"A Free Republic, Like Our Own": The US Navy and the African Colonization Movement in Public Discourse, 1819–60

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This article examines how US naval officers' attitudes about slavery, race, and American empire led many to support America's African colonization movement in the antebellum era. It argues that beyond the well-documented support they provided in Africa, many American naval officers joined colonization societies, gave speeches, published in newspapers, and authored books to advocate for colonization in the United States. Drawing on their firsthand experience, they provided credibility to the movement at a time when it was sorely needed in response to attacks from both sides of the political spectrum.

Cet article porte sur les attitudes des officiers de la marine américaine à l'égard de l'esclavage, de la question raciale et de l'empire américain qui ont amené plusieurs d'entre eux à soutenir le mouvement de colonisation de l'Afrique par les États-Unis durant la période d'avant-guerre. Il fait valoir qu'au-delà de l'appui bien documenté que bon nombre d'officiers de la marine américaine ont apporté en Afrique, ils ont participé à des sociétés de colonisation, prononcé des discours, publié des articles de journaux et écrit des ouvrages visant à promouvoir la colonisation aux États-Unis. Forts de leur expérience directe, ils ont conféré une crédibilité au mouvement à une époque où cette crédibilité était tout à fait nécessaire face aux attaques venant des deux côtés de l'échiquier politique.

In 1851, Lieutenant Matthew Fontaine Maury of the US Navy wrote an article in the *Southern Literary Messenger* explaining what he considered to be a major problem threatening the American South. The slave population was growing,

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and "unless some means of relief be devised … by which the South can, when the time comes, get rid of the excess of her slave population," he warned, "she will be ultimately found … in the predicament of the man with the wolf by the ears: – too dangerous to hold on to any longer, and equally dangerous to let go."[1] The lieutenant's pessimism about white and black coexistence was not new – he was quoting fellow Virginian Thomas Jefferson, who had compared slavery to holding "a wolf by the ear" 30 years earlier. To men like Jefferson, freed African Americans seemed to pose even greater danger than slaves of sparking insurrection and other resistance efforts.[2] Jefferson and many like-minded Americans believed that the best solution was to expatriate freed African Americans to overseas colonies.[3]

African colonizationism in the United States was a bipartisan movement that came to prominence in the late 1810s. Its influential members established settlements for free African Americans in what would eventually become Liberia. To support the fledgling outposts, colonizationists used their influence to organize federal assistance – and they found enthusiastic backing in the US Navy. Northern and Southern officers alike became some of the movement's most important supporters. Though the settlements were not officially part of the US, American officers operating in West Africa repeatedly intervened in favor of colonization between 1819 and the Civil War.[4] They helped found Monrovia, provided military aid, mediated disputes with neighboring Africans, and intimidated and attacked those neighbors when conflict escalated – often on their own initiative.[5] Meanwhile, after returning home, many of the same officers involved in Liberian operations used their unique firsthand experience in the settlements to become public champions of colonizationism.

Historians have documented many of the navy's interventions in Liberia, though there has been little effort to examine in depth the underlying attitudes behind them in the officer corps.[6] This paper argues that sympathy

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1 Matthew Fontaine Maury, "Commercial Prospects of the South," *Southern Literary Messenger* (Richmond, VA) 17, no. 10 (1851): 698.

2 Jefferson to John Holmes, 22 April 1820, in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford, vol. 12 (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), 159.

3 John P. Kaminski, *Thomas Jefferson: Philosopher and Politician* (Parallel Press, 2005), 31.

4 Eugene van Sickle, "Reluctant Imperialists: The U.S. Navy and Liberia, 1819–1845," *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 1 (2011): 111–12.

5 R. John Brockmann, *Commodore Robert F. Stockton, 1795–1866: Protean Man for a Protean Nation* (Cambria Press, 2009), 42–43; William Harwar Parker, *Recollections of a Naval Officer, 1841–1865*, ed. Craig L. Symonds (Naval Institute Press, 1985), 133.

6 David F. Ericson, "The American Colonization Society's Not-So-Private Colonization Project," in *New Directions in the Study of African American Recolonization*, ed. Beverly C. Tomek and Matthew J. Hetrick (University Press of Florida, 2017); Eric Burin, "The Cape

for colonization was prevalent among American naval officers and that such sympathy extended beyond actions on the ground in West Africa into public advocacy. Through their favorable official reports, participation in the colonization society, speeches, and personal publications, naval officers simultaneously shaped the nation's foreign policy in Africa and the domestic discourse of slavery and empire.

Background

The colonization movement received its official start in 1819, when the Monroe administration gave the American Colonization Society (ACS) $100,000 to found the first settlement in West Africa, which grew into the city of Monrovia.[7] Several American states also created their own colonization societies with separate settlements, which had all combined by 1857 into the independent nation of Liberia.[8] Colonization reflected the rising spirit of Jacksonian democracy, premised on equality for white men and the exclusion of other races.[9] Yet the movement had an unusually varied makeup. Many members hoped to curtail the Atlantic slave trade or extend the influence of American commerce, democracy, and religion into the African interior. Some, especially in the North, wanted to expedite the emancipation of slaves and give black Americans an overseas sanctuary from widespread racism. They charged that emigration would enable African Americans to prove their manhood just as white frontiersmen had. Black men would also be able to vote and hold public office – citizenship rights which affirmed the Jacksonian democrat notion of manhood.[10] In Liberia, all this could be achieved without threatening white rule by creating a "separate but equal" citizenship.[11] Conversely, many

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Mesurado Contract: A Reconsideration," in *New Directions*, ed. Tomek and Hetrick; Van Sickle, "Reluctant Imperialists"; Donald L. Canney, *Africa Squadron: The U.S. Navy and the Slave Trade, 1842–1861* (Potomac Books, 2006); Richard L. Hall, *On Afric's Shore: A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834–1857* (Maryland Historical Society, 2003); Spencer Tucker, *Andrew Foote: Civil War Admiral on Western Waters* (Naval Institute Press, 2000); David Foster Long, *Gold Braid and Foreign Relations: Diplomatic Activities of U.S. Naval Officers, 1798–1883* (Naval Institute Press, 1988).

7 Karen Fisher Younger, "Liberia and the Last Slave Ships," *Civil War History* 54, no. 4 (2008): 427–28; Van Sickle, "Reluctant Imperialists," 108.

8 John H. Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry: Antebellum Sailor and Diplomat* (Naval Institute Press, 2001), 102.

9 Nicholas Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart: How Enlightened Americans Invented Racial Segregation* (Basic Books, 2016), 6–7.

10 Bruce Dorsey, "A Gendered History of African Colonization in the Antebellum United States," *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 1 (2000): 84, 87, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3789511.

11 Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart*, 10; Dorsey, "A Gendered History of African Colonization," 78.

S. Augustus Mitchell, "Map of Liberia," *Mitchell's School Atlas* (Philadelphia, 1839), no. 17. (Wikimedia Commons)

colonizationists, especially in the South, hoped their movement could rid the nation of free black people.[12] Southerners believed that free African Americans, with their connection to enslaved communities and their potential to spread subversive ideas, could foster slave insurrection – especially after Denmark Vesey's planned uprising was uncovered in South Carolina. A shared fear of violence caused by abolitionism was an important unifying factor among white colonizationists, who believed that emigration offered a more

12 Younger, "Liberia and the Last Slave Ships," 427–28.

sensible alternative.[13] In the movement's first two decades, colonizationism's ability to unite both pro- and anti-slavery advocates attracted Northerners and Southerners and, at times, garnered bipartisan support from many important national leaders including presidents James Madison, James Monroe, and Andrew Jackson as well as figures such as Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and John Marshall.[14]

African Americans, however, found the movement far less enticing. Pro-slavery influences were alarming, and an overwhelming majority of African Americans rejected the idea that they should be expected to relocate if they wanted rights. By the early 1800s, almost all of them were several generations removed from Africa and had only ever known American culture. They especially feared that forced expatriation would become national policy.[15] Yet as one historian explains, some free black Americans chose to emigrate anyway for essentially "the same reasons that inspired European settlers across North America: cheap or free land, economic opportunity, the chance to live, think, and worship in freedom, and the prospect that succeeding generations would have better lives."[16] Some shared white colonizationists' belief that they could obtain full citizenship only by building their own society outside of white dominion.[17] Newly freed slaves, on the other hand, often emigrated to Liberia because they had no other options; many states passed laws forcing manumitted men and women to leave or preventing immigration of free African Americans from outside the state.[18] Colonizationists, in other words, were a diverse body: white and black, freeborn and recently freed, and pro- and anti-slavery.

Colonizationism and the Officer Corps

Naval officers' willingness to join the colonization coalition reflected the corps' emerging professional identity, regional background, and prevalent attitudes about race and slavery. Naval officers fit into the main colonizationist demographic: "moderate white men, engaged in learned professions and civic-

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13 Dorsey, "A Gendered History of African Colonization," 89.

14 Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 26; Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart*, 4; Van Sickle, "Reluctant Imperialists," 108n1.

15 Ousmane K. Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle Against the Colonization Movement* (New York University Press, 2014), 2–3.

16 Hall, *On Afric's Shore*, xvi–xix.

17 Dorsey, "A Gendered History of African Colonization," 87; Winston James, *The Struggles of John Brown Russwurm: The Life and Writings of a Pan-Africanist Pioneer, 1799–1851* (New York University Press, 2010), 100.

18 Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 65; Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart*, 313.

minded."[19] As historian Nicholas Guyatt has argued, such men considered themselves liberal reformers guided by Christian virtue and enlightened reason and "determined to reject the temptations of 'prejudice.'" While they were certainly *not* free of prejudice, they framed solutions to national issues like slavery in the language of progress, attempting to use evidence based on science, exploration, and firsthand observation (the most "credible" observers being like-minded white men, of course).[20]

Like colonizationists, most officers were also moderates on the issue of slavery by contemporary standards. They might be nominally pro- or anti-slavery but accepted the institution for the present and generally were wary of both universal abolition and broadening the scope of American slavery. Many believed that the institution should (or would) eventually disappear. Matthew Calbraith Perry of Rhode Island, one of the officers most proactive in providing naval aid for Liberia, explained that "I am not one of those who cry out against the institution of domestic slavery because I myself have no property in slaves." Yet he ultimately hoped slavery would end, which he believed would require government compensation and the expulsion of freed African Americans.[21] The officer corps was disproportionately from the mid-Atlantic – the heartland of colonizationism and a place where slavery seemed to be in decline in the early 1800s due to factors like gradual emancipation and soil exhaustion.[22] The structure of a naval career also discouraged sectionalism and political radicalism. Midshipmen from both North and South left their childhood communities to go to sea at a young age (usually joining the navy in their teenage years). They spent much of their lives living in intimate quarters with peers from all parts of the country, sharing ideas and forming a social circle strengthened by friendship and marriages into each other's families.[23] Long periods at sea meant that even though some Southern officers owned enslaved servants for themselves or their families, relatively few owned large numbers. Most made their living from their naval career rather than from

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19 Hall, *On Afric's Shore*, xvi.

20 Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart*, 7–8.

21 Quoted in Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 103–4.

22 Peter Karsten, *The Naval Aristocracy: The Golden Age of Annapolis and the Emergence of Modern American Navalism* (Free Press, 1972), 5; Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Harvard University Press, 2005), 199. For a more detailed discussion of demographics and slavery attitudes in the officer corps, see Roger A. Bailey, "'The Great Question': Slavery, Sectionalism, and the U.S. Naval Officer Corps, 1820–1861" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2021), 13–18.

23 Karsten, *The Naval Aristocracy*, 250–51. For a stark example of a Southern midshipman's proslavery influence on his Northern compatriot, see Jay Slagle, *Ironclad Captain: Seth Ledyard Phelps and the U.S. Navy, 1841–1864* (Kent State University Press, 1997), 33–35.

plantation agriculture.[24] Finally, almost all officers opposed the transatlantic slave trade, often because of horrifying firsthand encounters with slave ships.[25]

Regardless of their precise stance on slavery, most officers agreed with colonizationists that free black people did not belong in the United States.[26] Having experienced mixed-race societies firsthand in places like Brazil, many feared that interracial marriage would degrade perceived Anglo-Saxon superiority.[27] But even those who claimed to be concerned about African American welfare supported expatriation. Navy Chaplain Charles W. Thomas of Georgia was typical in his belief in colonization as a solution to the "serious question" of free African Americans:

> To permit them to remain and increase in the southern States, where they are often made the dupes and tools of bad white men from abroad, and where too often their influence over the slave population is anything but wholesome, is not to be thought of by the friends of the black man, or the friends of the South.

Thomas was joined by many other officers who complained of the "failure of the African slave" in the US to prosper after manumission, which they variously blamed on black racial inferiority, Northern restrictions on black immigration, or white discrimination that prevented African Americans from ever becoming more than "nominal freemen."[28] Officers like Matthew

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24 Bailey, "The Great Question," 16.

25 See, for example, Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition during the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842* (Philadelphia, 1844), 1:54–55; William Francis Lynch, *Naval Life: Or, Observations Afloat and Ashore* (New York, 1851), 147–50.

26 Hall, *On Afric's Shore*, xvi.

27 Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart*, 10. See, for example, 28 January and 8 August 1841, Washington F. Davidson Diary, HM 69950, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA; Frederick C. Drake, *The Empire of the Seas: A Biography of Rear Admiral Robert Wilson Shufeldt, USN* (University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 344; Ari Hoogenboom, *Gustavus Vasa Fox of the Union Navy: A Biography* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 25; Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, 1:67; Barry Alan Joyce, *The Shaping of American Ethnography: The Wilkes Exploring Expedition, 1838–1842* (University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 71.

28 Charles W. Thomas, *Adventures and Observations on the West Coast of Africa, and Its Islands* (New York, 1860), 170; Alexander Wylly Habersham, *The North Pacific Surveying and Exploring Expedition, Or, My Last Cruise: Where We Went and What We Saw* (Philadelphia, 1857), 54–55; "The Captured Africans," *The World* (New York), 14 July 1860, quoted in Sharla M. Fett, *Recaptured Africans: Surviving Slave Ships, Detention, and Dislocation in the Final Years of the Slave Trade* (University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 119. See also Maury, "Commercial Prospects of the South," 698; Charles Wilkes, *Autobiography of Rear Admiral Charles Wilkes, U.S. Navy, 1798–1877*, ed. William James Morgan (Naval History Division,

Calbraith Perry explained that freedom in Liberia, on the other hand, promised "competency and … the independent exercise of their own thoughts, opinions and movements" to the enslaved men and women "now groveling in the United States."[29] Another officer was happy that he could manumit two of his own enslaved workers because the ACS made it possible to do so "with advantage to them, and security to the country" by sending them to Africa.[30] Colonization offered a seemingly elegant solution to the race question that appealed to officers sympathizing with both slaveholders and African Americans.

Portrait of Matthew Calbraith Perry in 1835 by William S. Mount, courtesy of the Naval Academy Museum. (NH 47671-K, Naval History and Heritage Command)

A black American enclave in Africa was surprisingly easy for officers to situate within their larger imperial vision. Between the War of 1812 and the Civil War, the navy's mission involved protecting merchants and missionaries, exploring foreign lands, and negotiating commercial treaties.[31] Officers envisaged a maritime American empire based on commerce and culture, in which open trade would enrich the US while allowing its goods, Christianity, and democratic values to spread abroad.[32] Those who believed that resettlement would elevate the black race shared colonizationists' hope that as Liberians became more advanced, they would take up the American mantle of spreading trade, "civilization, sound morals, and true religion over the whole continent of Africa."[33] The potential influence of white Americans

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1978), 103. Wilkes claimed that he had not supported colonization despite considering it a "philanthropic" undertaking. Given his disdain for racially mixed societies in his antebellum publications and his proclivity for self-promotion, however, his Reconstruction-era memoir likely overstated his antebellum qualms about colonization to reflect the movement's diminished popularity.

29 Quoted in Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 103.

30 "Colonization Society," *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 7 (September 1825): 214.

31 John H. Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire: The Commercial and Diplomatic Role of the American Navy, 1829–1861* (Greenwood Press, 1985), 3–6.

32 Karsten, *The Naval Aristocracy*, 216–17.

33 William V. Pettit and John P. Durbin, *Addresses Delivered in the Hall of the House of Representatives, Harrisburg, Pa. on Tuesday Evening, April 6, 1852* (Philadelphia, 1852), 4;

was limited in Africa, where disease, environment, and the hot climate were widely considered too dangerous to white men.[34] African Americans seemed poised fill this gap. Lieutenant Robert F. Stockton of New Jersey expected that colonization would "open the rich resources of that extensive continent."[35] The presence of a prosperous Christian population and legitimate trade would also help the navy with its goal of stamping out the slave trade.[36]

There were officers who were skeptical of the power of colonization to uplift black people, and some even expressed concerns that without "the white man's civilization" African Americans would "soon just slide back to the native level."[37] This skepticism was more common among younger officers who were raised amidst more polarized political discourse beginning in the 1830s, however. Most commanders of ships and squadrons were members of the previous generation. These officers, men like Perry and Stockton, had the most discretionary power, public visibility, and influential social connections – and therefore the greatest ability to support colonization.

Public Discourse

Historians have documented many of the navy's actions on the ground in Africa to sustain Liberia in the antebellum era. As senior lieutenants, Perry and Stockton helped found Monrovia in 1820 and 1821, along with several of their peers. As they and other officers returned to West Africa over the next 40 years, they provided weapons, supplies, transportation, military advice and a host of other forms of support for the colonies.[38] This aid helped the tenuous colonies survive but can distract from the equally important advocacy that

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Hall, *On Afric's Shore*, xvi; Van Sickle, "Reluctant Imperialists," 134; Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 103.

34 Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 113. White colonizationists incorrectly supposed that African American settlers would be resistant or immune to most African diseases.

35 New Jersey Colonization Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting Held at Princeton, New-Jersey, July 14, 1824, to Form a Society in the State of New-Jersey, to Cooperate with the American Colonization Society* (Princeton, 1824), 4.

36 Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 104.

37 Quoted in Slagle, *Ironclad Captain*, 34–38. See also William P. Rodgers to Robert S. Rodgers, 6 June 1844, box 36, folder 2, Denison-Rodgers Family Papers, Coll. 356, Manuscripts Collection, G.W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.; Gerald Horne, *The Deepest South: The United States, Brazil, and the African Slave Trade* (New York University Press, 2007), 283n65.

38 Ericson, "The American Colonization Society's Not-So-Private Colonization Project"; Burin, "Cape Mesurado Contract"; Van Sickle, "Reluctant Imperialists"; Canney, *Africa Squadron*; Hall, *On Afric's Shore*; Tucker, *Andrew Foote*; Long, *Gold Braid and Foreign Relations*.

officers provided back in the US, which remained a critical supplier of funds and settlers for the colonies.

Stockton was the most active and outspoken. He began championing the ACS shortly after first returning from Africa, where he had used the threat of violence to help the society acquire land from natives.[39] The lieutenant quickly became affiliated with New Jersey colonizationists and was elected president of the state's ACS branch in 1824.[40] He soon served as their delegate to a national society meeting in the US Capitol alongside such luminaries as Chief Justice John Marshall and the Marquis de Lafayette. Stockton's opening address, which was printed in the first issue of the society's new *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, was a model of Jeffersonian idealism and moderate, conciliatory rhetoric. He blamed Britain for foisting the evils of slavery onto an American society that had been founded on "moral rectitude and … equal rights." Stockton could not endorse abolitionists' "wild and destructive scheme" of immediate emancipation, but he declared that Southern "magnanimity" would not allow slavery to last indefinitely. Indeed, the threat of insurrection was too great. Colonization was the best solution.[41] Like-minded officers returning from Africa echoed many of these sentiments, drafting pro-colonization letters for publication in newspapers.[42]

Engraved portrait of Captain Robert Field Stockton by H.B. Hall, 1840. (NH 63721, Naval History and Heritage Command)

Stockton and his peers created a sense

39 Burin, "Cape Mesurado Contract," 242.

40 New Jersey Colonization Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting*, 3.

41 Brockmann, *Commodore Robert F. Stockton*, 40–41; "Annual Meeting of the Colonization Society," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 1 (1825): 13–15.

42 For example: "Extract of a Letter from an Officer on Board the United States Ship Cyane to His Friend in This City," *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), 12 June 1820, 2; John B. Nicholson to Henry Clay, 17 March 1828, in "From the *National Intelligencer*: American Colony at Liberia," *Richmond Enquirer*, 8 April 1828, 4.

of shared mission between pro- and anti-slavery colonizationists and may even have made the movement more appealing to some African Americans. After an address in New York, Rev. Samuel Cornish, a prominent black newspaper editor, reflected that "if the designs of the American Colonization Society, were such as represented by that pious and talented gentleman … I at once would be a colonizationist, and persuade every other man in America to be the same." But like most African Americans, the editor was unconvinced: "Alas! The society as a body, are not so pure in their purposes."[43] Other abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison were less forgiving of Stockton's conciliation, pointing out that "sentiments, like these, act upon the consciences of slave owners like opiates upon the body, lulling them into slumber."[44]

Garrison's attack was part of a larger turn against colonization by both pro- and anti-slavery advocates that began in the 1830s. Mainstream figures like Garrison and Frederick Douglass now joined black abolitionists who had opposed the ACS since the outset, calling instead for immediate and total abolition of slavery.[45] In response to the threat of these "immediatists" and the ascendance of cotton agriculture, Southerners were also radicalizing. John C. Calhoun famously denounced abolitionists and proclaimed on the floor of the Senate that slavery was a "positive good." Thanks to "the fostering care of our institutions," he explained, "never before has the black race of Central Africa … attained a condition so civilized and so improved."[46] By extension, slavery – not colonization – was the best way to uplift the black race. Things had changed. As one scholar writes, "for a movement supposedly keen to unite abolitionists and slaveholders … colonizationists seemed only to unite both sides in opposition to colonization."[47] Stockton lamented that Southerners saw the movement as "a plan generated in the North to operate against the institutions of the South; and in the North it was thought to be a Southern project to get rid of the free blacks only that they might tighten the chains of slavery."[48]

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43 "American Colonization Society," *Rights of All* (New York), 9 October 1829, 42.

44 William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on African Colonization, Or, An Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society* (Boston, 1832), 67.

45 Bjørn F. Stillion Southard, *Peculiar Rhetoric: Slavery, Freedom, and the African Colonization Movement* (University Press of Mississippi, 2019), 5–6.

46 John C. Calhoun, "Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions, Delivered in the Senate, February 6th, 1837," in *Speeches of John C. Calhoun, Delivered in the House of Representatives and in the Senate of the United States*, ed. Richard R. Cralle, vol. 2 (New York, 1853), 625–33.

47 Stillion Southard, *Peculiar Rhetoric*, 6.

48 "Speech at Princeton, 1824," in Samuel J. Bayard, *A Sketch of the Life of Com. Robert F. Stockton* (New York, 1856), 65.

As the colonization movement came under fire, naval officers with firsthand experience in Liberia became some of the movement's key defenders. The year after his cruise in command of the USS *Boxer* off the coast of Africa in 1832, for example, Lieutenant Benjamin Page attended a colonization meeting in New York, where he offered favorable accounts of the settlements in Liberia and "very satisfactory contradictions to the statements recently put forth by the enemies of the cause." Page made it clear that African American settlers were safe, had good character, and were spreading their positive influence to the surrounding native communities.[49] Similarly, many of Page's peers wrote to colonization leaders and allowed them to publish extracts of their letters extoling Liberian successes and dismissing anti-colonization accusations.[50] The *African Repository* and other colonizationist publications also appropriated passages from officers' official reports to the navy as propaganda.[51] Officers' firsthand experience combined with their reputations as professionals and men of integrity lent the movement credibility at a time when it was sorely needed. A colonizationist congressman from Ohio, for example, countered criticisms about poor living conditions in Liberia by citing several naval reports, noting that, "if you scan the characters of these witnesses, you will find them unimpeached, and unimpeachable."[52]

Officers had even more extensive reach through their published travel accounts and memoirs. These writings reached ever-larger audiences as American print culture grew and the public became increasingly fascinated with travel literature. Since most Americans could not journey abroad, published travel accounts formulated their perceptions of other cultures and races.[53] Officers were especially influential because the officer corps was generally well-respected and increasingly focused on science – some of their accounts were even published by Congress and in collaboration with civilian

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49 *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 9, no. 6 (August 1833): 190.

50 "Letter from Com. Gregory, and Speech of Purser Bradford," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 31, no.7 (July 1855): 199–204; *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society* (Washington, 1841), 22–24; Craig B. Hollander, "Against a Sea of Troubles: Slave Trade Suppressionism During the Early Republic" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2013), 528.

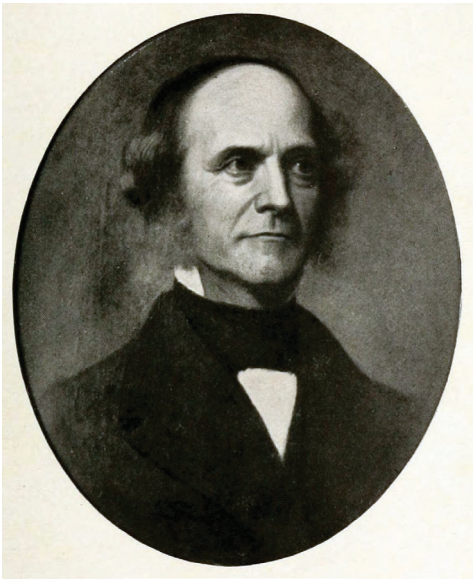
51 See, for example, "The African Colony," *Weekly Arkansas Gazette*, 26 April 1825; "American Colony at Liberia," *Watch-Tower* (Cooperstown, NY), 7 April 1828.

52 "Mr Whittlesby's Address," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 9, no. 8 (October 1833): 230–31. See also "General Mercer and Colonization," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 9, no. 9 (November 1833): 267.

53 Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 57–59.

scientists.[54]

From roughly 1845 to 1860, officers began to produce a steady stream of book-length travel narratives featuring sympathetic depictions of Liberia. The creation of a permanent Africa Squadron in 1843 meant more naval officers visiting Liberia, and the rise of sectional politics created more interest in solutions to the slavery question. One of the first and most popular accounts was *Journal of an African Cruiser* (1845). Its author, Horatio Bridge, was a well-connected navy purser from Maine who served in the Africa Squadron (as well as a friend and former schoolmate of both President Franklin Pierce and John B. Russwurm, the first black governor of the Maryland Colonization Society's settlement in Liberia).[55] Bridge identified himself as a "A Northern man, but … neither an abolitionist nor a colonizationist."[56] Whether or not Bridge labeled himself a colonizationist, his book was decidedly favorable towards the project, emphasizing the importance of a separate society for



"Horatio Bridge. From the portrait by Eastman Johnson." In Frank Preston Stearns, *The Life and Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (J.P. Lippincott Company, 1906), 64.

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54 William P. Leeman, *The Long Road to Annapolis: The Founding of the Naval Academy and the Emerging American Republic* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 160–61. For examples of naval narratives published by Congress or partnering with scientists, see Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, vol. 2; William Lewis Herndon, *Exploration of the Valley of the Amazon: Made under Direction of the Navy Department*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC, 1854); Thomas Jefferson Page, *La Plata, the Argentine Confederation and Paraguay: Being a Narrative of the Exploration of the Tributaries of the River La Plata and Adjacent Countries During the Years 1853, '54, '55 and '56* (New York, 1859).

55 Philip Mcfarland, *Hawthorne in Concord* (Grove Press, 2004), 121; Hall, *On Afric's Shore*, 139. Russwurm later became president of the short-lived independent "Republic of Maryland," before the settlement merged with Liberia.

56 Horatio Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, ed. Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1845), v; Patrick Brancaccio, "'The Black Man's Paradise': Hawthorne's Editing of the *Journal of an African Cruiser*," *The New England Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (1980): 28, https://www.jstor.org/stable/365287.

granting African Americans equality. The book was especially successful thanks to his close friend Nathaniel Hawthorne, who extensively edited it and helped cast Liberia in an even more positive light.[57] *Journal of an African Cruiser* had two American print runs and a British edition and was praised by reviewers for providing a "view of the slave trade and the Negro character, without the prejudices of the southern planter, or the fanaticism of the abolitionist."[58] The *Southern Patriot* endorsed the volume "to the Southern reader, and trust it finds its way to thousands in the North," while ACS leaders called its publication "one of the most prominent events in the history of colonization for the past year."[59]

Lieutenant Andrew Hull Foote's influential *Africa and the American Flag* (1854) was another prominent work that married advocacy for stronger slave trade suppression with an endorsement of the colonization project – citing religious, commercial, and nationalist imperatives for spreading American influence in Africa.[60] The book became a bestseller, and Foote sent copies to influential officials in Washington, was quoted in congressional debates, and met with lawmakers and President Millard Filmore.[61] He also gave a speech to the ACS which the society published.[62] The Rhode Islander was joined by Southern officers writing pro-colonization naval memoirs, as well.[63] Popular novelist Lieutenant Henry Augustus Wise even authored a children's book: *The Story of the Gray African Parrot* featured a cabin boy and his pet parrot on a

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57 Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 149; Larry J. Reynolds, "Transatlantic Visions and Revisions of Race: Hawthorne, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, and the Editing of *Journal of an African Cruiser*," *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review* 42, no. 2 (2016): 1, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/nathhawtrevi.42.2.0001.

58 Brancaccio, "The Black Man's Paradise," 39–40; "List of New and Valuable Works Published by Wiley and Putnam, London," in *Narrative of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains, in the Year 1842, and to Oregon and North California, in the Years 1843–44*, by John Charles Frémont (London, 1846), 11.

59 "Journal of an African Cruiser," *Southern Patriot* (Charleston, SC), 6 August 1845; "Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 22 no. 2 (February 1846): 50.

60 Fett, *Recaptured Africans*, 32–33; Andrew H. Foote, *Africa and the American Flag* (New York, 1854), 382. Foote also spoke before the ACS. James Hoppin, *Life of Andrew Hull Foote, Rear-Admiral United States Navy* (New York, 1874), 89.

61 Fett, *Recaptured Africans*, 6. Andrew Foote to Edward H. Leffingwell, 19 February 1855, Andrew H. Foote Letters, MS 2958.3509, New-York Historical Society. The book was reviewed well overall across the country, and was printed again in London. Tucker, *Andrew Foote*, 74–76.

62 Andrew H. Foote, *The African Squadron, Ashburton Treaty, Consular Sea Letters: Reviewed, in an Address* (Philadelphia, 1855), 2.

63 Lynch, *Naval Life*, 142; Thomas, *Adventures and Observations on the West Coast of Africa*, vi–viii. Thomas's account was originally serialized in the *Southern Christian Advocate* in 1858. Fett, *Recaptured Africans*, 203n116.

voyage that stopped in Liberia, "an American settlement, where colored people go from the United States, and where they have established a free Republic, like our own."[64] Popular accounts like these contributed to an thriving antebellum literature featuring educational travel narratives, maritime adventure stories about slaving and piracy, and works that blended the two.[65] Simultaneously, they assured Americans that the colonization of "more-civilized" black people to Africa was a viable long-term solution to the nation's racial issues.

Conclusion

Colonization, of course, was not the solution to the country's problems with slavery. There were several million enslaved people in the Unites States at any given time, but only fifteen thousand African Americans ever emigrated to Liberia.[66] In hindsight, its failure demonstrates the futility of segregation as a cure for racial discord. Few African Americans had ever been included in this discussion, and white abolitionists and pro-slavery radicals abandoned the colonization movement as well. Even Lieutenant Matthew Maury, with his hopes to remove African Americans from the country, admitted that "neither past experience nor future prospects justify the assertion that Liberia and African colonization can ever be relied on to relieve the country whenever it shall be overpressed with slaves."[67] Instead, Maury looked for other colonization solutions to the problem – particularly American slave settlements in South America.[68]

Maury was not alone. Northern whites also began to look south of the border for sites that might increase the appeal of emancipation, much as black colonizationists turned their sights towards Latin America and the Caribbean, where they hoped to resettle in societies free of formal racial hierarchy and the influence of the US government.[69] Nevertheless the American Colonization

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64 Charles King, *By Land and Sea* (Philadelphia, 1891), 5–6; Henry Augustus Wise, *The Story of the Gray African Parrot Who Was Rescued by the Little Sailor Boy in the River Garden* (New York, 1860), 62–63.

65 David Chapin, *Exploring Other Worlds: Margaret Fox, Elisha Kent Kane, and the Antebellum Culture of Curiosity* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 5–8; Fett, *Recaptured Africans*, 34–38.

66 Stillion Southard, *Peculiar Rhetoric*, 4–5.

67 Maury, "Commercial Prospects of the South," 698.

68 Donald Marquand Dozer, "Matthew Fontaine Maury's Letter of Instruction to William Lewis Herndon," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 28, no. 2 (May 1948): 212–28.

69 Michel Gobat, *Empire by Invitation: William Walker and Manifest Destiny in Central America* (Harvard University Press, 2018), 283–84; David L. Valuska, *The African American in the Union Navy, 1861–1865* (Garland Publishing, 1993), 68–70; *Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People, held at Cleveland, Ohio, Thursday, Friday and*

Society continued to plod along with its project in Liberia. Colonization spoke to such a deep-seated desire for an easy, external solution to the nation's thorny racial problems that even many of the ACS's multiplying opponents could not drop the idea of colonization entirely.

An important reason for the resilience of the colonization dream was the number of naval officers who supported it for over four decades. Just as their aid on the ground in Africa helped the settlements survive, officers' efforts to legitimize the vision of the ACS helped keep colonization in the public debate even as it was assailed from both sides of the deepening partisan divide. For political moderates, this transatlantic discourse on colonization preserved hope for an external compromise solution to the problems of slavery and race. If, as Nicholas Guyatt has argued, colonization was "a life raft for liberal whites" who wanted to adhere to the nation's founding democratic values without accepting African Americans as equal members of their society, then the navy helped keep that raft afloat even in the heavy seas of the 1850s.[70] By arguing for the viability of a compromise on slavery, the movement and the officers who supported it eased partisan tensions and helped resist the nation's drift towards civil war. For black Americans, however, they kept the looming threat of expulsion alive for decades.[71]

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Saturday, the 24th, 25th and 26th of August 1854 (Pittsburgh, 1854), 43.

70 Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart*, 10.

71 Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide*, 2–3.