

Beverly C. Tomek. *Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). Pp. 304. Illustrations, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$39.00.

Beverly Tomek's *Colonization and Its Discontents* is an important contribution to a growing scholarship on the African colonization movement. Although focused on a single state, Tomek examines the complex relationship between colonization and other branches of the abolitionist movement more thoroughly than any previous historian. As Tomek shows, "Pennsylvania offers an excellent lens through which to view the changes that took place within the American antislavery community" between the American Revolution and the Civil War (1). A number of factors combined to make Pennsylvania exceptionally important within the antislavery movement, including its geographic position as a northern border state and its tradition of Quaker benevolence. The state was home to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (or PAS, established in 1784), which advocated the gradual abolition of slavery; the Pennsylvania Colonization Society (PCS, created in 1826), one of the most important auxiliaries of the American Colonization Society (ACS); and the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society (PASS, formed in 1837), representing those demanding immediate abolition.

The ACS was formed in December 1816 with the mission to colonize free blacks and manumitted slaves in Africa, specifically in the area that became Liberia. Since its formation, contemporaries and scholars have debated whether the ACS was primarily intended to facilitate manumissions by providing an outlet for freed slaves or to reinforce slavery and white supremacy by removing free blacks. Tomek recognizes that different people supported colonization for different reasons, but argues that the auxiliary PCS was always genuinely antislavery and that the parent organization became more so over time. Of course, "antislavery" is itself a complicated category, as Tomek notes. She divides Pennsylvania colonizationists into two groups: those whose antislavery activism was motivated by humanitarian concern for African Americans and those who were more concerned with slavery's negative political and economic effects on white Americans. In paired chapters, she uses Elliot Cresson and Mathew Carey,

respectively, as case studies for the two positions. Chapters on James Forten and Martin Delany examine the free black community's involvement in colonization, demonstrating that blacks were not opposed to the idea of colonization per se, but wary of any colonization schemes that were not controlled by blacks themselves. Free blacks were more supportive of the PCS's commitment to black education and uplift, a topic addressed in a chapter on Benjamin Coates.

One of the virtues of Tomek's book is her nuanced assessment of historical actors' motives and actions. While she recognizes that there were "crucial elements of exclusion and social control" in the antislavery and colonization movements, she contextualizes and qualifies such statements (18). Elites' efforts to control the behavior of poor blacks were similar to their efforts to control poor whites, and it was often with the aim of uplifting them so that they could "become valuable citizens" rather than remaining members of a permanent underclass (46). In her overall assessment of the different forms of antislavery in Pennsylvania, she seems to place the PCS at the conservative end of the spectrum, with the PAS in the middle, and the PASS at the more radical end. But Tomek notes that the humanitarian wing of the PCS, personified by Elliot Cresson and Benjamin Coates, was often more progressive in terms of valuing black input and participation than was the PAS. Members of the PCS, some of whom were members of the other abolitionist groups as well, believed that colonization was either an essential component of the abolitionist movement or a more pragmatic alternative to typical abolitionist agitation, which they feared was counterproductive.

Black Pennsylvanians' relative lack of interest in Liberian emigration does not seem to have bothered most humanitarian colonizationists, for Tomek shows that they restricted their efforts to colonizing conditionally manumitted slaves (at least until the *Dred Scott* decision of 1857). The PCS's insistence that their funds only be used to pay for the emigration of manumitted slaves created some tension with the ACS, and Tomek cites it as evidence that the PCS was more antislavery than the parent organization. However, Tomek also notes that this policy had some unintended consequences. Prioritizing manumitted slaves over free blacks meant that emigrants to Liberia were less likely to have the types of skills, education, and resources that could expedite development and promote social stability.

Tomek is clearly sympathetic to the PCS, arguing that the group was dominated by sincere humanitarians who struggled against the evil of slavery in the manner they thought best calculated to avoid the (very real) danger

of disunion and civil war. Yet she is fully aware of their shortcomings. The estimated 6,000 slaves the colonizationists sent to Liberia was “minuscule” in the larger scheme of things (99). Furthermore, many colonizationists’ wishful thinking led them to discount the devastating mortality rates suffered by emigrants. And although Tomek emphasizes that the PCS supported black education and uplift while always opposing coerced emigration, she acknowledges that the colonization movement unintentionally reinforced the racist notion that blacks did not belong in the United States.

In general, Tomek’s structure of five case studies framed by three chapters contextualizing and assessing the colonization movement within the larger history of abolitionism works very well. But there are a few instances where the separate case studies limit the potential for comparative analysis. For example, Tomek repeatedly states that many Pennsylvania colonizationists concluded that “white Americans would never accept free blacks” as equals (11, 46, 52). Yet she later gives examples of other colonizationists, especially African Americans, hoping that the Liberian experiment would “prove black equality” and lead to equal rights within the United States (161, 100, 145, 174). Thus, there is an unreconciled tension over the extent to which colonization represented a permanent surrender to white prejudice or a pragmatic attempt to overcome it. A greater attention to colonizationists’ conceptions of timeframe might have helped clarify this issue. Colonizationists were often vague when it came to the speed of progress, but Tomek gives us no notion of whether her characters envisioned emancipation and equality to take years or centuries. These points aside, *Colonization and Its Discontents* is an enlightening examination of the role of colonization in the state and national controversies over slavery, abolition, and civil rights in antebellum America.

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