of Liberia in the Seventeenth Century,” Johnston, *Liberia*, vol. 1, 83-104. The account was written in 1677-1678 by Chevalier des Marchais, a Franco-Dutch explorer. The account covers much of coastal Liberia, including Cape Mesurado. Mamba Point is now the site of the United States Embassy in Monrovia.

¹⁰² Kenneth C. Barnes, *Journey of Hope: The Back-to-Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), xii.

our hopes,” he wrote, “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them,...[for] there is Omnipotence engaged in this cause.”¹⁰³

But, like much of Liberian and western colonial history in general, the American settlers failed to recognize the innate differences between the native culture and their own. According to Harry Johnston, the chiefs who sold the land to the Americans “probably thought, if they looked at all to the future, that these eccentric persons – enthusiastic, thin, fever-stricken white men, who loathed drink, debauchery, and the slave trade, and English-speaking Christian Negroes dressed in European fashion – merely wished to settle here and there along the coast” and establish profitable relations with the natives in the interior, otherwise keeping largely to themselves. “They certainly did not realize that they were ‘selling their country.’”¹⁰⁴ Though it is unclear exactly what King Peter thought he had signed at gunpoint on December 15, 1821, the treaty, and the subsequent growth of settler institutions, serves as the first example of western political and legal influences at work in Liberian settler-native relations.

The settlers, unaware of native politics and jurisprudence, simply assumed that treaty making, and permanent land sales were common practices throughout the world. If nothing else, the settlers saw these western concepts as standards of an advanced system that the “savage” natives ought to understand and follow for their own betterment. As Americans, or at least cultural products of American society, the black emigrants saw themselves as emissaries, teachers of a new, more correct, more Christian way of life. They were sent to Africa by God to enlighten, or “fix,” their own people and themselves. For those settlers who sought unabated freedom, the essential *emigrationist* settlers, the

¹⁰³ R.T., “Communication,” *African Repository*, 1, 1 (March 1825): 6.

¹⁰⁴ Johnston, *Liberia*, vol. 1, 129.

establishment of a settlement in Africa served two purposes: to renew the life of the individual emigrant, and to resuscitate the spirits of the diasporic, and native, African populations.

But this early Pan-Negro sentiment was a direct product of American social and political ideology. Although the emigrants who manifested the “mutinous spirit” that Jehudi Ashmun mentioned in his journal clearly felt threatened, or even abused, by the actions of the white agents, they founded their thoughts and plans for a new life in Africa upon the decades-old American notions of virtuous sacrifice, Christian morality, and republican politics. Similar to the first English settlers in North America, they did not intend to adopt native traditions, beliefs, and practices once in Africa, for they saw republicanism and Christianity as fundamental to human freedom, knowledge, and improvement. They looked to “free” the natives of their useless, backward practices, introducing the virtues of individuality and self-reliance so beloved and worshiped in America.

To these settlers, the notions of individual effort and sacrifice were key. In order to achieve true “freedom,” and “enlightenment,” one had to recognize the importance of self-interest in the overall improvement of the community. They seemingly adopted what Alexis de Tocqueville defined in 1835 as “enlightened self-interest” – the idea that “enlightened love” for oneself motivates virtuous men “to help one another out, and makes them ready and willing to sacrifice a portion of their time and wealth for the good

of the state.”¹⁰⁵ To the settlers, Africa, without this American “enlightened self-interest,” or “virtue,” was stagnant, even retrogressive.¹⁰⁶

Many of the settlers, both emigrationist and colonizationist, simply could not understand the seemingly backward native practices of ancestor worship, open nudity, sacrifice, polygamy, and monarchical rule, to name a few. They often wrote to the United States of the peculiar “traits of the African.” In a letter to the *African Repository*, most likely written in late 1824, an anonymous emigrant explained that “the natives suffer less from the anticipation of future evils, or death, than more civilized and enlightened people.” “Their superstitions,” he wrote, “have steeped and poisoned their whole soul,” and are “associated with every object in nature, every phenomenon of providence and mind, every state and relation of this life, and all their blind notions of the next.”¹⁰⁷

Although the ideas of divine omnipotence and life after death did not stray far from the western concepts of a single omnipotent God, and heaven and hell, the settlers reacted to the native practices with confusion and even anger. The foreign names and exotic images involved in native religion and culture, regardless of meaning, shocked the settlers, causing either simple rejection, or outright mockery in letters and newspaper articles.¹⁰⁸ The settlers saw the Liberian experiment as a providentially decreed goodwill mission. They believed that through slavery, an inherent evil, American blacks learned

¹⁰⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835 reprint; New York: Library of America, 2004), 611.

¹⁰⁶ *African Repository*, 1, 3 (May 1825): 93; “Moral Qualities of the Africans,” *African Repository*, 1, 4 (June 1825): 111-115.

¹⁰⁷ *African Repository*, 1, 3 (May 1825): 79, 82.

¹⁰⁸ Jehudi Ashmun, “Consideration in Reference to a Mission in Africa,” *African Repository*, 1, 4 (June 1825): 118-120; “Latest from Liberia,” *African Repository*, 1, 4 (June 1825): 115-116; and also see the two citations above.

the advanced norms and teachings of post-Revolutionary America. The physical image of American prosperity and wealth, western religion, and the sense of individual importance, self-definition, and dedication to a unified republican society, as we will see in the coming pages, ran deep in the ideological foundations of the earliest Liberian settlers, both emigrationist and colonizationist, light-skinned and dark.

But Liberia during the 1820s, and into the 1830s, was far from an American-inspired unified republic. In 1824, the ACS Board of Managers passed the first Liberian Constitution. The Constitution officially named the colony “Liberia,” the capital “Monrovia,” and established an administrative network to govern the new colony. In Liberia, the ACS Agent, a white man appointed by the ACS Board, retained all administrative and judicial power not expressly delegated to the Board itself. In a largely symbolic move, the Board allowed the settlers to elect a deputy agent to serve as an advisor to the ACS Agent.¹⁰⁹ Instead of a representative government, the Liberian settlers received an autocratic system observed by a disconnected, and distant, oligarchy of white men.

In action, and thought, perhaps, the Liberian settlers were in fact more free than in the United States. The 1824 Constitution gave each black man, and woman, the right to own land, so long as he or she maintained that land in an “orderly manner” – that is, tilling the land, planting crops, and constructing a wood-framed house.¹¹⁰ Though not mentioned specifically in the Constitution, the press, consisting of a single newspaper by 1828, the *Liberia Herald*, had relative freedom in the early colony, as long as the Agent

¹⁰⁹ Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 11; and Huberich, *Political and Legislative History*, 319-320.

¹¹⁰ Huberich, *Political and Legislative History*, 321.

did not deem the newspaper's opinion a "public nuisance," a loosely defined law authorizing the Agent to adapt any rule or regulation when necessary for the "safety" of the settlement.¹¹¹ There is also little evidence of any arrests for public dissent, or subversion during the late 1820s, though laws defining such activity existed. Thus, Liberia, at least to the ACS Board and the readers of the *African Repository*, the ACS's main organ, appeared to be thriving in nearly every capacity, living up to all the hype.

But by the end of the decade, a tension brewed within settler society. While the ACS encouraged an agrarian lifestyle in the settlement, giving each emigrant free land and requiring the planting of cash crops, those few emigrants who came over to Liberia with a degree of personal wealth preferred trade over agriculture. They quickly erected trading houses, a port, and large plantation homes along Ashmun Street, at the center of town.¹¹² An elite settler class soon emerged, and Monrovia, both the center of Liberian society, and the center of Liberian commerce and wealth, quickly became the territory of a light-skinned, well-educated, socially dominant upper crust ruled by a few aristocratic families, such as the Robertses, Warings, Lewises, and Bensons.

These families, of whom the majority arrived on either the *Elizabeth* or the *Nautilus*, saw themselves as the founders of the Liberian colony, the aristocracy of their Americo-African community. They were, in general, very light-skinned, often just an eighth, or a quarter black, and had received either formal education, or skilled labor

¹¹¹ See Carl Patrick Burrowes, *Power and Press Freedom in Liberia, 1830-1970: The Impact of Globalization and Civil Society on Media-Government Relations* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2004), 17-18; and "Constitution for the Government of the African Settlement," Article 8, Business Papers, *RACS*, 99.

¹¹² Johnston, *Liberia*, vol. 1, 149-150, 256.

training in the United States.¹¹³ As historian J. Gus Liebenow wrote: “These were Americans, and their views of Africa and Africans were essentially those of nineteenth-century whites in the United States. The bonds of culture were stronger than the bonds of race.”¹¹⁴ They termed themselves the “Americo-Liberians,” recognizing this cultural bond. They carried themselves with dignity and class, imitating the aristocratic whites of their former home. According to Charles Thomas, an early American visitor to Monrovia, they dressed well, “extravagantly so,” donning “kid gloves and umbrellas” on every possible occasion. They were “refined” and “tasteful,” even dainty and soft. They were, in every sense, an “aristocracy” from the American border South.¹¹⁵

As freeborn black men and women primarily from Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina, many of the Americo-Liberians looked down upon the freedmen and recaptured slaves from the Northeast and Deep South who gradually populated Liberia over the last half of the 1820s and early 1830s. These people, the freedmen and recaptives, the Americas believed, needed only slightly less education in civility and Christianity as the natives. They never wore as expensive clothing as the Americo-Liberians, nor did they speak English as well as their fellow citizens. They lacked education and discipline, a solid work ethic, and natural leadership. They practiced agriculture, but never made money; they owned land, but not enough to deserve respect. Better yet, some still had native African surnames, or even worse, the names of their former masters. To the Americo-Liberians, the dark-skinned emigrants who accepted the free ACS land along

¹¹³ See Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 42-43, among many others, for a description of the Americo-Liberian class.

¹¹⁴ Liebenow, *Liberia*, 15.

¹¹⁵ Charles W. Thomas, *Adventures and Observations on the West Coast of Africa and Its Islands* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1860), 156.

the Mesurado and St. James Rivers, and who remained in a state of simple agricultural subsistence, did not quite deserve the philanthropy they received.¹¹⁶

The dichotomy between what we will call “simple” Liberians, and the Americo-Liberians appears to have developed in the second generation of settlers – that is, the group of settlers who emigrated either as children, or teenagers, in the 1820s, and who came of age in the early 1830s. But the ideas upon which this split rested emerged much earlier, before the Constitution of 1824, or even the establishment of Monrovia. In fact, the split originated in racial identity itself, in the differences between the settlers’ experiences in America, and the colors of their skin, the names of their families, and the freedom or enslavement of their parents and ancestors.

For the first time in history, a colony of black men and women emerged not out of revolution, but out of American individualism, out of that fleeting desire to find something better, to make something of oneself. But as Liberia emerged from the failure of the Sherbro Island settlement and grew into a young colonial establishment, this desire existed strictly at the individual level. Based on the early American conceptions of racial superiority and light-skinned social and cultural domination, the emigrationist motive of communal, or, in this case, racial improvement through individual action took second

¹¹⁶ Many historians have discussed the nature of the Americo-Liberian community. See Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 42-59; Liebenow, *Liberia*, 15-20; Johnston, *Liberia*, vol.1, 340-395; and Burrowes, “Black Christian Republicanism,” 30-44. Rarely do these studies mention the relationship, or even the existence of a relationship, between the elite, light-skinned Americo-Liberians and other, darker skinned Liberians, equally “American,” who came over on the same ships, and at the same times, but were excluded from the Americo-Liberian cabal. Aside from the above citations, the information in this paragraph came from a number of letters from Joseph Jenkins Roberts, the clear leader of the Americo-Liberians, and the first Liberian president, and other Americo-Liberians, between 1833 and 1849 (*RACS*, Library of Congress), as well as many articles in *African Repository* over the 1830s and 1840s, primarily from the “Latest from Liberia” section.

chorus to ideas of personal social and economic growth infused with intra-racial separatism and class struggle. The key is that in building their society during the late 1820s and early 1830s, the Liberian settlers lacked the unity through undesirability they experienced in the United States.¹¹⁷ The only unifying descriptors at the time were that nearly all of the settlers had lived in the United States, and had some African blood. But the amount of African blood, and experiences in America differed drastically from settler to settler; and by the late 1820s, and into the 1830s, a class system defined by shared American experiences and lightness of skin came to dominate Liberian social and political ideology and culture.

As light-skinned blacks from the border South, the Americo-Liberians saw themselves as self-made men, much like the wealthy planters of rural Virginia, or the wealthy merchants of the Atlantic coast. They represented the most complete image of American high character and class, they believed; for they had defied the odds, emigrated to Africa, and created a life of comfort and wealth in a distant, benighted land. But in most cases, a life of misery, at least to the Americo-Liberian elite, was a distant, if not nonexistent, memory. None of the emigrants aboard the *Elizabeth* or the *Nautilus* were born into slavery, and only six former slaves arrived in Liberia between 1820 and 1825.¹¹⁸ By a large margin, they were nearly all free born, largely religious volunteers of

¹¹⁷ One of the most well known works to emphasize the communal nature of desirability, or undesirability, especially through race, is Edmund S. Morgan's, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975). Morgan focuses primarily on pre-independence Virginia, but explains that the white colonists of time successfully merged rhetoric of liberty and dignity with pro-slavery belief through a sense of racial desirability that prompted the often quoted summary saying, "at least we're not slaves."

¹¹⁸ "Information relative to...", 28th Congress, 2d. Session, S. Doc. 150; and Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 17.

moderate social standing. Few, if any, came from destitution, or fiscal desperation. They simply saw Africa as the land of hope, Canaan, the Promised Land, home.¹¹⁹

The Americo-Liberians were not escaping slavery, or even blatant racism or disrespect in the United States. In the case of Joseph Jenkins Roberts, perhaps the most prominent, well-known Americo-Liberian of the nineteenth-century, and future president of Liberia, life in America was comfortable. As an octoroon, or one-eighth black, Roberts, along with his mother, Amelia, and several siblings, grew up on the edge of acceptance in Petersburg, Virginia. Though not considered “white,” Roberts attended the local Methodist middle school with white students, and sat in the white congregation of Petersburg’s Union Street Methodist Church each Sunday. During adolescence, along with his friend William Colson, a light-skinned barber, Roberts established a moderately profitable trading company, Roberts, Colson, & Company, in Petersburg, dealing in European and African imports.¹²⁰ By all standards, Roberts was a successful businessman by the time he, and his family, decided to emigrate to Liberia in 1829. But, like many of his fellow Americo-Liberians, J. J. Roberts did not seek safety, or an escape of any sort. Rather, he sought that extra step up in society, into a class denied him in America, into the aristocracy. Thus, it seems, for many Americo-Liberians, of whom Roberts was a good example of the standard, emigration to Liberia served to erase the one descriptor in the way of true cultural and social improvement in America: blackness.

¹¹⁹ Barnes, *Journey of Hope*, 4; Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 22; and *African Repository*, 13, 7 (July 1837): 254.

¹²⁰ Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 154; Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 45; and C. W. Tazewell, *Virginia’s Ninth President: Joseph Jenkins Roberts* (Virginia Beach: W. S. Dawson Co., 1992), 13.

During the late 1820s, and, to a much greater extent, the early 1830s, a new, more diverse population of emigrants flooded into Liberia. With the ACS's manumission campaign picking up along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, and the violent racial backlash of Nat Turner's failed rebellion in Virginia in 1831, emigration to Liberia became less voluntary and more frantic. Throughout Virginia, blacks wrote to the ACS begging for passage out of the United States, while several dozen cautious slaveholders in the Deep South decided to manumit their slaves to Liberia.¹²¹ As a result, the ten-year-old African colony received hundreds of largely illiterate, desperately poor unskilled free blacks and former slaves, many of whom had never lived independently, or even functioned in western society.

The Americo-Liberians, who served as the social link between ACS leadership and the Liberian community at large, used these petrified, confused new arrivals as workmen for the ACS agenda. They sent the former slaves to the outskirts of town, often forming new villages along the St. James and Mesurado Rivers. There the Americas dug the new arrivals into the land, strictly enforcing the Constitution of 1824 and its required "proper maintenance" clause. They then separated the largely illiterate, unskilled free blacks by state of origin, and sent them to live along the Atlantic coast with their former American neighbors, many of whom had established well-developed farms and communities of their own over the past decade.¹²² Suddenly, Liberia was not just a haven

¹²¹ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 17-18; and James Thomas Sabin, "The Making of the Americo-Liberian Community: A Study of Politics and Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1976), 33-35.

¹²² Sabin, "Making of the Americo-Liberian Community," 33-34; Unknown to R. R. Gurley (ACS Secretary), February 1, 1833, *RACS*; and Joseph Mechlin (ACS Agent) to R. R. Gurley, May 15, 1833, *RACS*. Mechlin mentions a settlement of South Carolina

for free black volunteers trying to escape racial oppression, and race-based social boundaries in the United States. Liberia had become what the southern colonizationists had always intended it to be: a colony of removal, a destination for the unwanted and feared, regardless of education and social standing.

By the early 1830s, Liberia had experienced the largest influx of emigrants in its history. Between 1830 and 1833, 1,884 emigrants arrived in the colony, many of which were manumitted slaves or terrified free blacks fleeing an increasingly violent, segregated society.¹²³ The Liberian settlement had grown beyond the borders of Monrovia, into new villages called “New Georgia,” “Caldwell,” and “Millsburg” all along the coast. Liberia had nearly tripled in size, both in population and land. The stellar growth of the colony in the early 1830s brought about two important developments: the active mobilization of the under-classes, both away from and into the Americo-Liberian upper class, and the emergence of dynamic social and political ideology in the settler community.

According to political scientist James Thomas Sabin, “the boom of the 1830’s caught the Society unprepared and unequipped.”¹²⁴ The ACS could no longer keep up with the needs of the new emigrants, who repeatedly appealed to the Society for supplies, food, and tools.¹²⁵ Settler after settler called for social reform, complaining of the lack of fertile land, debilitating sickness, and the ACS’s failure to provide the guaranteed six

blacks along the Atlantic in “prosperous conditions,” but he fears that the South Carolinians will not accept the 400 newly arrived emigrants into their settlement.

¹²³ Shick, “Quantitative Analysis,” 47. Shick shows that the years 1832 and 1833 made up a total of 30.5% of the total emigration to Liberia between 1820 and 1842.

¹²⁴ Sabin, “Making of the Americo-Liberian Community,” 48.

¹²⁵ Throughout the 1830s, emigrants constantly wrote to the ACS begging for provisions, and aid. Much of this sentiment of dependence stemmed from the lack of acceptance the new emigrants met once in Liberia. Their land was poor, their food scarce, and their community unwilling to help, at least in many cases. See *RACS*, 1833-1834, for many such letters.

months worth of provisions.¹²⁶ But the Board of Managers, unwilling to look past the positive financial numbers sent from the colony in 1832, refused to institute needed governmental reforms, or expand settler influence in colonial politics, for six years, creating only a settler advisory council in 1834.¹²⁷

The Americo-Liberians easily filled all the positions on the advisory board. In fact, in 1835, all of the four members of the board were from Monrovia, of extremely light complexion, highly educated (Hilary Teage and J. W. Prout both had college degrees), and had lived in the colony for over a decade. They acted as sycophants to the ACS Agent and Board, rarely challenging an issue or rule unless it threatened Americo-Liberian practices, or traditions. By the late 1830s, the Americo-Liberians had successfully gained control of Liberia proper, shunning the second-class free blacks away from Monrovia, and tying them up with the constant flow of unskilled free blacks and recaptured slaves.

But over the course of the late 1830s and early 1840s, “dangerous” new developments in the Liberian social and political structure forced the Americo-Liberians to alter their plans for control of the colony. In 1839, the ACS Board decided to consolidate all the Liberian settlements into a single “Commonwealth of Liberia” headed by a white Governor and six-man elected Colonial Council. Not only did this new representative government threaten the Americas’ selective oligarchy, it threatened the exclusivity of the Americo-Liberian community as a whole. In an attempt to break into

¹²⁶ There are many examples of frustrated settlers’ letters. See op. cit. 41, and a number of secondary works on the subject. Though not mentioned in the current context, many other sources quote the letters of frustrations, primarily with sickness and poverty.

¹²⁷ *Sixteenth Annual Report*, 5. The report also notes that the Port of Monrovia brought in \$125,000 in 1832, which convinced the Board of Managers that Gurley’s grim outlook for the colony and the Society was false.

the social elite, and separate themselves from the third-class recaptured slaves and unskilled blacks, the so-called “pure Negroes” of the free born second-class started to adopt the dress, accents, and mannerisms of the Americo-Liberian aristocracy. They founded western-style churches in Caldwell, Millsburg, Edina, and Clay-Ashland, ordained their own ministers, and attached the Methodist, Protestant, and Presbyterian names with little sense of meaning or regulation.¹²⁸ When possible, they traveled to Monrovia to take part in balls, speeches, and social activities, walking the broad avenues of the capital in frock coats and evening dresses. Even the third-class recaptured slaves, many of whom had never stepped foot in the United States, started to change their surnames to more “acceptable,” western names, such as Johnson, Williams, Roberts, and Washington. They adopted simplified settler dress, usually a white buttoned shirt and black slacks, learned settler English, and attended church on Sundays.¹²⁹

Within a decade, underclass Liberians began to see each other as a single people again, placed in Africa by divine providence, and charged with a “manifest destiny” to spread American virtue and Christianity into the continent. In the Liberian Declaration of Independence, written, signed, and ratified in the summer of 1847,¹³⁰ the Americo-

¹²⁸ See Park, “White” Americans, 87; and Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, 102-104. Caldwell, Millsburg, Edina, and Clay-Ashland were communities surrounding Monrovia. Emigrants from Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, and Pennsylvania inhabited these towns. They still exist today; as do many of the churches, but some have merged with Monrovia proper.

¹²⁹ J. J. Roberts to William McLain, May 21, 1849, *RACS*. Roberts explains how many immigrants change their names when they arrive in Liberia, “especially when they had born the name of a former master,” or tribe.

¹³⁰ Liberian independence came about as a result of international challenges to Liberia’s right to sovereignty. Because Liberia was the “colony” of a private organization, and not of the United States government, British trading vessels refused to pay anchorage and exportation fees/taxes established by the Liberian colonial government, claiming that the Liberians had no legitimate claim to the coastal area, or the products moving in and out

Liberian authors, including John N. Lewis, Hilary Teage, and J. W. Prout, emphasized the uniformity of the Liberians' communal past, largely ignoring race and status in Liberia. "We the people of the Republic of Liberia," they wrote, "were originally the inhabitants of the United States of North America. In some parts of that country we were debarred by law from all the rights and privileges of men – in others parts, public sentiment, more powerful than law, frowned us down." The authors equated legal slavery with oppressive public sentiment, admitting a difference in previous condition, but promoting unity through a common experience and a shared history. The people of Liberia, the authors made it seem, did everything together, as if the needs of the whole drove the actions of the few. Together they were "taxed without...consent," "compelled to contribute to the resources of a country which gave [them] no protection." Together

of the "colony." Accordingly, the Liberian leadership, then under Americo-Liberian control, with the blessings of the ACS, decided to declare independence in order to force recognition of the ACS's colony. The ACS, through one Professor Greenleaf of Harvard University, provided the Liberian Constitutional Convention with a framed Constitution, which the Liberian delegates amended substantially, largely adding rights included in the American Constitution which Professor Greenleaf originally left out. The Constitutional Convention took place over a four-day period, during which James Lugenbeel, a former ACS Agent and colonial physician, recorded and commented on nearly every debate and amendment. The Constitution and Declaration of Independence were published in the *African Repository* on July 26, 1847, the day Liberia officially declared its independence. Both the Constitution and Declaration of Independence were signed by eleven Americo-Liberian delegates, although around 25 delegates attended the Constitutional Convention over the four day period (this speculative number comes from Lugenbeel's journal of the Convention in which he mentions at least 25 different people speaking, or voting. He mentions many names just a single time.). The Declaration of Independence, which was largely structured around Thomas Jefferson's original, was written solely by Hilary Teage, a light-skinned, college educated, Americo-Liberian who had lived in the colony for over twenty years at the time. See J. W. Lugenbeel to William McLain, "Extracts from my Journal," October 16, 1847, *RACS*. Lugenbeel also wrote a candid letter to McLain a week earlier decrying the "ignorance" of some the delegates. See op. cit. 132.

they “looked with anxiety abroad for some asylum” from their shared “degradation.”¹³¹ And although some of the most well educated and prominent Americo-Liberians drew up the declaration “on behalf of the people of this Commonwealth,” the Declaration of Independence, and the attached Constitution, according to J. W. Lugenbeel, a white doctor who opposed Liberian independence, passed popular ratification with near unanimity and a surprising lack of corruption.¹³² Everyone, both simple Liberians and Americo-Liberians, it seems, recognized a new theoretical meaning to the demonym “Liberian” – the *united, equal* citizens of the first African republic.

Yet class stratification persisted at unparalleled levels. The Americo-Liberians began to rely more heavily on race and skin color, family name and state of origin. Rather than meeting a single descriptor, one had to meet a combination of descriptors. Light skin was no longer enough. One had to have light skin, speak flawless American English, and come from Virginia, Maryland, Washington, D.C., or Pennsylvania to gain full acceptance, or “membership” into the Americo-Liberian elite.¹³³ In reality, by the time Liberia declared independence, Liberian society was just as segregated and divided as in the early 1830s. The difference was the nationalistic sentiment, virtuous republicanism, and utilitarian ethic preached by the Americo-Liberians between the

¹³¹ “Declaration of Independence,” quoted in Huberich, *Political and Legislative History*, 829. The Liberian Declaration of Independence is quoted in many sources. The original manuscript no longer exists. It was published in the *African Repository*, *Liberia Herald*, the *ACS Annual Report* for 1847, as well as a number of American newspapers. The original manuscript seems to have been lost in the last half century, most likely when rebel forces burned the Liberian National Archives in 1996.

¹³² J. W. Lugenbeel to William McLain, October 9, 1847, *RACS*. Lugenbeel, who sat in on the Liberian Constitutional Convention, has extended commentary about the “ignorance” of the framers, and their “sickening” belief that blacks “do not require the assistance of ‘white people’” to establish the foundations of government.

¹³³ See Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic*, 153-154; Starr, *Liberia*, 89-90; and Liebenow, *Liberia*, 59-60.

formation of the Liberian Commonwealth in 1839 and the declaration of independence in 1847, and their specious acceptance of the lower classes into Liberian, or Monrovia, settler society.

The Americo-Liberians played to the free blacks' emigrationist ideological origins. Although the vast majority of Americo-Liberians believed in, and supported, ACS funding and oversight, after the formation of the Commonwealth of Liberia in 1839 they began to refer to Liberia as a "nation of colored people on the soil of Africa, adorned and dignified with the attributes of a civilized and Christian community." In this "nation of colored people," the Americo-Liberians, or, in this case, Hilary Teage, included "the whole people of these colonies, without the exception of a single individual capable of thought." All Liberians, Teage claimed, represented the "imagination" and "lofty aspirations" of an "enduring," successful people. In seeking freedom from the "Anglo-Saxon yoke" together in "[our] father-land," Teage continued, all Liberians were "linked in an indissoluble co-partnership...[from which] each derives and imparts support and countenance."¹³⁴

Teage, and his Americo-Liberian compatriots, created the idea of a joint effort toward a greater, independent future, touching on the same sense of cooperation that saved the colony in the early years after the Sherbro Island disaster. The Americo-Liberians recognized that the growing middle class often felt cheated and forgotten by the ACS, which, by the mid-1840s, was spending more on the Liberian colony than it was

¹³⁴ Hilary Teage, "The Independence of Liberia," *African Repository*, 33, 1 (January 1847): 18. Portions also quoted in Burrowes, "Black Christian Republicanism," 30. Hilary Teage (1805-1853) was a light-skinned black ("pure Negro") member of the Liberian Colonial Council, the first Liberian Secretary of State, and a senator from Monrovia. He is widely considered the ideological father of Liberia, and, along with Edward Wilmot Blyden, one of Liberia's greatest thinkers.

taking in.¹³⁵ During the late 1830s and early 1840s, thousands of letters from frustrated settlers poured into the ACS office in Washington, denouncing the ACS for abandoning the colony. Some even wished to return to the United States, whatever the consequences. Thomas C. Brown, a black South Carolinian who emigrated in 1833, wrote that “Great numbers would like to come back, and had rather suffered slavery than stay in that country and starve.”¹³⁶

Naturally, middle class Liberians who established relatively successful farms and communities outside of Monrovia, as well as those who felt abandoned by the ACS, fell victim to the Americo-Liberians’ rhetoric of racial and national unity. They wanted to be part of the “co-partnership,” accepted into the hidden, selective, aristocratic world of the Americo-Liberian elite. Hilary Teage’s message, which many leaders repeated over the next decade, seemed to reaffirm the settlers’ efforts to adopt the Americo-Liberians’ American values: their dress, speech, arrogance, and pride.¹³⁷ They, the settlers, were suddenly part of something, no longer exiles, or feared half-citizens and slaves. They were Liberians, or so the Americo-Liberians had them believe, and they played an irreplaceable role in a system greater than them all.

¹³⁵ See *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society*, Handwritten, *RACS*, 4-10; Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 161-162; and Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 239-240. In 1846, the ACS had a 13-year-old debt. In 1847, a number of large legacies, including that of John McDonough of New Orleans, the largest single donor in ACS history, lifted that debt.

¹³⁶ *Examination of Thomas C. Brown* quoted in Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 68.

¹³⁷ Over the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, Americo-Liberian leaders would often write for their people, referring to “the people of Liberia and I,” or “we,” on many occasions. See, for example, J. J. Roberts to Samuel Wilkeson, November 12, 1839, *RACS*; and John N. Lewis to Samuel Wilkeson, April 10, 1841, *RACS*. In these letters, both Roberts and Lewis refer to the people of Liberia as “we.”

In essence, the Americo-Liberians were using emigrationism against the settlers. By invoking independence and using the word “nation,” rather than “colony,” or “settlement,” the Liberian leaders maintained the illusion of altruism and virtue at the highest levels of society, as if they too sought the exact same freedom and liberty as the hitherto debarred “pure Negroes.” Joseph Jenkins Roberts, then-governor of the Commonwealth, emphasized this American-style republican virtue in a speech in early 1847. “We [must] remember the indisputable maxim,” he said, “[that] ‘The will of the people is the law of the land,’ and that the government is, or ought to be, instituted for their benefit”; for the greatest form of government, he affirmed, is that “which is capable of producing the greatest degree of happiness and safety” in society.¹³⁸ But that happiness and safety required sacrifice and higher meaning. Unanimity, he admitted, was impossible, and as a result, those “citizens” on the losing side of each decision must recognize the virtue in the selfless acceptance of defeat.

Roberts seemed to merge the self-interested virtue of American republicanism with a sense of utilitarian justification. He was, in essence, explaining to the Liberian people the virtue of losing. Because unanimity was impossible, and the one “indisputable maxim” of government declared the “will of the people” law, the voting majority was inevitably correct, for, if nothing else, it produced the “greatest degree of happiness,” or freedom, throughout society. He appeared to tell the Liberian people to view defeat as a virtue, as a selfless sacrifice for the greater good. In a way, Roberts passed this idea off as self-interest, a self-interest the people could not yet understand, for they lacked virtue

¹³⁸ J. J. Roberts, “Speech to the Ninth Session of the Council,” January 1847, quoted in Huberich, *Political and Legislative History*, 811; and *African Repository*, 23, 5 (May 1847): 148.

and an understanding of the fundamentals of tyranny, which are inspired by lone self-interest.

He was protecting the Americo-Liberian stranglehold on national politics. Opposition was not virtuous. Denunciation of the majority denied virtuous self-interest and the betterment of the community. Yet Roberts's speech opened a door to acceptance as well. By joining the majority, or even simply respecting the majority opinion while maintaining an opposing view, Liberians outside of politics and power could join in the noble work of nation building. In other words, by recognizing and practicing virtuous self-interest, or as de Tocqueville termed it, "enlightened self-interest properly understood," all Liberians – elite and middle-class; light-skinned and dark; educated and ignorant – could participate in the founding of a moral, representative, united, black-run republican government inspired by that of their shared former home.¹³⁹

Roberts spoke from an ideological and intellectual distance, however. He knew, as did the rest of his elite countrymen, that the Americo-Liberian political and social foundation was immovable by the mid to late 1840s. They dominated the governorship, the Colonial Council, and owned the majority of wealth in Liberia. "Don't give up the ship," Roberts wrote in a candid letter to a friend in 1851, emphasizing the "weight and importance" of sustained political presence.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, the Americas started to recede even further into their selective social circle. They established American-style Masonic lodges throughout the settlements, in addition to the United Order of the Odd Fellows, and the Sons of Ham. Like in the early decades of American political and social development, membership in one of these secret fraternal orders was seen, throughout all

¹³⁹ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 611

¹⁴⁰ J. J. Roberts to James Lugenbeel, October 10, 1851, *RACS*.

of society, as the apex of social acceptance and influence, as membership consisted primarily of the wealthy, aged, politically active Americo-Liberian men. They would march down Ashmun Street at the center of Monrovia, in full regalia, from the Government House to the Lodge. They banged on drums, and blew horns, flaunting the benefits and beauty of their new creation as evidence of their social prominence and western cultural connections.¹⁴¹

The top Americo-Liberians naturally held the highest orders within the Liberian Freemason system. In fact, Joseph Jenkins Roberts was named the first Grand Master of the Monrovia lodge, along with all but three of the first ten presidents of Liberia.¹⁴² Though the American Masonic Order did not officially recognize or authorize that of Liberia, the Liberians, as they did with many of their institutions, looked to the American past for authority. “We conceived [that] we had full right & authority [to form the Lodge] with the same impunity that the American masons had, after their Revolution,” Henry J. Roberts, an Americo-Liberian doctor and brother of Joseph J. Roberts, wrote to the ACS in 1851.¹⁴³

On a number of occasions, second-class free blacks made it into the order, but were never allowed to advance far enough to maintain any real power or influence. In all likelihood, the Americo-Liberians organized the Masonic lodge to subvert, or block, the

¹⁴¹ See Johnston, *Liberia*, vol. 1, 357, for a photograph of Liberian Masonic regalia.

¹⁴² See Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 56-58; and “Proceedings of the M.W. Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons,” *Fifteenth Annual Report* (Salt Lake City: Tribune Printing, 1886), 77. The only three presidents who did not hold the position of Grand Master were James Spriggs-Payne, who, as a reverend in the Methodist church, decided that Masonic power would take away from his holy duty; Edward James Roye, the first non-Americo-Liberian president, who was not offered the position, and was later thrown out of office; and James S. Smith, who accepted a non-elected, truncated term after Roye was deposed in 1871.

¹⁴³ H. J. Roberts to J. M. Lugenbeel, October 15, 1851, *RACS*.

advance of the “simple” Liberians. But like their rhetoric of nationalism and virtuous republicanism, the Americo-Liberians projected Masonic membership as a distant, but possible, achievement for all Liberians. Though much remains to be written and learned about the Liberian Masonic order, one can reasonably assume that the Americo-Liberians intended to promote masonry as a new part of a new social structure, and a new Christianity-driven life.¹⁴⁴ In other words, through the Masonic lodge, among other institutions, the Liberian elite created a ring of society that required initiation, rather than simple imitation, to join. One had to fully immerse himself, and pledge allegiance to the western dress, speech, social practice, and Christianity involved in the shared Masonic ritual to gain entrance.

By the late 1840s, as Liberia moved gradually towards political independence, the sense of nationalism and racial unity permeated the whole of Liberian society. The American styles and influences central to elite Liberian society no longer stood at an unreachable distance from the rest of Liberia. Essentially, the Americo-Liberians succeeded in promoting the American Jacksonian notions of self-definition and self-creation.¹⁴⁵ The educated, wealthy elite class was no longer feared; rather, second-class Liberians, especially those of moderate wealth and local social standing, saw the Monroviens as successful Liberian patriots, embodying the dedication to the greater good and the self-interested sacrifice that Roberts and Teage emphasized in their speeches and letters. Simple Liberians no longer imitated Americo-Liberians to escape social

¹⁴⁴ Liberian Masonry is a subject that has all but escaped serious academic study. Though many of the papers and accounts of Liberian Masonry were destroyed or lost during the civil wars, a future study of Freemasonry in Liberia could provide for an interesting discussion of the transference American and Liberian cultural and social influences.

¹⁴⁵ Harris, *African and American Values*, 46-47.

oppression and cultural exile. They tried to be patriotic and proud Liberians, Christians in Africa, civilized blacks in the land of “savage Negroes.” They were part of a people rather than a race, a society rather than a tribe. They were Liberians, not Negroes. And they seemed to have accepted their second-class status, for, they believed, second-class status could turn into first in half a lifetime or less.¹⁴⁶

As members of a civilized Christian society, urban Liberians began to look outside of Monrovia and its surrounding villages, to the “heathen” tribesmen, or “savage” Negroes, of the interior to fulfill their providential mission, their “manifest destiny” to spread civilization and Christianity across the African continent. But the urban Liberians, together with early western missionaries, felt that conversion to Christianity and civilization required a change in lifestyle, physical image, and ideological foundation. The natives, they feared, would regress back to heathenism if left to decipher the meaning of Christian civility and morality by themselves. Accordingly, Americo-Liberian and urban Liberian families organized a system of “apprenticeships” to fully indoctrinate native Africans into Liberian settler society.¹⁴⁷

Established by law in 1838, the apprenticeship system allowed settler families to “adopt” a young “apprentice” from a local ethnic group, or tribe. Often a child, or even

¹⁴⁶ Daniel H. Peterson, *The Looking-Glass: Being a true report and narrative of the life, travels, and labors Rev. Daniel H. Peterson, a colored clergyman; Embracing a period of time from the year 1812 to 1854, and including his visit to Western Africa*, in Wilson Jeremiah Moses, ed., *Liberian Dreams: Back-to-Africa Narratives from the 1850s* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 61-63; Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 154-155; Abraham Blackford to Mary B. Blackford, September 9, 1844, in Bell I. Wiley, ed., *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833-1869* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1980), 21-23; and Robert Leander Sterdivant to John H. Cocke, June 11, 1846, in Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 62-64.

¹⁴⁷ See Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 65-66; and Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 27-28.

an infant, the apprentice was bound to the settler family until the age of 21 for men, and 18 for women. They served, in essence, as indentured servants, legally obliged to stay with and obey the settler family until the apprenticeship ended. The family often sent their apprenticed “son” or “daughter” to the local missionary school, where the students dressed in western clothing, spoke settler English, and learned the fundamentals of national pride, republican values, and Christian morality. In many cases, the child adopted the settler family’s surname, and even took on a more “appropriate” given name.¹⁴⁸ When the apprenticeship ended, the then-Christianized, civilized apprentice had the choice either to marry into settler society, which many did, or return to his or her village to promote the benefits and values of Christianity and western civility.¹⁴⁹

Both Americo-Liberians and middle-class settlers partook in apprenticeships. They often considered it a moral, Christian duty. It was, in a sense, their form of missionary work, a practice that “benefited” the natives, and fulfilled the settlers’ providential mission to Christianize benighted Africa without facing the dangers of the uncharted, undiscovered interior. The practice also gave the middle-class the sense of autonomy and control they had sought since the very beginning of the Liberian experiment. Though under the political and social control of a *de facto* racial-cultural oligarchy, the apprenticeship system, from which recaptured slaves were not immune,

¹⁴⁸ A good example of this is “Prudence Spendlove,” an eight-year-old native orphan whose tribe, or ethnic group, offered her to F. L. Sheridan as an apprentice. Prudence’s original name is not known, but it is certain that “Prudence Spendlove” was not it. See Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 65.

¹⁴⁹ Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 28-29; and Barnes, *Journey of Hope*, 167. Barnes intimates that settler families took on apprentices both for conversion purposes and for cheap, even free, labor. Though he may be correct about the use of apprentices for labor purposes later on in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there is little evidence of that being the case in the mid nineteenth century, as colonial mandate, and later national law prohibited excessive child labor within the apprenticeship system.

gave the skilled free blacks a purpose, a place in a society that had, for nearly thirty years, all but ignored them. They were, at last, the messengers, the emissaries, the representatives of the advanced American culture so long monopolized by the Americo-Liberians. They could wear frock coats, evening dresses, top hats, and pearls with pride, for they had the “authority” to explain what it meant to be Liberian, what it meant to be a civilized black Christian in Africa. They were to be envied, not mocked, listened to, not ignored. They were, so it seemed, “the People of Liberia.”¹⁵⁰

But when the “People of Liberia” declared independence from the American Colonization Society on July 26, 1847, two separate societies, with two different notions of what civility and Christianity meant, existed within the borders of the new Republic. Since the mid 1830s, western missionaries from all over the United States had set up mission houses, schools, and sometimes villages in both settler society and the hinterland. For the first decade or so, most, if not all, western missionaries were educated, ordained white men. Rarely did a black man arrive in Liberia for the specific purpose of missionary work. But after Liberian independence, and on into the 1850s and 1860s, the face of both the missionary enterprise, and the settlers’ relations with the missionaries began to change. As the white men either died, or returned back to the United States frustrated by debilitating sickness and ignorant natives, American missionary societies, most of which represented the Methodist, Protestant, or Presbyterian churches, began to send black “local preachers,” and educated mulattoes to the Liberian front. The societies

¹⁵⁰ See “The Declaration of Independence” in Huberich, *Political and Legislative History*, 829.

believed that the blacks naturally fit better with the African climate and culture, and could thus survive longer and have a deeper impact on the heathens.¹⁵¹

But, in the mid 1850s, when the Liberian missionary enterprise officially shifted from white leadership to black, many second and third class settlers who never forgot the early emigrationists' calling for unrestricted freedom and true racial unity split off from settler society, and joined the black-led missionary enterprises in the interior. As we will see in the next chapter, these frustrated settlers who historian Eunjin Park terms "settler-missionaries," began to organize and challenge the Americo-Liberian hold on Liberian cultural and social definition. Men like Edward Wilmot Blyden, Edward James Roye, John Seys, Alexander Crummell, and even Americo-Liberian leader, and Methodist minister, James Spriggs-Payne, emerged as champions of a new Pan-Negro, racial nationalist ideology within Liberian society. They looked back to the early emigrationist arguments of the late 1810s, and accused the Americo-Liberians of creating a culturally stagnant society poisoned by intra-racial inequality, and class stratification. They claimed that the republicanism and sense of "liberty" upon which the Americo-Liberians forged their declaration of independence and constitution was a commodity controlled entirely by an arrogant, self-obsessed few. "The love of liberty brought us here," they

¹⁵¹ *African Repository*, 13, 1 (July 1837): 218-219. This is an early example of white missionaries proposing a transference of power to blacks due to climate and disease tolerance. The foreign missionary boards took no action for another 10 years at the earliest. This article also examples the situation of white missionaries in Liberia during the mid 1830s. The author is "S. Chase," a white Methodist missionary.

claimed, quoting the new Liberian national motto, but “the lack of money kept us here.”¹⁵²

The settler-missionaries and pan-Negroists, as we shall see in the next chapter, had no objections to the existence of Liberia as a place of escape, freedom, and racial camaraderie. In fact, they remained as loyal to the Liberian experiment as the Americo-Liberians; however, the settler-missionaries, pan-Negroists, and black missionaries, as a whole, criticized, and at times worked to reverse, the style of conversion practiced in Monrovia with regard to the natives, as well as the race-infused social order at work in the capital. They did not reject the idea of “manifest destiny,” or the providential calling to civilize and Christianize the natives. Far from it. They simply followed different definitions of “civility” and “Christianity.” They allowed agency, and ideological independence on the part of the natives. Total indoctrination, they believed, did not convert the soul voluntarily. It allowed no room for interpretation and experimentation. To the black Liberian missionaries of the mid nineteenth century, “liberty” and “freedom” meant the right to experience religion and a simplified, more internal form of civilization through personal experience, rather than forced indoctrination. Apprenticeships, to the missionaries and pan-Negroists, bordered on slavery, and did not convert enough natives to have any reasonable effect on the Negro race, or Liberia as a whole.¹⁵³

¹⁵² This quote is well known, but no one seems to know who said it. See O’Hara Lanier, “The Problem of Mass Education in Liberia,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, 30, 3 (Summer 1961): 259.

¹⁵³ See Chapter III of this work. For an interesting description of missionary establishments in Liberia during the late 1920s and early 1930s, see Graham Greene, *A Journey Without Maps*.

As early as 1837, missionaries both in the United States and from the Liberian field wrote of this new plan for conversion. In a letter from Bolobo, in southeast Liberia, most likely written in late spring 1837, an anonymous volunteer missionary described the value of simplified Christian lessons, and the use of mass conversion through pidgin sermons and short meetings. Defending his use of pidgin sermons, he wrote: “This may seem to some minds as a strange specimen of sermonizing, but so completely ignorant are [the natives] of divine truth, that any other mode of instruction would have been unintelligible and unprofitable.” Though it is altogether unclear exactly what effect the sermon had on the natives, he indicates that the natives paid “gratifying” and “encouraging” attention to “my message.” In fact, he appears proud of his work, as though confident that his message had the desired effect. “The name of Jesus had never before fallen upon their ears,” he wrote. “But now these things were laid open to their minds in language which they could understand and upon authority which they felt no disposition to question.”¹⁵⁴

In the next chapter, we will see a continuation of this type of rhetoric and practice, that which questions the inclusion of external western accoutrements in the conversion of native Africans in Liberia. Although the success of the underlying practice of such fundamental conversion is speculative, the existence of the rhetoric, over a number of decades, and the movement of black-led Liberian missionaries to separate, both physically and ideologically, from the urban Americo-Liberians is clear. After 1875, the year most historians note as the end of the black-led Liberian missionary enterprise, at least 10 black missionaries, most of whom had served for over a decade, remained in the

¹⁵⁴ *African Repository*, 13, 7 (July 1837): 242.

interior. According to records of the ACS and the Methodist Episcopal Church, they remained “itinerant,” preaching outside of defined areas, and claiming no forms of secular jobs. These were, by all accounts, professional missionaries, completely detached from the Americo-Liberian socio-religious structure.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, between the years 1865 and 1892, 34 African Americans marked as “missionaries” emigrated to Liberia from the United States. At least half of this group arrived after 1875, and a third arrived between 1875 and 1885.¹⁵⁶ Historians, on the whole, have ignored the very existence of pan-Negro ideology outside the confines of urban Monrovia, much less the sustained presence of missionaries after 1875 and the emergence of a simplified, pan-Negro style of conversion and rhetoric in the black-led Liberian missionary field after Liberian independence.

¹⁵⁵ See Park, “White” Americans, 202-205. Park is the most direct proponent of the “failed experiment of black autonomy” theory (see Chapter III of this work). He also marks 1875 as the “last year” of the black Liberian missionary force. Also see, *African Repository*, 27, 7 (July 1847): 214-216. This provides a listing of areas, and the number of officially recognized missionaries in each designated area. Each area has a name, such as “Monrovia,” “Greenville,” or “Millsburg.” There is no area, or lack thereof, termed “itinerant.” However, the article mentions white Methodist leaders expressing disdain for “the revivals that have been among the natives.” The leadership clearly did not support, or encourage active Great Awakening-style revivals in the interior, but such revivals seem to have occurred frequently enough for Monrovia-based leadership to find out and form an opinion. This article was also written just two years before the emergence of autonomous black leadership in the Liberian field (for more on this see Chapter III of this work). Also see, Board of Managers, “Minutes,” 1834-1912, Book 12, *RACS*, 119-123; and “Church Records and Registers – Liberia,” Methodist Episcopal Church of New York Records, 1876, Box 304, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, NY. These papers provide a list of every missionary associated with the Methodist Episcopal Church in foreign fields. Ten missionaries, all in Liberia, are marked as “black” and “itinerant” in 1876.

¹⁵⁶ See Peter J. Murdza, Jr., *Immigrants to Liberia 1865 to 1904: An Alphabetical Listing* (Newark, DE: Liberian Studies Association, Inc., 1975), 1-71, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, NY.

Thus, in the following chapter, we will discover that the Liberian missionary establishment did not fail, or collapse, as many historians claim; but neither did it necessarily succeed. It simply transformed and broke off from the Americo-Liberian socio-religious structure. While it did not create black-skinned imitations of the antebellum American South, as the Americo-Liberian system did, it succeeded in mobilizing black missionaries from both the United States and Liberia in the Liberian interior, an area the Americo-Liberians all but ignored. These missionaries, inspired by the rhetoric and leadership of men like John Seys, Edward Blyden, Alexander Crummell, and John W. Roberts, adopted a new form of conversion organized around planting the seeds of Christian thought and morality, along with notions of American freedom, racial nationalism, and self-definition, within a great many native minds. The missionaries simply focused on the internalization of these American-based Christian values, rather than the outward, physical focus of Americo-Liberian conversion.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ The success of these black missionaries in actually converting native Africans is not up for discussion here. Though relevant to an overarching discussion of Liberian, and to an extent, West African missionary experiences, little or no information exists on the actual success rates of post-independence Liberian missionaries. Thus, the focus of the current work is on the existence, activities and ideas of the black Liberian missionary groups, not the number of natives converted to Christianity under their tutelage. The success, or failure, of these missionaries, however, is untouched by intense historical scholarship. A future study would provide much needed insight into this long ignored portion of Liberian history.

Chapter III:

“He be God Who Make all Dis Man, Dem Bush, Dem Tree, Dem Riber”

One of the first buildings ever constructed in Liberia was a church. In January 1821, while the survivors of the *Elizabeth* party sought refuge in Freetown, Sierra Leone, a group of black Virginia Baptists, led by Lott Carey, Colin Teage, and Joseph Langford, decided to unite as a church before embarking on the *Nautilus* a few weeks later. The church the group formed in the United States eventually became the first church ever built in Liberia. They called it Providence Baptist, and completed construction in early 1822 at the center of Cape Mesurado.¹⁵⁸ All of the seven founding members of Providence Baptist were free blacks, four men and three women, from Richmond, Virginia. Working-class and literate, the cohort represented the standard among the *Nautilus* crew, which included both future Americo-Liberian elites, such as Hilary Teage and John J. Barbour, and an elderly former slave named R. H. Simpson who purchased his freedom in 1820 in order to make the voyage.¹⁵⁹ The seven Baptists led the emigrants in prayer, and held church services on Sundays in the stowage quarters. Lott Carey soon became a leader of the *Nautilus* party, as his energetic sermons concerning “the search for freedom,” and the hope that lay in Africa captured the attention and trust of nearly every emigrant. One of the emigrants wrote of Carey’s zeal a few years later. “A sermon which I heard from Mr. Carey,” he wrote in 1828, “was the best extemporaneous

¹⁵⁸ See Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic*, 63; Liebenow, *Liberia: Evolution of Privilege*, 9; and *African Repository*, 44, 3 (July 1877): 81.

¹⁵⁹ “Information relative to...,” 28th Congress, 2d. Session, S. Doc. 150.

discourse I have ever heard; it contained more original and impressive thoughts, some of which are distinct in my memory and can never be forgotten.”¹⁶⁰

Carey was a good example of an early emigrationist as well. Born a slave in Virginia in 1780, and freed in 1807 after converting to Christianity, he looked to Africa as the natural home of American blacks. He saw the Liberian experiment as a worthy cause for racial uplift and African enlightenment, but did not intend to let Liberian governmental authority remain in the hands of the white ACS and United States government agents forever. The American settlers, he believed, were to establish a *black* settlement in their shared ancestral home, and aid their “benighted brethren” with the virtues and practices of western Christianity. “I am an African,” he wrote before leaving for Liberia. “I wish to go to a country where I shall be estimated by my merits, not by my complexion.” He felt “bound to labor for [his] suffering race,” both in America and Africa. But, he affirmed, nothing would come of the Liberian experiment if the United States did not grow to respect the “conduct and character” of the African race.¹⁶¹

Because Providence Baptist was the only permanent settler church in Liberia until 1828, Carey preached to a large portion of the early settler community, regardless of previous denominational allegiance. The church, which doubled as a meetinghouse in the early years of the settlement, was Carey’s pulpit, quite literally. From it each Sunday he preached, infusing political rhetoric, and calls for settler authority and missionary

¹⁶⁰ Anonymous quoted in George Winfred Harvey, *The Story of Baptist Missions in Foreign Lands: From the time of Carey to the present day* (St. Louis: Chancy R. Barns, 1884), 202.

¹⁶¹ Lott Carey quoted in Liebenow, *Liberia: Evolution of Privilege*, 9; Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 109; and Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 69. Also see Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, 93.

ventures, into Bible passages and scripture. In a sermon from early 1822, Carey directly attacked the American Colonization Society, and the United States government for promoting colonization over missionary-minded emigration. “If you intend to do anything for Africa,” he told his new congregation, “you must not wait for the Colonization Society, nor for the government, for neither of these are in search of missionary grounds, but [only] of colonizing grounds.”¹⁶² Carey feared an extended white presence in Liberia. By the nature of his experience in America, he obviously distrusted the white agents, and felt that they could do little for the black population of Africa. Missionary work, and the establishment of a western Christian society in Africa, Carey believed, required racial unity and an escape from the American notion of Negro inferiority.

But Carey also saw little sense in shunning all foreign support from the budding black American settlement in Africa. Although Carey clearly supported the emigrationist side of the emigrationist-colonizationist divide, he gained influence in the colony as an outspoken proponent of cooperation, the idea that Liberia could not grow or prosper without communal sacrifice and compromise. He spoke of the importance of independent missionary work throughout the Liberian colony, as well as settler governmental authority. But, he also spoke, at equal length, of the necessities of survival. “All of us who are connected with the [ACS] agents, who are under public instructions,” he proclaimed, “must be conformed to their laws, whether they militate against

¹⁶² Carey quoted in Miles Mark Fisher, “Lott Cary, the Colonizing Missionary,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 7, 4 (October 1922): 390; also, *Seventh Annual Report of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions* (Philadelphia: Anderson & Meehan, 1822), no pagination, microform, Pullen Library, Georgia State University.

missionary operations or not.”¹⁶³ The colony, he believed, as it stood in the early 1820s, was not strong enough, or organized enough for self-rule. Independence required social structure, a Christian foundation, and a strong sense of purpose and moral leadership. To Carey, the settlement, though capable, lacked both the structure, and the unified purpose, to exist on its own. “I am greatly afraid [foreign oversight] will not end soon,” he wrote to the United States in 1822. “Until there can be a more permanent settlement obtained,...we are bound to the government’s agents,...[and] our labours will be very few.”¹⁶⁴

Lott Carey filled a unique role in the history of both Liberia and American missionary work in Africa. As a “pure Negro,” a former slave, and an emigrationist, Carey did not meet the standard descriptions of early Liberian leaders, most of whom were free born, light-skinned, and strongly supportive of ACS authority and presence. As a Baptist, he represented a church that in the following decades failed to establish a meaningful presence in Liberia. And as a self-proclaimed missionary, he placed the virtues and standards of Christian thought ahead of the cultural imitation and social expansion advanced by the Americo-Liberians of later years. But Carey was also a pastor, a man of God, and a brilliant speaker. He was passionate about his people, his race, and his religion. He was outspoken, but rational, opinionated, but willing to compromise for the betterment of the community. According to a memorial printed after

¹⁶³ Carey in Fisher, “Lott Cary,” 390.

¹⁶⁴ Carey quoted in J. B. Taylor, *Biography of Elder Lott Cary, Late Missionary to Africa* (Baltimore: Armstrong & Berry, 1837), 29.

his death, Carey “exhibited a boldness of thought,” and a sense of leadership “which no acquirement could ever have given him.”¹⁶⁵

But the extent of Carey’s influence in Liberian settler society as a whole is unclear. Though many scholars see Lott Carey as a leader in early Liberian history, his untimely death in 1828 stopped him from having any serious influence on Liberia’s immediate future.¹⁶⁶ After his death, the Americo-Liberian minority took hold, forming a meritocratic racial oligarchy that dominated Liberian society unopposed for nearly thirty years. As a result, emigrationist ideas, along with pan-Negroism, and clerical autonomy, became tools of the ruling class, and lost nearly all meaning until Liberian independence in 1847. Western churches, too, did not arrive in Liberia in any meaningful numbers, as we will see, until 1833, when the Methodists established their first church and missionary post.

If anything, Carey’s influence was latent and indirect. His legacy held more meaning than his actions. In later decades, many settlers looked back at Carey’s work with reverence, proclaiming him the person to whom the colony was “indebted, more than any other man.”¹⁶⁷ But it was not until the emergence of black-run churches in Liberia that Carey’s legacy had any great influence. In a sense, Carey was the first

¹⁶⁵ “Brief Memoir of Rev. Lott Carey,” *Missionary Register*, 17 (November 1829): 481.

¹⁶⁶ Nearly every work on Liberian and African missionary history mentions Carey as an early Liberian leader. Although Carey was a visible character in both the history of Liberian leadership and society, most scholars fail to recognize his lack of immediate impact. He is often lauded for leading the successful defense of the colony against an attacking native force. But this action could have been out of necessity, and has little to do with social and religious leadership outside of wartime. See Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, 93-94; and Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 96-97, to name a few.

¹⁶⁷ Samuel Wilkeson, *A Concise History of the Commencement, Progress and Present Condition of the American Colonies in Liberia* (Washington: The Madisonian Office, 1839), 38.

settler-missionary, the first public figure who in action and thought saw Liberia as a black Christian nation, who supported black-led missionary work, and civilization through Christian ideas, not western images. In many ways, he was the ideological frontrunner, some thirty years removed, for what Edward Wilmot Blyden, John Seys, John W. Roberts, and Alexander Crummell, among others, proposed in the 1860s and 1870s, and what defined the Liberian social, cultural, and religious dichotomy of the following century. The evolution of American churches in Liberia is the key to understanding how and why Carey's emigrationist ideology, and pan-Negroist motivations remained dormant, and misrepresented, for so long.

After Carey's death, religion in Liberia became part of the Americo-Liberian social structure. Although Providence Baptist remained active, and Christianity, in general, remained a major fixture in the lives of almost every settler, settlers stopped using the church as a political forum, a meetinghouse, and social center. The cooperative effort that Carey, and the growing Americo-Liberian leadership promoted took hold of the colony. But the effort focused on society building and organization, rather than racial unification and expansion through Christianity. Leaders, such as Jehudi Ashmun, the white former Baptist priest who left America to engage in coastal African trading, and Nathaniel Brander, a mulatto member of the *Elizabeth* party and later one of the two candidates for the first Liberian presidency, emphasized Christianity as the unifying foundation of the nascent Americo-African society, not the driving force. "My confidence in the great Christian foundation is steadfast and unshaken," Ashmun wrote to the United States in August 1828. "[We are] building on this foundation," recognizing the "love of Christian brotherhood, unfeigned." To Ashmun, who served as ACS agent

from 1824 to 1828, the Liberian experiment gave American blacks the chance to grow both as individuals and a race. But this growth was not self-imposed. The settlers needed oversight, and education in the fundamentals of white Christian morality, before they could expand into the African continent to spread the word of God, or even exemplify the very standards with which they sought to indoctrinate the natives.¹⁶⁸

Ashmun's "great Christian foundation," it seems, took the place of active church membership.¹⁶⁹ Although American church leaders and white visitors to the colony continuously wrote of Africa's potential for missionary work, the rhetoric, and writing did not crystallize into action until much later, in the late 1830s and early 1840s. As a result, Liberian society during the late 1820s and early 1830s relied on emotional religion and outward piety – that is, an emphasis on the external images and appearance of Christian enlightenment and character, as well as consistent invocation of the gospel and divine presence in Liberia's success. Temperance organizations, for example, flourished in the early settlement as a reaction to the natives' "love of rum," and some colonists' "clandestine" consumption of the "ardent spirits."¹⁷⁰ Nearly every report and letter from Liberia spoke of the providential journey of the Negro back to Africa, and the settlers' divine assurance that their experiment would succeed. In a simple letter to his former

¹⁶⁸ See Ralph Randolph Gurley, *Life of Jehudi Ashmun, late Colonial Agent in Liberia* (Washington: James G. Dunn, 1835), 60, 91, 388-390.

¹⁶⁹ There is no evidence that indicates the existence of a large congregation at Providence Baptist, or any other makeshift community church, during the late 1820s and early 1830s. While rhetoric of providential destiny, and divine action became commonplace in speeches, letters, and reports, discussion of church-related matters, or active church organizations in Liberia drastically decreased after 1828. See *African Repository*, vols. 4-10, with emphasis on the "Latest from Liberia" section; and *RACS*, Incoming Letters, boxes 6 and 7, 1821-1833.

¹⁷⁰ *African Repository*, 6, 4 (June 1830): 101; and *African Repository*, 6, 11 (January 1831): 333.

master, Richard McMorine of Elizabeth City, North Carolina, expressed his trust in Liberia's providential success. "It is a new Country," he wrote, "[and] it is hard to live in all new Countrys at first,...[but] God did not make a country for the man of collar [*sic.*] where he could not live."¹⁷¹ In similar fashion, Robert Mechlin, in a letter back to the ACS Board, wrote that he was "taken by the Great work in which [the settlers] are engaged."¹⁷²

In spite of the "Christian foundation" and professed Christian morality at work in the settlement, Christianity did not expand into Liberia as planned. In fact, during the five years between the death of Lott Carey and the arrival of the first official western missionary in Liberia, the settlers founded just one quasi-permanent church in the colony: the First United Methodist Church of Liberia (1828), which lacked a permanent home and organized congregation until 1832.¹⁷³ During that same period, the expansion of Christianity into the hinterland took the form of hapless agrarian settlements on the outskirts of Monrovia inhabited by newly arrived free blacks and former slaves. Unlike the earliest settlers, these free blacks and manumitted slaves were, in many cases, literally forced by their white masters to emigrate, or drawn to the ACS by deteriorating racial conditions in the United States.¹⁷⁴ As a result, the settler expansion out of Monrovia,

¹⁷¹ Richard McMorine quoted in Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 185.

¹⁷² Robert Mechlin to R. R. Gurley, May 15, 18[33], *RACS*.

¹⁷³ The history of the First United Methodist Church of Liberia is largely a mystery. Few scholars even take note of its existence. The few that mention it do so only in passing and with little detail. It is not mentioned in the *African Repository*, settler letters, or reports of the Methodist Church in Liberia. The only two scholarly works that specifically mention the church are Dunn, et. al., *Historical Dictionary of Liberia*, 229, which refers to the church as "Union Church of Liberia," and Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, 102, which provides 1832 as the year the "First Methodist Church" was completed.

¹⁷⁴ See Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 17; Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic*, 72.

however modest, lacked an active sense of community. The Americo-Liberian leadership, and the strict regulations of the 1824 Constitution forced the new arrivals to work at building homesteads, and food supplies before any real communal unity could occur.¹⁷⁵ Thus, a number of new, semi-organized settlements sprouted up around Monrovia in the late 1820s and early 1830s, but very few new churches formed. However, changes in the American religious landscape during the 1830s served as the catalyst for Liberian religious and social growth over the next few decades, as well as the foundation for a quasi-revolutionary populist racial and clerical movement in Liberia some twenty years later.

In the early 1830s, America's national churches experienced a reorganization of sorts. Instead of the wandering evangelicals of the early nineteenth-century, the Methodists, for example, according to historian Daniel Walker Howe, "erected church and chapel buildings" for the first time, creating a "conventional ministry...[of] local clergy." They began to focus on education, and looked to expand the ranks of the middle-class, rather than "skilled artisans and small farmers." Most importantly, as the Second Great Awakening reached fever pitch, the Methodists, as well as nearly every major denomination in the United States excepting Baptists, started holding "revivals" throughout the nation. But unlike the revivals of earlier decades, which differentiated between specific groups according to educational level, race, class, and gender, and

¹⁷⁵ As mentioned in the previous chapter, the 1824 Constitution required settlers who accepted ACS land to build a wood-framed house and plant sufficient crops within six months of their arrival in Liberia. Failure to do so most often resulted in confiscation of land, fines, or even apprenticeship. See Amy DeRogitas, *Moral Geography: Maps, Missionaries, and the American Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 2-4, 155; Huberich, *Political and Legislative History*, 319-320; and Sabin, "making the Americo-Liberian Community," 33-34.

focused on smaller numbers of people in general, the revivals of the early 1830s, were, in Howe's words, "remarkable for embracing 'all sorts and conditions of men.'" The pastors of permanent congregations reached out to slaves, women, and children, educating them in the gospel and Christian ethics. They emphasized individual worth, agency, and self-value, regardless of social position, or education. They promoted a new "personal identity" as Christ's child, or, in the case of blacks, accepted members of God's people, rather than American southern society.¹⁷⁶

At the same time, American churches sent the first official white missionaries to Liberia, and established the first officially recognized western churches in the colony. The Methodist Episcopal Church (M.E.) led the way in 1833, with the short-lived white missionary, Rev. Melville B. Cox. In 1834 the Presbyterian Church completed its first permanent structure in Monrovia, and, in 1836, the Protestant Episcopal Church (P.E.) followed suit.¹⁷⁷ Of the initial three churches in Liberia, the Presbyterians and Methodists had the most influence on the Monrovia community.¹⁷⁸ Almost immediately, the small band of white missionaries, both men and women, founded religious schools, and built permanent churches in Monrovia and the surrounding areas.

¹⁷⁶ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 179-188; and Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 197-200.

¹⁷⁷ See Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, 102-103; Oldfield, "Protestant Episcopal Church," 31; Park, "*White*" Americans, 19-20; and Beyan, "Socio-Religious Characterization," 2. Beyan provides dates that are different from the other works. The corresponding citation in Beyan's work, Harry Johnston's *Liberia*, vol. II, 353-376, however, does not provide the same dates as Beyan's text. The dates provided above correspond to those most common in existing literature. Though not discussed in this work, the Roman Catholics, who had little influence throughout West Africa, and especially Liberia, arrived in Cape Mount, north of Monrovia, in 1841.

¹⁷⁸ The Protestants first arrived in Cape Palmas, an independent settlement far south of Monrovia founded by the Maryland Colonization Society in 1834.

Much like American-based Methodist groups at the time (which they called “conferences”), the first Methodists in Liberia focused almost entirely upon educating the settlers in Christian morality and skilled labor.¹⁷⁹ Caught up in the missionary spirit and humanitarian fervor of the Second Great Awakening, Melville Cox, who lived at the Maine Wesleyan Seminary before traveling to Liberia, started planning his work for Liberia nearly two years before his departure. He planned to found a “properly *academical* primary school” for both “the Africans and the Americans.” The purpose of this school, which he planned to build in Monrovia, was to aid the settlers in the work of creating a “Christianized and civilized” society, while implanting the “*habits*” of Christianity into the “pagan” minds of “the Africans.”¹⁸⁰

Cox’s plans for Liberia, however, were nothing short of quixotic. Cox, it seems, tried to transplant the revival-style mass conversions of America’s Great Awakening to the small, American settler enclave on the coast of Africa without considering the disparity between the settler and native cultures. He, like many other white missionaries in Liberia during the 1830s and 1840s, expected the indigenes to seek out western education and Christianity. Because of this, the church, and Christianity in general, would expand centripetally, as the fusion of the settler and native cultures, through the “*academical* primary school,” would, in theory, grow to create a single well educated, and skilled Christian society. But like most early white missionaries, Cox failed to recognize the history of Liberia’s ethnic groups, or the power of the nascent settler

¹⁷⁹ See Park, “*White*” Americans, 21-22.

¹⁸⁰ Melville B. Cox, *The Remains of Melville B. Cox, late missionary to Liberia*, edited by Gershom F. Cox (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1839), 232; also see Henry John Drewal, “Methodist Education in Liberia, 1833-1856,” in Vincent M. Battle and Charles H. Lyons, eds., *Essays in the History of African Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970), 36.

standards. Few of Liberia's native ethnic groups had any meaningful interaction with white, or black, Christians before the settlers arrived.¹⁸¹ The Mandingo and the Vai, for example, who occupied the area northwest of Monrovia spanning the Liberia-Sierra Leone border, had been devoted Muslims since the mid-sixteenth century. The Gola, on the other hand, who inhabited a western portion of Liberia spanning the Liberia-Guinée border, did not operate a coastal trade, and thus had little or no exposure to foreign religions or cultures in general.¹⁸²

As a result of Cox's misperception, and that of American missionaries in general, the first missionary schools in Liberia seemed to reverse the notions of self-worth, agency, and unified Christian individualism promoted through Jacksonian America's Great Awakening. The schools, in essence, served as mass apprenticeships. Centered in Cape Mount, a few miles north of Monrovia, the first missionary school in Liberia, founded by the Methodists in 1834, attracted significantly more settler children than natives. Much like apprenticeships, the Methodist teachers, most of whom were white women, feared the "problem of 'pagan' influences on students," and required native children to don the western clothing, and speak the American English of the settlers. The school day, and the length of tenure differed drastically between settler and native children. The sons and daughters of settlers attended school from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M., five days a week, and returned home each day after class, and on weekends. Natives, on the

¹⁸¹ The use of the word "native" is not intended to imply that these groups had always lived on the Grain Coast (modern Liberia). In fact, very few of these groups have a history on the Grain Coast before the sixteenth-century. See Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 1-6; Jo M. Sullivan, *Settlers in Sinoe County, Liberia, and their Relations with the Kru, 1835-1920* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1978), 69-71.

¹⁸² See Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 82-90; Teah Wulah, *The Forgotten Liberia: History of Indigenous Tribes* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, Inc., 2005), 33-34, 52-53.

other hand, lived at the school, and attended classes with the settler children. After 2 P.M., the native children spent much of their time learning a skill, such as farming, weaving, or carpentry.¹⁸³

The length of education was generally four years for both settlers and natives. However, as of 1838, when colonial law first established apprenticeship contracts, Methodist, and Presbyterian schools would not accept a native boy or girl without procuring legal custody of the children through an “indenture,” or apprenticeship, with the parents.¹⁸⁴ In many instances, the white female missionary teachers would accept native children into their homes in order to immerse the students “immediately and entirely to the habits and customs of civilized society, in dress and everything, as are the children of the colonists.”¹⁸⁵ Later in the decade, and on into the 1840s, the “indentures,” or apprenticeships extended far beyond four years. In fact, in 1843, the Methodist, Presbyterian, ACS, and Americo-Liberian leadership in the Commonwealth decided to merge the system of apprenticeships with that of the growing number of missionary schools throughout the settlement. After the four year educational term, the schools offered the healthiest, and most intelligent, native children to settler families for apprenticeship work, and further immersion into Liberian society. As a result, a large

¹⁸³ See Gurley, *Jehudi Ashmun*, 356-357; *Sixteenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States* (Washington: James G. Dunn, 1833), 6-8; *Christian Advocate and Journal*, 12 (1838): 34-35; and Drewal, “Methodist Education,” 40-43.

¹⁸⁴ “Missionary Department,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, 24, 32 (1850): 126; and “Protest,” *Christian Reflector*, August 3, 1838, 2-3. This “Protest,” signed by such names as William Wilberforce and John Clapham, asserts that the ACS’s plan for the “abolition of slavery [is] altogether delusive” because of apprenticeships, and “colored people” practicing the same “persecution” that made them emigrate in the first place.

¹⁸⁵ *African Repository*, 29, 7 (July 1853): 202; Drewal, “Methodist Education,” 42; and *African Repository*, 13, 7 (July 1837): 246.

number African male students, who often entered missionary schools around the age of 14 years, spent nearly eight full years in the hands of Americo-Liberian families, or under the watch of white Methodist and Presbyterian ministers and teachers.¹⁸⁶

Although the Second Great Awakening in the United States attracted American churches to the forgotten portions of the American population, and led to the preservation of self-worth, agency, and Christian acceptance of even the most degraded groups of people, the ideas simply did not translate to the white-led Liberian missionary field of the 1830s and 1840s. Though inspired by the same rhetoric of revival, education, uplift, and empowerment as their American colleagues, the first wave of white Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries to arrive in Liberia engaged in practices strikingly similar to those of the growing Americo-Liberian elite. They spoke of racial uplift, and Christian brotherhood, intellectual equality, and the revivification of an enlightened culture darkened by paganism. Yet, the mission schools seemed only to promote Americo-Liberian, and by proxy, Southern American cultural hegemony in the Liberian settlements. Missionary teachers did not simply implant the “habits” of American Christianity into the native children’s minds, as Melville Cox had planned in 1831. They forced total indoctrination through legal “indenture,” apprenticeship, and immersion. Through the missionary schools of the 1830s and 1840s, the settler and native cultures did not fuse together atop a Christian foundation. Rather, the dominant Americo-Liberian system of cultural imitation, and latent Christianity, simply absorbed the few

¹⁸⁶ See George R. Stetson, *The Liberian Republic as it is* (Boston: A. Williams & Co., 1881), 18; Park, “*White*” *Americans*, 106. Park discusses the “indenturing” of a female student after the term of education elapsed. Also see United States Bureau of Manufactures, “Liberian Law of Apprenticeship,” *Monthly Consular and Trade Reports* (1904), 127-129, Library of Congress; and “Missionary Department,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, 24, 32 (1850): 126.

native children who successfully completed the term of study, and “accepted” them into settler society as third-class “pure Negroes,” and “Congo children.”¹⁸⁷

The reason behind the exploitation of native youths in the name of Christian conversion, and moral, and intellectual, uplift was, by nature, racial. In the United States, even at the height of the Second Great Awakening, the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches refused to ordain black preachers, pastors, and priests. Blacks stood in the church hierarchies as part-time “local preachers,” and, at best, deacons.¹⁸⁸ Though, in Daniel Walker Howe’s words, open to “all sorts and conditions of men,” the churches did not shed racist sentiment, and race-based prejudices altogether. Just like in the United States, the white clerical rhetoric of human value, individualism, and worth, in Liberia, only went so far beyond the common norms. Though the mission schools of the 1830s and 1840s provided a relatively valuable education to some native children, that education required immersion into a new, completely different social environment, complete with new dress, new speech patterns, and a new racial identity.

To the indigenes who left their native groups to join the settler schools, the Americo-Liberians and white missionaries occupied the same dominant social strata. They were light-skinned, well spoken, intelligent, and in charge. As pupils, and apprentices, the natives, from the very beginning, stood as listeners, not speakers, followers, not leaders. They were told what to think and do, how to dress, how speak,

¹⁸⁷ Americo-Liberians often referred to recaptured slaves, and “converted” natives as “Congoes,” because they assumed the slaves originally inhabited the Congo River area. See Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 72; and J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 84. Oddly enough, in more recent times, Americo-Liberians have become known as “Congo people.” The origin of this switch, however, is unclear.

¹⁸⁸ Park, “*White*” *Americans*, 47-49; and James E. Kirby, Russell E. Richey, and Kenneth E. Rowe, *The Methodists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 103-104.

and what to believe. First the missionaries, then the Americo-Liberians, imbued the native children with a sense of innate inferiority, for they were, it seemed, victims of an uneducated, benighted, backward society, believers and practitioners of barbarism, paganism, and false beliefs. Like the recaptured slaves, the Liberian social leaders believed, the average native's lack of an American experience hindered his, or her, ability to fully accept and understand the standards of Liberia's American social order. His dark skin, they assumed, also made it difficult for him to learn the correct syntax of American English, the virtues of Christian morality, and the western origins of Americo-Liberian political ideas.¹⁸⁹

Suddenly, the natives were black, "Negroes," and "Congoes." For the first time, at least in a social sense, the natives became aware of their skin color, and the conceived values inherent to it. Of course, many local Liberian ethnic groups had interacted with European slavers, traders, explorers, and, in some cases, missionaries before, but in all previous cases, the native groups were the providers of a product, be it slaves, camwood, or palm oil. Never had the interaction focused on total indoctrination and immersion into a new social structure and class, based largely upon shared cultural history and race.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ See *African Repository*, 13, 7 (July 1837): 246-247; Charles S. Johnson, *Bitter Canaan: The Story of the Negro Republic* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press, 1987), 86, 94, 131-133; Joseph Mechlin to R. R. Gurley, May 15, 1833, *RACS*; and Joseph Jenkins Roberts, "First Inaugural Address," in Guannu, *Inaugural Addresses*, 2-7.

¹⁹⁰ Many of the central ethnic groups did not operate coastal trade, and thus had little or no interaction with Europeans, or white people in general before the settlers. Other groups, many of which operated slave trading posts near the Sierra Leone and Côte D'Ivoire borders, had sustained relations with white European traders and missionaries. These groups often fought with muskets, and had metal tools, but maintained traditional social and cultural values. See Wulah, *The Forgotten Liberia*, 13-17; Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 3-5.

Like the Americo-Liberians, the white Methodists and Presbyterians believed that Christianity and civilization – that is, the imitation of America’s wealthiest classes – went hand-in-hand, as two parts of one whole. They believed in white intellectual superiority, while rhetorically, they promoted racial equality at every level. In many ways, the arrival of white missionaries, and the establishment of an official religious culture and structure in Liberia helped to maintain Americo-Liberian dominance. White missionaries and light-skinned Americo-Liberian leaders often worked together, as seen in the apprenticeship supply line created in the early 1840s, to structure Liberian society in a way that both strengthened Americo-Liberian, and clerical, social and political power, and blinded the under-classes to the reality of the situation – the seemingly endless illusion of possible class mobility, and the repeated retrenchment of Americo-Liberian values.¹⁹¹

Americo-Liberian, ACS, and missionary leadership in the 1830s and 1840s often overlapped. Of the eight official colonial agents, or governors, of Liberia between 1830 and 1848, all but two were openly pious and/or members of the clergy.¹⁹² Men such as John B. Pinney, and Ezekiel Skinner, two white Methodist Reverends, oversaw both the Liberian colonial government, and actively participated in the church’s missionary organization in the colony.¹⁹³ Public schooling, which the ACS Board established in the

¹⁹¹ See Chapter II of this work for detailed examples of both illusions of mobility, and Americo-Liberian retrenchment. Citations for specific examples are provided. This retrenchment, however, has escaped serious academic study outside of the current work.

¹⁹² See Christian Abayomi Cassell, *Liberia: History of the First African Republic* (New York: Fountainhead Publishers, 1970), 411.

¹⁹³ Teah Wulah, *Back to Africa: A Liberian Tragedy* (New York: AuthorHouse, Inc., 2009), 227; also see James Fairhead, Tim Geysbeek, Svend E. Holsoe, and Melissa Leach, eds., *African-American Exploration in West Africa: Four Nineteenth-Century Diaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 41-43.

colony as early as 1827, quickly shifted to church-run religious schooling, as white missionaries started to build more and more schools throughout the settlements.¹⁹⁴ Seeing the increase of white female missionary teachers in the settlement, and the growing number of mission schools inside and outside of Monrovia in the mid-1830s, the ACS Board, in 1833, decided to cut all funding from the public school system, and dedicate the funds to improving the public structures of the colony, such as the storehouse, government house, and roads.¹⁹⁵

The reasons behind the Board's actions, though not specifically cited in the resolution, seem relatively clear. The Liberian public schools no longer benefited Americo-Liberian society by the mid 1830s. At the time, the Americo-Liberians, who controlled Liberian social and ideological norms, as well as class structure, wealth, and commerce, began to send their children to the mission schools, so they could learn the Christian values of America from white missionaries, rather than the semi-literate black

¹⁹⁴ See "Foreign Intelligence," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, 2, 10 (November 1827): 39; and Drewal, "Methodist Education," 34-35.

¹⁹⁵ See Board of Managers, "Business Papers," Proceedings and Minutes, 1816-1833, Book 10, *RACS*, 35. ACS public schools, based on the business records of the ACS, existed for no more than five years, and all but ceased to exist after the establishment of a stable missionary school system both in Monrovia and its surrounding areas. ACS public schools do not show up in any record after December 1834. See Drewal, "Methodist Education," 36-40; Board of Managers, "Business Papers," Minutes, 1834-1847, Books 11 and 12, *RACS*; and Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 23. Gershoni asserts that the "state of Liberia was unable to provide schools even for its Americo-Liberian citizens." If we know that ACS public schools existed, and were attended by settlers between 1827 and 1834, then Gershoni's statement insinuates that no public school system existed after the collapse of the ACS public school system, and thus missionary education became the standard form of education in the colony, and republic. It thus seems as though the ACS public schools were not a function of the Americo-Liberian mindset, for at the first opportunity, the wealthiest, most socially and politically elite Americo-Liberians transferred their children to the missionary educational establishment.

teachers of the public schools.¹⁹⁶ In addition, ACS schools focused almost entirely upon scriptural studies and agrarian skills, while the settler curriculum at the mission schools, which differed from the native curriculum, focused on philosophy, theology, mathematics, American English, and history. Similar to the United States, the wealthiest Liberians sent their children to the best schools, while the lower classes of society had to settle for the second-class education, and, in Liberia's case, agrarian skill training and scripture. But during the 1830s and 1840s, few second and third class settlers could spare their children's labor, or the time and money necessary to send children off to Monrovia each day, or board them in the city. As a result, the Americo-Liberians, in sending their children to the mission schools, and abandoning the public institutions, effectively changed the nature of Liberian education, and helped define missionary ideology and practice in Monrovia and the surrounding areas.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ See Park, *"White" Americans*, 43-46; and Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 32-33. Both of these works provide a good summary of the educational backgrounds of the black, Liberian settlers and teachers. They both explain how teachers in the colonial schools were rarely completely literate, and had little or no formal education. The literate, well-educated Americo-Liberians preferred more professional jobs, such as politics, trade, commerce, and investment in land, to early educational jobs.

¹⁹⁷ We must remember that the settlers lacked much political autonomy during the 1820s and early 1830s. The Liberian Constitution of 1824 remained in effect until 1839, and the settlers only received rights to an elected advisory council in 1834. In addition, western missionaries did not arrive in Liberia in any meaningful number until around 1833, with the arrival of Melville B. Cox and the American Methodist missionary convention. As we saw in Chapter II, dynamic political and social ideology did not effectively surface in Liberian society until the early 1830s as well, around the time of the missionaries' arrival, and the creation of the elected advisory council. The ACS public schools, it would thus seem, indicate little regarding the educational, religious, and cultural values of the Americo-Liberian settlers if they did in fact collapse after 1834 as the record shows. They only seem to indicate the beliefs of the ACS Board, and the poorly educated, ACS-appointed teachers, who were largely middle class, and, in all likelihood, darker-skinned. See op. cit. 194 and 195. Also see Chapter II of this work.

In the early 1840s, however, portions of the Liberian missionary establishment began to notice, and organize against, the social, and political disparity at work in the Monrovia area. John Seys, the white superintendent of the Methodist mission in Liberia at the time, and an outspoken adherent of the emigrationist cause, started looking to the black population of the United States to fill empty missionary positions in the field.¹⁹⁸ Seys believed, as Lott Carey believed, that blacks should convert blacks, and that the white system of superintendency and leadership served the sole purpose of establishing an organized structure for a future black-run system. To Seys, the inclusion of white missionaries in black Africa both threatened the autonomy of the black settlers, and erased any separation from slavery and white authority that had grown in Liberian society. He recognized the problems with the status quo of the missionary enterprise. Though black missionaries existed in Liberia before the 1840s, the American churches did not recognize them as official representatives of the church, and thus did not pay them a salary, or give them any form of benefits. Yet these missionaries ventured out into the interior, spoke at native villages, and traveled “up rivers and creeks at their own expense to teach their brethren and neighbors the way to heaven.”¹⁹⁹

These missionaries were largely second-class, dark-skinned, semi-literate failed farmers who, after failing to properly maintain their allotted land, took to missionary

¹⁹⁸ There was an extremely high death rate among white missionaries in Liberia. For example, Melville B. Cox died within 11 months of arriving in Liberia, and Henry P. Baker, a prospective male teacher, died within three months. Malaria, or the “African Fever,” caused most deaths. See Park, “White” Americans, 198-199 for a list of all white Methodist missionaries sent to Liberia, and their dates of arrival and removal (i.e. death). Also see Clegg, *Price of Liberty*, *passim* for an in-depth discussion of Liberian death rates.

¹⁹⁹ Quote from *African Repository*, 11, 5 (May 1835): 155; also see Park, “White” Americans, 127-130.

work to fulfill their perceived Christian “destiny.”²⁰⁰ Recognizing the misrepresentation, and unfairness inherent to the missionary and governmental systems, Seys, along with some volunteer missionaries and two fellow white missionaries, Dr. S. M. Goheen, and Jabez Burton, wrote an anti-government pamphlet that challenged the authority of the white-run ACS governmental structure, and its refusal to involve dark-skinned blacks in the workings of both the government, and the missionary enterprise.²⁰¹ They attacked what they called the “oppressive regulations” of the white government and Americo-Liberian-led council. They challenged the honesty of the settler elite, and the validity of their alleged Christian moral foundations. Most importantly, they questioned the meaning of missionary work, and freedom in general, if a section of the host population is debarred from active, recognized participation.²⁰² Such rhetoric “astounded” men like Joseph Jenkins Roberts who, as a member of the highest Americo-Liberian circles and a pious Methodist layman, viewed the “false and malicious” accusations as insults, and threats, to the “chaste, sober, and honest” people of Liberia. They incited riot, and social

²⁰⁰ See Fairhead, et. al., *African-American Exploration*, 18-20; Dunn, *Episcopal Church in Liberia*, 47-48; and see *African Repository*, 13, 7 (July 1837): *passim*. There are many references to dark-skinned black missionaries both embarking for, and already existing in, Liberia as early as 1837. Semi-literacy is based on a) the lack of extant letters from these volunteer missionaries, and b) statistics given for the social class these volunteers appear to have populated. For such statistics, see Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 32-33.

²⁰¹ See J. J. Roberts to Samuel Wilkeson, April 6, 1841, *RACS*; John N. Lewis to Samuel Wilkeson, April 10, 1841, *RACS*; Wesley Johnson to Samuel Wilkeson, December 2, 1841, *RACS*; Unknown to Unknown, Unknown date, #15, box 154, *RACS*; and

²⁰² No copies of the original pamphlet remain in American archives, or publications. Portions of the pamphlet were printed in *Africa's Luminary*, September 4, 1840, 47. It is mentioned specifically in a number of settler letters to the ACS. See *op.cit.* 42. Francis Burns, the first official black missionary to Liberia, wrote of Seys's angry, impassioned sermons in letter to the ACS from 1841. See Francis Burns to Samuel Wilkinson, April 2, 1841, *RACS*. Also see George S. Brown, *Brown's Abridged Journal, Containing a brief account of the life, trials and travels of Geo. S. Brown* (Troy, NY: Prescott & Wilson, 1849), 148-149.

unrest, Roberts claimed, and threatened the very foundations of Liberian society, and the hope for freedom that brought all Liberians to Africa. If such “dangerous insinuations...[are] the facts,” Roberts concluded, “I bid adue [*sic.*] to Liberian Liberty.”²⁰³

In essence, the members of the “Missionary Party,” as Seys and his followers came to be known, were the first to promote clerical voluntarism in the Liberian colony, an idea that, in less than a decade, would catalyze a racial separatist movement in the new republic, and split Liberian society for the next century, or more. Far from Joseph Roberts’s fears, the missionaries did not seek to abolish all connections with the ACS, or the United States in general. Rather, they sought clerical autonomy, freedom to enter the interior and spread the “light” of God’s word to the native inhabitants. The system of stationary mission schools, and total immersion into Americo-Liberian society, was not working. It converted too few souls in too long a time. Itinerancy was key. Christianity, according to Seys and the black missionaries, would have no impact on the African continent if teachers, missionaries, and preachers remained engulfed by the regulations, culture, and norms of Monrovia, and the distant white leadership.²⁰⁴ The Methodist church, and the colonial missionary enterprise in general, *required* black-led authority over a black-led missionary force which focused on mass conversion to Christian thought, not western social and cultural standards shrouded in Christian education.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ J. J. Roberts to Samuel Wilkeson, April 6, 1841, *RACS*.

²⁰⁴ See “Need of an Itinerant Missionary,” *African Repository*, 13, 7 (July 1837): 247.

²⁰⁵ See Park, “White” Americans, 136-141; Liebenow, *Quest for Democracy*, 89; Liebenow, *Evolution of Privilege*, 10-11, for background on the “Missionary Party’s” stance.

In late 1841, white leadership in Liberia ended. Following the death of Thomas Buchanan, the last white governor of Liberia, in September 1841, the ACS Board appointed Joseph Jenkins Roberts the first black governor of the commonwealth.²⁰⁶ Some six years later, on July 26, 1847, the Liberian people, in a declaration to the American Colonization Society, announced the independence of the Republic of Liberia, and elected Roberts its first president. At last, it seemed, the emigrationist cause was complete. White leadership had collapsed. The Americo-Liberians began preaching of Liberian and racial nationalism, republican virtue, and standards of equality and freedom. The Liberian elite also seemed to recognize the value of all Liberian people, opening the settler standard to citizens of lesser means. There was no reason, it seems, for Seys and his followers to continue their fight against white-led oppression.²⁰⁷

But although the dispute between John Seys and the colonial government fizzled out after Roberts became governor in 1841, the ideas first posited by Lott Carey, and revived by John Seys, remained latent in the minds of Liberia's black missionaries and second-class thinkers. By the time of Liberian independence, a number of disgruntled Liberian settlers, mainly from the under-classes on the frontier, had fled the Monrovia area, joining both the Methodist missionary groups in Monrovia's surrounding villages, and the largely distant and autonomous Protestant enterprise located in the independent settlement of Maryland, south of Monrovia.²⁰⁸ Out of this under-class migration grew a

²⁰⁶ Louis Sheridan to ACS Board, September 10, 1841, *RACS*.

²⁰⁷ It is unclear exactly why John Seys and his followers stopped their campaign. No one was arrested, and John Seys, after leaving for Sierra Leone in 1841, returned to Liberia a year later to a warm welcome from the government. Thereafter, Seys is not mentioned in any Liberian publication, letter, or report.

²⁰⁸ J. J. Roberts to William McLain, January 7, 1848, *RACS*. Roberts mentions an "unusual" number of settlers leaving "a tract of territory on the Sinoe River, opposite the

new sense of racial identity, and Christian consciousness in the new African republic, largely disconnected from Americo-Liberian ideological influences.

In what historian Eunjin Park describes as “the failed experiment of black autonomy,” the Methodist Board of Foreign Missions granted the Liberian Missionary Convention full autonomy in 1849, more a reaction to numerous white deaths than recognition of black competence, or capability.²⁰⁹ Autonomy gave the now black-led missionary corps the freedom to enter the interior, rather than remain at mission schools and urban centers. Almost immediately, Methodist and Protestant leaders began preaching of black nationalism, Christian unity, and the importance of itinerancy in the field. Similar to America’s Second Great Awakening some twenty years earlier, leaders such as Alexander Crummell, John Payne, Edward Wilson, and John W. Roberts, mostly black, educated, American-born ministers, promoted mass conversion on a basic level. No longer did missionary leaders crave total indoctrination, or immersion into an American-style social order. Recognition of the fundamentals of Christianity, on the natives’ part, was enough to “lift” them out of “paganism.” They saw mass conversion – that is, the preaching of a single missionary, or small group of missionaries, to a large group of natives over a short period of time – as a way to “enlighten” many natives with a simple understanding of Christian thought. They thought, however correctly or incorrectly, that mass conversion, pidgin sermons, and simplified lessons, would allow

Mississippi settlement.” He feared that they had left to live with the “colored people of the free state,” i.e. Maryland in Africa, the main settlement of the Protestant Church. Also see J. W. Lugenbeel to William McLain, October 9, 1847, and July 15, 1848, *RACS*.

²⁰⁹ See Park, “*White*” *Americans*, 153-154.

the natives to teach themselves the values of Christianity, without the personal one-on-one guidance of permanent missionaries.²¹⁰

As a result, the then-autonomous missionary conventions in Liberia, as well as individuals who fled the “oppressive” Americo-Liberian oligarchy in Monrovia, traveled in small groups throughout the Liberian countryside, preaching to entire villages for a day, or even a few hours, and then continuing on to the next stop, repeating the process over and over throughout the year. Speaking in symbolic terms, a missionary named Cyrus Hamlin wrote to the *Literary and Theological Review* as early as Spring 1837 about the prospective reasons for such simplified, moralistic conversion: “[The missionary] may not penetrate the mines of [the natives’] mountains and bring up from their buried deeps the gold and gems of commerce and civilization; but he may penetrate the mines of [their] moral darkness, and bring from thence the gem of an immortal spirit.”²¹¹

In like manner, newly arrived missionaries, and some missionary leaders, wrote both of the existence of racial separatism, and the need for simplified conversion practices in Liberia, some 20 years after Hamlin. In 1857, David Wilson, a Presbyterian missionary who arrived in Liberia from St. Clair, Pennsylvania, in 1856, wrote former

²¹⁰ Mass conversion took away the personal aspect of Americo-Liberian conversion. Because the natives had less interaction with black missionaries, who often preached to large numbers of natives, and left the village shortly thereafter, they were often left to decipher the meaning of Christianity, and its teachings, on their own, or with friends and relatives. Mass conversion, to use a somewhat modern comparison, worked in much the same way as high student-teacher ratios work today. For an interesting, though very short, mention of high student-teacher ratios in Liberia, see Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 55.

²¹¹ See *African Repository*, 13, 7 (July 1837): 242-243; “Need of an Itinerant Missionary,” *African Repository*, 13, 7 (July 1837): 246-247; quote from *Literary and Theological Review*, 4, 14 (June 1837): 145.

Liberian missionary Leighton Wilson: “You are not unaware that a strong jealousy of the white man...[prevails] in this country.” He went on explain that a number of missionaries in Liberia, primarily the most outspoken “victims” of this “jealousy,” refused to “conciliate” the Monrovia-based political and religious establishment, who seemingly opposed the machinations of the black missionary force, “at the expense of truth or principle.”²¹²

That same year, another missionary, Edward Williams, who during the first few months of his arrival worked in Monrovia, preaching to settler children, described the reasons for his late recognition that the interior held more “hope and progress” than the urban, Americo-Liberian capital. He focused on native conversion to “Gospel principles,” claiming that the intense bible studies, and “deliberate,” forced cultural “distractions” of apprenticeships and old missionary schools, denied native conversion on “God’s own time.” In essence, he became frustrated with the seemingly fruitless depth and intensity of Americo-Liberian indoctrination, and defected to the more mobile, simpler revival-style conversion practices of the black-led missionary enterprise.²¹³

Such missionaries likewise looked to weaken missionary ties to the Americo-Liberian government, as many leaders felt that the Liberian government had abandoned both the under-class “pure Negroes,” and the natives as a whole. Moreover, although the

²¹² See David A. Wilson to Leighton Wilson, January 14, 1857, Records of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, microfilm reel 65, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, NY (hereafter, *PBFM-S*). Also see, Susan Wilds McArver, “‘The Salvation of Souls’ and the ‘Salvation of the Republic of Liberia’: Denominational Conflict and Racial Diversity in Antebellum Presbyterian Foreign Missions,” in Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *North American Foreign Missions, 1810-1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 156.

²¹³ Edward T. Williams to Leighton Wilson, July 15, 1857, *PBFM-S*, mf reel 65; also see *ibid.*, 159-160.

historical record is all but silent regarding the actual success of these detractive groups, and the degree to which the natives latched to the simplified sermons and teachings, the rhetoric of contemporaneous leaders, when combined with the Hamlin's, Wilson's, and Williams's statements, as well as other earlier calls for itinerant missionaries and reform in the Liberian field, allows us to reasonably infer that the Liberian missionary system did not necessarily "succeed" in the 1850s, 1860s, 1870s, and beyond, but it did not necessarily "fail," or altogether "stop," either, as we will see more clearly in the next few pages. "I cannot write the glowing reports of the nation and of the people and condition and prospects of the Republic which many people do," Alexander Crummell, a dark-skinned, New York-born Protestant minister, tellingly wrote in 1853. For, he claimed, "political partisanship," and racial inequality were "unseemly, distracting and despiritualizing" to a nation founded on liberty and freedom.²¹⁴

Crummell, along with a number of other missionary leaders, believed that the Americo-Liberians had lost Christianity as a guide for civilization, and society. They had become "idolatrous," according to Crummell. The Americo-Liberians, like the leaders of the Roman Empire, Babylon, and Egypt, had fallen to "decadence and luxury," spoiled by the materials that separated them from their subjects, the "luxury [that] cloy and enervates," destroys and corrupts.²¹⁵ They worshiped fine clothes, and drink, and food, and speech, while preaching of temperance, virtue, and acceptance. They were, in the eyes of Crummell, Payne, and even Roberts, Joseph Roberts's brother, "as low and rude" as the pagan natives. The difference, however, was that the Americo-Liberians were too

²¹⁴ See Alexander Crummell, "God and Nature," in Alexander Crummell, *The Future of Africa: being addresses, sermons, etc., etc. delivered in the Republic of Liberia* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1862), 151; also Moses, *Crummell*, 93-94.

²¹⁵ Crummell, *Future of Africa*, 154-163; *ibid.*, 94-95.

far gone to return from their track of corruption and idolatry, while the natives, they believed, awaited Christian enlightenment and knowledge.

Soon, both the Protestant and Methodist missionary enterprises were hiring educated blacks from the United States, and settler-missionaries from the Monrovia area to enter the Liberian missionary field. They built churches and stations at the furthest reaches of settler land, in Clay-Ashland, Edina, Greenville, and Cuttington.²¹⁶ They traveled distances of 40 miles or more, over a number of days, to hold palavers with the native chiefs, and to preach to native villages. Importantly, they simplified sermonic rhetoric, either translating scripture directly to a native language, as they did with the Kpelle and Vai of western Liberia, or speaking in a heavily accented, simplified pidgin English.

With this came simplified, more accessible lessons. Rather than focusing on the triune Godhead, theories of transubstantiation, the immaculate conception, and other theoretical and metaphysical ideas taught in both settler schools and the United States, the new black missionaries spoke of simple creation; a single, omnipotent, benevolent God; angels, rather than the native “devils,” or *gree-grees*; Jesus as God’s son, rather than one part of a single God of three parts; and the unity of man through Christian faith. “He be God who make all dis man, dem bush, dem tree, dem riber,” they told the native villagers. “First time, no one man lib to dis world. Den God, he make one man and one

²¹⁶ See Dunn, *History of Episcopal Church in Liberia*, 12. All of these towns contained churches built during the late 1830s and early 1840s when the second-class settlers started to mimic the first-class Americo-Liberians. In some cases, the official Methodist and Protestant churches claimed these churches as church lands, in other cases, the official churches simply built new structures. In Cuttington, to the far north of Monrovia, the unified Protestant and Methodist mission station, built in 1854, later became Cuttington College, the oldest private university in Sub-Saharan Africa.

women. Dat man and dat woman go hab pickenniny, and dem pickenniny go hab more gen; bomby de world cum up full people.”²¹⁷

Though it is unclear whether or not Liberian pidgin English was any more effective than standard American English, the importance lies in the effort. The itinerant missionaries had entirely abandoned the Americo-Liberian notion of complete Christian conversion. Modesty in dress, correctly accented English, and even correct religious terminology gave way to a simple knowledge of Christian fundamentals. The missionaries came to see their work as a constructive process, adding to what the natives already knew and believed. In 1860, Edward Wilmot Blyden, perhaps the best known and most respected of the early pan-Negro thinkers, wrote of the Liberian mission field as “constructive rather than destructive.” The missionary, he asserted, “has nothing to demolish; he only has to arrange his materials and proceed to build.”²¹⁸ Through the seeds of Christian thought planted by the itinerant missionaries, the natives, Blyden believed, would learn to integrate Christian ethics and symbols into their normal lives, eventually growing into an enlightened, proud, universally recognized people.

To thinkers like Blyden, Crummell, Payne, and Roberts, the Americo-Liberians, as well as white European and American missionaries, acted on an inherently racist foundation, as if lightness of skin defined one’s intellectual capability, and gave him or

²¹⁷ This quote comes from an account of a volunteer missionary in 1837. See *African Repository*, 13, 7 (July 1837): 242-243. Liberian pidgin, however, is documented to have developed through missionaries, as late as the early twentieth century. See John W. Frazier and Eugene L. Tettey-Fio, *Race, Ethnicity, and Place in a Changing America* (Binghamton, NY: Global Academic Publishing, 2006), 146-147; also see Ian F. Hancock, “English in Liberia,” *American Speech*, 49, 3/4 (Autumn-Winter 1974): 225-226.

²¹⁸ Edward Wilmot Blyden, “Hope for Africa,” in *Liberia’s Offering, being Addresses, Sermons, etc.* (New York: John A. Gray, 1862), 24; also see Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 73.

her the right to claim Christianity as a form of racial property. To the Americo-Liberians, Europeans, and Americans, “the African mind is regarded as a great blank, or worse than a blank, filled with everything dark and horrible and repulsive,” Blyden wrote in his canonical work, *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race*. “Everything is to be destroyed, and replaced by something new and foreign.” But that “new and foreign” idea, Christianity, Blyden claimed, “has seemed to be the property exclusively of the European branch of the human family, ... being for the most part confined to one or two races.”²¹⁹ In order to break the Indo-Europeans’ unwarranted monopoly over Christian ideals and standards, Liberian missionaries, and African missionaries in general, had to adopt a heuristic approach to conversion, and free Christianity from the constraints of western social and cultural standards. “Let the boys and girls in the schools eat the simple, wholesome food of their country,” he wrote. “Let them wear the clothing of their country made in the best style, clean and neat, that in the process of their training they may not receive the impression that the external accidents of European civilisation are the essentials of Christianity.”²²⁰

Missionaries, according to Blyden, should likewise avoid secular jobs and politics altogether, both in Monrovia and the interior.²²¹ In essence, Blyden, as well as Crummell, believed that racial hegemony, and Christian thought, should define Liberia as a nation, rather than a partial imitation of western culture, and an enormous native population oppressed and degraded by those western imitators, all of whom represented,

²¹⁹ Blyden, *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race*, 66, 277-278.

²²⁰ Blyden quoted in Dunn, *Episcopal Church in Liberia*, 112.

²²¹ Blyden, *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race*, 280. Blyden explained that secular values, and interest, causes one to “seek material aggrandizement at any cost,” and relegates the “human soul – the immaterial – [to] secondary and subordinate importance.”

through ancestry, the very same Africa upon which they made their homes. Christianity, and western standards of society building, and technology, for example, were blessings of divine import, according to Blyden, Crummell, and the black missionaries of the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s; however, such blessings did not define Liberia, or its people. Racial unity, preferably through Christianity, should define Liberia and its people. To Blyden, those missionaries, and blacks in general, focused on the internalization of Christian faith and morality, embodied “the ardent and enlightened love of liberty” that the Americo-Liberians wrote into their declaration of independence, but subsequently forgot.

The “love of freedom,” and the right of self-definition, and self-help, as well as the right to be black, or African, and not oppressed, and degraded, defined the ideal Liberia to Edward Blyden, Alexander Crummell, and their second-class and missionary pan-Negro followers of the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s.²²² Of course, the Americo-Liberians remained in Monrovia, Buchanan, Robertsport, and other settler enclaves, imitating the United States in speech, dress, custom, and religion. They claimed to be a nation of civilized Christians, infusing religious rhetoric and divine providence into notions of republican freedom, and individual liberty, embodying the national motto: “The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here.” But as journalist William Powers writes, “The coast was the extent of the consciousness of the black aristocrats.”²²³ They ventured into the interior only to establish political control over the hinterland, and its people, thus

²²² Blyden, “A Chapter in the History of the African Slave Trade,” in *Liberia’s Offering*, 164-165.

²²³ William Powers, *Blue Clay People: Seasons on Africa’s Fragile Edge* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 43.

satisfying the demands of the international community and the 1884 Berlin Conference.²²⁴

But somehow Christianity continued to grow in Liberia throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, reaching 31 percent of the population by 1982.²²⁵ Based on the reclusive nature of the Americo-Liberian population in Monrovia, and the lack of Americo-Liberian settlements in the interior, as well as the failure of many mission schools after 1875,²²⁶ one can reasonably assert that the Liberian mission field, though split between two sparring ideologies, did not in practice, or intent, fail. In fact, with the arrival of Blyden-esque Arkansan missionaries in the 1890s through the newly arrived, pan-Negroist African Methodist Episcopal Church, the missionary movement in Liberia, though much different from the original enterprise of the 1830s and 1840s, continued with itinerancy, and fundamental conversion, rather than total indoctrination.²²⁷

Thus, a failure of purpose, at least on a structural level, did not define the Liberia mission field. It took on a new form, a new constitution, and a new set of values. It took the Jacksonian notion of self-definition out of its American, “civilized” context, and placed it in the African interior, something the Americo-Liberians never did.²²⁸ Though

²²⁴ Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 33-35; M. B. Akpan, “Black Imperialism: Americo-Liberian Rule over the African Peoples of Liberia, 1841-1964,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 7, 2 (1973): 227-230.

²²⁵ David Lindenfeld, “Indigenous Encounters with Christian Missionaries in China and West Africa, 1800-1920: A Comparative Study,” *Journal of World History*, 16, 3 (September 2005): 354. According to the CIA World Fact Book (2010), 40 percent of Liberia’s population, in 2009, was Christian in one form or another.

²²⁶ Park, “White” Americans, 107-108.

²²⁷ Barnes, *Journey of Hope*, 108-122.

²²⁸ Thomas C. Hendrix, “A Half-Century of Americo-Liberian Christianity: With Special Focus on Methodism, 1822-1872,” *Liberian Studies Journal*, 19, 2 (1994): 243-274. Hendrix mentions the existence of Jacksonian ideas in Americo-Liberian society, and religion; however, he, like so many other historians, fails to mention, or discuss, Seys,

founded on Christian morality, and faith, the Liberian missionary enterprise, under men like Edward Blyden, Alexander Crummell, John Seys, and Edward Williams, and David Wilson, who largely abandoned denominational standards, in the 1850s and 1860s, allowed for a racial, or populist, nationalism, rather than a political and cultural nationalism. To be Liberian was to be a black man or woman living in the arbitrary borders of the Liberian Republic. Civilization meant a basic understanding of Christian faith and ethics, not the donning of silken top-hats, and membership in the Liberian Masonic Order. In this way, the post-Blyden, post-Crummell Liberian missionary system fell to the historical wayside, as it did not produce any tangible change in the lifestyle of the average native, and thus eluded substantial statistical coverage for over a century. Of course, some natives who imbibed “God’s word” through missionary work went back to their original “benighted,” “pagan” practices and beliefs after the missionaries left, but at least a few retained the latent standards of Christian thought, and continued to practice Christianity in native form. Although the few extant numbers may be small, the fact remains that the black-led missionary enterprise, though weakened and forgotten by its contemporaries and historians alike, did not altogether cease, or fundamentally fail, after 1875 and the departure of Blyden, Crummell, and nearly every other ideological missionary leader in the 1870s. Black missionaries existed in Liberia almost continually for its entire history, and the years between 1875 and the arrival of Arkansan pan-Negro missionaries in the 1890s, are no exception. And either way, of the 31 percent of Liberians who claimed to be Christian in 1982, 2 percent, at most, were Americos,

Crummell, or Blyden at any length, thus falling into the same group of scholars who fail to recognize the importance, or existence, of Jacksonianism in the Liberian interior, and the continuance of Liberian missionary work into and after the 1870s. Katherine Harris’s, *African and American Values*, makes a strikingly similar claim.

leaving 29 percent of Liberia's population, or some 597,000 people, practicing Christianity outside the Americo-Liberian ethnic structure.²²⁹

²²⁹ Liberian population in 1982 from United Nations Corporate Document Repository, *Liberia*, ILCA Mongraph Series (Addis Ababa, 1992). At the time, only 2 percent (41,000) of the Liberian population was of Americo-Liberian descent. In 2009, that population had increased to 2.5 percent (86,000), with 40 percent (1.3 million) claiming to be Christian. The population of Monrovia, Liberia's only real city, in 1982 was estimated at around 200,000.

Conclusion

The Republic of Liberia, and the settlement that produced it, remained culturally American. Until the outbreak of civil war in 1980, the presidents of Liberia, save one, and many members of the country's legislature, were either born in the United States or were direct descendents of settlers from the United States. Although only 2.5 percent of the Liberian population descended from the emigrants of a century or more earlier, the power of that past withstood the test of time. The current president of Liberia, and the first democratically elected president since 1971, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, is a descendent of the Gola people, with no ethnic connection to the Americo-Liberian elite. But she has written of Liberia's trust in the United States and the two nations' shared history. "We were anxious but not frightened," she recalled of the social upheaval preceding the 1980 civil war. "Like most Liberians,...we always felt that if anything really terrible began to happen, if ever things went seriously awry, America would come to our aid. America was our great father, our patron saint. It would never let us suffer."²³⁰

Even after 120 years of independence, Liberia had established little more than an American-style republic on the west coast of Africa, one kept alive by a series of multi-million-dollar loans from the United States government and the construction of the largest rubber plantation in the world by America's Firestone Rubber Company. The Liberian flag, designed after that of the United States, contains eleven red and white alternating stripes, and a single white star on a blue field; John F. Kennedy Memorial Hospital serves as the main hospital for the Monrovia area; the Independence Obelisk at

²³⁰ Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, *This Child Will Be Great: Memoir of a Remarkable Life by Africa's First Woman President* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 64.

the heart of Monrovia's Centennial Pavilion includes the names of Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster among the founders of the Liberian republic; and Robertsfield International Airport, built by the American government during World War II as the United States Air Force's hub in Africa, has served Liberia's sizable tourist population for decades.²³¹ Thus, there is little wonder why average Liberians, like Zubin Cooper, a Liberian journalist who lived in Monrovia both before and after the wars, saw Liberia as part of the United States. "We consider ourselves a 51st state," he told a film crew shooting a documentary in 2003. "But maybe it's a one-sided thing."²³²

The Americo-Liberians of the 1830s and 1840s brought the same idea to their fabricated American culture. America was, as President Sirleaf described it, their "patron saint," their "great father," the homeland from which they borrowed their national, cultural, and racial identities. They were members of the "religion of the top hat and frock coat," as Sir Harry Johnston described in 1906. They marched down the central avenues of Monrovia in full Masonic regalia, playing independence songs such as "All Hail, Liberia, Hail," and waving the Liberian star-spangled banner. They separated themselves physically and socially from the under-classes, developing private social orders, like the Masons, and restricting social acceptance to those capable of maintaining

²³¹ Robert Earle Anderson, *Liberia, America's African Friend* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 164-166; and Liebenow, *Liberia: Quest for Democracy*, 56-68. For a detailed discussion of Liberia's deal with the Firestone Company, and emergence of neo-slavery in the Republic, see Johnson, *Bitter Canaan, passim*, and Ibrahim Sundiata, *Brothers and Strangers: Black Zion, Black Slavery, 1914-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

²³² Zubin Cooper, in *Liberia: An Uncivil War*, DVD, directed by Jonathan Stack and James Brabazon (Gabriel Films, 2004). Also see, John Shattuck, "Close Relationship to U.S. Did Not Help Liberia Much," *The New York Times*, August 7, 2004.

the western style of dress, speech, and deportment. In essence, they were American before they were Liberian, and Liberian before they were African. They existed in a time warp of sorts, donning the high fashions of the 1830s and 1840s well into the 1890s and 1900s. They placed a value on skin color, ancestry, and outward appearance, lauding those who most approximated the character of the white American upper crust, the planters of the Deep South, the politicians of Washington, D.C., and the socialites of Virginia. On a number of occasions, the natives, the people of the under-classes, and the “pure Negroes” who lived life on the outskirts of Americo-Liberian society referred to the Americo-Liberian aristocrats simply as “Americans,” or “white-men.”²³³

The story of America’s founding emerged, over a half-century later, in the story of Liberia’s founding. Joseph Jenkins Roberts’s first inaugural address, the first speech delivered in the independent Republic of Liberia, placed the settlers of the *Elizabeth* party in an American historical context, recalling the group as a “mere handful of isolated Christian pilgrims, . . . inspired by the love of liberty and equal rights.”²³⁴ Just like the founders of the American republic, the people of the Liberian republic built their nation on a foundation of natural rights, individual worth, and personal freedom. In the Liberian Declaration of Independence, the American-born authors stated clearly that the people of

²³³ See Graham Greene, *A Journey Without Maps* (1936 reprint; New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 75-79. In this vivid, true travel account, written by one of the prominent English novelists of the 1930s, Greene explains how, even in the mid 1930s, the ethnic peoples of the interior still referred to Monrovia as the “American city.” He also expresses shock over the lack of racial segregation, and social stratification, in the interior compared to Monrovia. Remembering a visit to Bolahun, a missionary village to the northwest of Monrovia near the Sierra Leone-Liberia border, Green wrote: “I was for the first time unashamed by the comparison between white and black.” Also see Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 110-112; Fairhead, et. al., *African-American Exploration*, 18-19; and J. W. Prout to R. R. Gurley, November 12, 1839, *RACS*.

²³⁴ Roberts, “First Inaugural Address,” in Guannu, *Inaugural Addresses*, 2.

Liberia “were originally inhabitants of the United States of North America,” escaping that land in search of a “favorable change,” the hope of which was “wholly extinguished” in their original home.²³⁵

The leading Americo-Liberians used the language of acceptance, republican virtue, sacrifice, and individualism that emerged after America’s “Revolution of 1800,” and again during the Jacksonian era of American politics some two decades before Liberian independence. In essence, they shrouded the racially stratified reality of Liberian life with the populist rhetoric of America’s changing political landscape. While maintaining a dominant social position in Monrovia and other settler enclaves, Liberian political and social leaders coaxed some members of the underclass into accepting the status quo, promoting a notion of self-definition, and individual freedom – the idea that hard work, and sacrifice at the time could create a better life in the future. They were all, light-skinned Americas and “pure Negroes” alike, part of a theoretical “nation of colored people on the soil of Africa, adorned and dignified with the attributes of a civilized and Christian community.”²³⁶ Members of the under-classes could, in theory, work hard enough, at least on the basic levels of personal appearance and lifestyle imitation, to enter the ranks of the Liberian elite. Thus, at least in theory, individual agency defined the Liberian social structure. A common purpose, a unifying dedication to freedom and liberty, bound the people of Liberia to each other and to their shared American cultural experience.

²³⁵ “Declaration of Independence,” in Huberich, *Political and Legislative History*, 829.

²³⁶ Hilary Teage, “The Independence of Liberia,” *African Repository*, 33, 1 (January 1847): 18; also quoted in Burrowes, “Black Christian Republicanism,” 30.

But the Liberian people, as a whole, as well as those in America who supported the venture, recognized the difference between rhetoric and reality. They realized that the Americo-Liberians spoke of equality and promoted a sense of nationalism that included the whole of Liberia's citizenship, yet operated under an assumption of social and racial value that contradicted that equality and nationalism, giving rise to a racially stratified social structure within the self-proclaimed "Black Republic."²³⁷ Thus, many Liberian citizens, and a number of American supporters, looked back to the lofty aims of men like Paul Cuffe and Thomas Jefferson, who saw Liberia as a chance for true black independence. Whatever the motives of Cuffe and Jefferson, they both promoted the idea of emigration as an escape for black people, a chance at honest survival and a sovereign existence. Much like Lott Carey, almost a decade after Cuffe and Jefferson, and John Seys, nearly two decades after Carey, these original *emigrationists* of the early 1810s laid the foundation for a continuous, albeit relatively weak, pan-Negro movement that remained active for nearly a century and a half.²³⁸ They viewed Liberia as a safe haven for North American blacks, an organized society devoid of racial prejudice or a race-based social structure. They, in general, distrusted white support and oversight, challenging the widely held notion that blacks *required* white instruction to exist on their own, in any capacity. As Lott Carey expressed in a sermon in 1822, the ACS and United

²³⁷ The original Liberian Constitution, which remained active from 1847 until the ratification of the Second Liberian Constitution in 1984, dictated that "none but Negroes or persons of Negro descent shall be eligible to citizenship in this Republic." In like manner, the Constitution restricted property ownership to citizens, disallowing the private holding of property by non-blacks. See Section V, Article 12 and 13 of the "Liberian Declaration of Independence and Constitution," all of which is reprinted in Huberich, *Political and Legislative History*.

²³⁸ Robert Finley and Samuel J. Mills were also part of this original emigrationist group.

States government sought to maintain control of the Liberian settlers through a colonial venture, run and controlled by white Americans, not black Liberians.²³⁹

But Carey also understood the importance of compromise and cooperation between those seeking unmolested freedom, and those capable of assuring the success of that freedom. The ACS and United States government could not simply abandon Liberia in the early 1820s, Carey asserted, as the settlers lacked the wherewithal to sustain an independent colony. They needed people, money, and safe relationships with the native peoples to survive on the world's frontier.²⁴⁰ But Carey died in 1828, long before he could establish a following strong enough to challenge the growing Americo-Liberian aristocracy, the majority of which strongly supported ACS oversight and US government aid.

In like manner, Lott Carey's death appears to represent the end of a unified historical narrative of Liberian history. Over the past few decades, historians have failed to provide a solid interpretation of Liberia's social and historical growth following Carey's death. Two specialized schools have emerged, one focusing primarily on Americo-Liberian social structure, and the evolution of Liberian settler society as a whole, and the other studying the growth of white-led Christian churches in Liberian settler society.²⁴¹ With the exception of one publication, Katherine Harris's *African and American Values*, historians have all but ignored the evolution and growth of the

²³⁹ Fisher, "Lott Cary," 390.

²⁴⁰ See Chapter III of this work for more on Carey. Also see, Taylor, *Biography of Elder Lott Cary*, 29; and "Brief Memoir of Rev. Lott Carey," *Missionary Register*, 17 (November 1829): 481

²⁴¹ This does not insinuate that these are the only two schools of Liberian historical scholarship. Rather, it simply suggests a dichotomy in the study of Liberian national identity, and racial, and religious, culture.

emigrationist-colonizationist split, and its important function in the continual instability of Liberian society. Although men like Edward Wilmot Blyden, John Seys, and Alexander Crummell have received some serious scholarly attention, their individual roles in the promotion of anti-Americo pan-Negroism have fallen by the wayside. What scholarship does exist on the topic tends to focus on the actions of the individuals, restricting any ideological discussion to the context of those actions. For example, of the two biographies that exist on Edward Wilmot Blyden, both focus more on the disparity between Blyden's actions and theories, as well as his education and activity in Monrovia political life, than his theoretical writings on theology and race, and his effect, through these writings, on Liberia's historical narrative.²⁴² In like manner, historians have fused Crummell's actions, as well as those of Seys, with the two men's respective racial and theological theories, failing to discuss the impact those theories had on the course of Liberian social and racial history during and after their lifetimes.²⁴³

²⁴² See Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, and Thomas W. Livingston, *Education and Race: A Biography of Edward Wilmot Blyden* (San Francisco, CA: The Glendessary Press, 1975). Both biographies provide good research, and a solid narrative of Blyden's life, as well as his important role in the evolution of Liberian political life. They work best in tandem, as Lynch provides a better discussion of Blyden's pan-Negro sentiment, and the evolution of his racial beliefs, while Livingston provides, as apparent from the title, a better discussion of his professional life, and his views on African-American, and African, education. Livingston's work is much more objective than Lynch's, yet both fail to detach Blyden's actions from his words. They both see Blyden's activity in Monrovia political life as a nullification of his theoretical writing, and do not look into how his writings played a role in the apparent dichotomy between a growing pro-black, Christian Liberian interior, and an increasingly reclusive, Americo-Liberian run urban Liberia.

²⁴³ Though not as bad as Blyden, both Crummell and Seys lack complete historical treatment. See Wilson, *Crummell*, for the best, most complete discussion of Crummell and his American legacy. Wilson succeeds in including Crummell's extensive work in Liberia, but fails, overall, to clearly define his role in post-independence Liberian racial culture and social history. Crummell is mentioned, sometimes at length, in a number of other publications, but never more meaningfully than in Wilson. See Dunn, *History of Episcopal Church*, 83-95; and Oldfield, "The Protestant Episcopal Church," *passim*. For

Neither school provides a solid connecting point – a character, year, or event that answers, even speculatively, why Liberia never became the stable nation of free blacks that Cuffe, Carey, Seys, Blyden, Crummell, and even Jefferson, envisioned. Carey, and John Seys, Edward Blyden, and Alexander Crummell, the men who decades after Carey’s death revived his ideas, are those connecting points, those characters in whom previous historians have failed to see, or even consciously look for, an answer. As a result, they have failed to fully express the cultural, historical, and even religious connection between the United States and the Liberian republic, inaccurately stating, for example, that the Liberian founders were freed slaves, not light-skinned free born blacks of relative privilege, possessing a surprising knowledge of American political theory.

The preceding pages are just the first steps toward a unified understanding of both Liberia’s founding story and the evolution of its complex cultural, racial, religious, and national identities. Although the Americo-Liberians were a demographic minority, they controlled, even dominated, the majority of Liberia’s population for most of its history. They brought Liberia to Christianity, a faith that claimed 35 percent of the population by the mid-1980s in spite of Americo-Liberian cultural stagnation and reclusion over the preceding century.²⁴⁴ They also created a settler standard by which they – the Americas – judged each citizen of the republic, establishing a three-tiered class system that separated the light-skinned from the dark, the rich from the poor, the African from the Liberian, for over a hundred years.

Seys, who has all but escaped serious academic study, see Park, “*White*” Americans; and Duignan and Gann, *The United States and Africa*, 87-93, 117-125.

²⁴⁴ See Lindenfeld, “Indigenous Encounters,” 354; and David Barrett, *World Christianity Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, A.D. 1900-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 724.

Historians, thus, cannot view Liberia as a single historical entity. Liberian history is intimately woven into American history. Of course, the people of the hinterland, the ethnic groups that inhabited the borders of what was to be Liberia hundreds of years before the settlers, were not products of American culture or tradition. In fact, they were never really *Liberian* to begin with. But the settlers, the people who adopted the names “Liberia,” and “Americo-Liberian,” who named their capital city after the American president James Monroe, and modeled their flag, Constitution, language, and social and cultural images after those of the United States, were products of the American nation, and maintained a national identity that mimicked that of their former home. Indeed, the very existence of an American-style republic in Africa, one whose independence preceded that of the next African free state by nearly a century, serves as important a role in American history as it does in African, or Liberian, history. Too many American-based external forces, such as dress, language, religion, law, and social and political theory played irrefutable, fundamental roles in the creation and development of the Liberian republic, and its interior, for historians of both Africa and America to separate the two as distinct areas of study.

In the same vein, this thesis serves as a call for expansion of Liberian studies. Scholars of Liberian history, as well as American racial history, must elucidate the connecting links between the culture of the oppressed, and that of the oppressors. In the case of Liberia, too often scholars focus on either the native reaction to the settlers, or the settlers’ reaction to the natives, ignoring the possible existence of a racialistic national identity shared, at some basic level, by at least a portion of both populations. As a result, Liberian history, and to a more modest extent, American history, contains a marked gap

in the historiography of racial culture and national identity based on the imported elements of the nation's racial character and identity. We must ask new questions. Such as: What did it mean to be black in Liberia? What did Liberia mean to blacks in America? What did it mean to be an African Christian in a new country called "Liberia"? How did African-Americans and Liberians differ? How were they the same? Could one be both African and Liberian? Or American and Liberian? It is my hope that this thesis has provided enough information for the future answering of these important questions, and the closing of this historiographical gap. The history of Liberia is far too incomplete for the possibilities it contains for both American racial culture and the African diasporic world as a whole.

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Vita

Andrew Nix Wegmann was born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. He attended St. Martin's Episcopal High School and graduated with high honors from Spring Hill College (Mobile, Alabama), where he was a Presidential Scholar and Howard Smith Award winner in history. He lives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.