

Philadelphia's Ladies' Liberia School Association and the Rise and Decline of Northern Female Colonization Support

ON APRIL 26, 1864, the funeral pageant of Elizabeth Johnson Thomson slowly wound its way to St. Mark's Episcopal Church through the crowded streets of Cape Palmas, a town located on the extreme southeastern coast of Liberia. The sheer number of people present made it clear that an important leader had died. A coalition of former American slaves led the procession, and they now marched as ministers and representatives of various ladies' charitable and temperance societies. The deceased, Elizabeth Mars Johnson Thomson, a free black from Connecticut, had become a major figure in Liberian education and religion.¹ This extraordinary event was the result of the efforts of the Philadelphia's Ladies' Liberia School Association, an auxiliary to the American Colonization Society (ACS), which by late 1832 had supported Thomson, as well as another black woman named Elizabeth Caesar, as teachers for their newly established schools in Liberia.²

The Philadelphia Ladies' Liberia School Association formed in 1832, and within a few short years it had developed a national association with

¹ "Death of Mrs. Thomson," *Cavalla Messenger* 29 (1864): 215; Randall Burkett, "Elizabeth Mars Johnson Thomson (1807–1864): A Research Note," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 55 (1986): 21–30.

² Gustavus and Elizabeth Caesar left for Liberia in August 1831, sponsored by Lydia Sigourney's "The Charitable Society in the African Sunday School" at Hartford and Philadelphia philanthropist, Beulah Sansom. They were followed in November 1832 by William and Elizabeth Johnson and their infant son, William. Soon after their arrival, the Philadelphia's Ladies' Liberia School Association took over financial responsibility for the women. Gustavus served as a minister in Caldwell, Liberia, until his death in 1834. Elizabeth Caesar remarried A. W. Anderson, a Baptist minister and teacher in Caldwell. William Johnson went to Liberia as a catechist and schoolmaster but died, along with his infant son, within two weeks of arriving in Liberia. Elizabeth Johnson remarried James Thomson, an Episcopalian who had immigrated to Liberia in 1832 from Demerara (British Guyana). See Clifton Hartwell Brewer, *A History of Religious Education in the Episcopal Church to 1835* (New Haven, CT, 1924), 243–46; Burkett, "Elizabeth Mars Johnson Thomson," 23–24.

auxiliaries in cities and towns across the United States.³ Membership in the association increased throughout the 1830s. Between 1834 and 1839, the group averaged forty-one new members a year and took in approximately fifteen hundred dollars per year in donations and subscriptions. The group's success encouraged leaders to interpret their efforts as part of God's providential plan whereby "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God."⁴ In terms of numbers of northern female colonization participants, Philadelphia was in a category by itself. Operating separately from any denomination or mission organization, ecumenical in composition, and working in conjunction with free blacks, the Ladies' Liberia School Association, by establishing and supervising schools in Liberia, was the first American female organization to exert its benevolent powers internationally. Yet, despite its early success, by the mid-1840s the association was struggling and in 1848 it disbanded.⁵

The rise and decline of female colonization efforts in Philadelphia typified northern female colonization activity in antebellum America. Throughout the 1830s, thousands of northern white women rallied in support of colonization. By 1850, though, only a handful of female societies continued to operate, and group remittances by women became rare. Most women's organizations disappeared from the historical record in the 1850s.⁶ This essay reevaluates colonization in light of antebellum female participation in Philadelphia, and it explains the impetus for northern female support as well as the reasons for its decline.

³ During its thirteen-year existence, the association claimed alliances in Columbia, Northumberland, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Athens, Xenia, Columbus, Springfield, and Cincinnati, Ohio; Hartford, Connecticut; Washington, DC; Boston and Springfield, Massachusetts; Burlington, New Jersey; Wilmington, Delaware; and Fredericksburg, Virginia.

⁴ "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God" is part of Psalm 68:1 and was reinterpreted by early colonization supporters to indicate that God was exacting a providential plan to convert Africa and its inhabitants to Christianity through colonization. The phrase became the movement's rallying cry and was frequently repeated in sermons, essays, and orations.

⁵ *First Annual Report of the Ladies' Association, Auxiliary to the American Colonization Society* (Philadelphia, 1833), 1–8. The annual reports are located at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁶ After decades of debate among black and white intellectuals on the merits of colonization, the American Colonization Society was founded in 1816 by several prominent politicians, ministers, and philanthropists. In the nineteenth century, the society would help send over fifteen thousand African Americans to Liberia, resettle over five thousand Africans captured from slave ships engaged in the illegal slave trade, and raise close to three million dollars. P.J. Staudenraus's *The African Colonization Movement, 1816–1865* (New York, 1961) remains the most comprehensive, if dated, history of the movement.

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Scholars have long viewed the American colonization movement as the marginal, hypocritical, and insincere racist opponent of the more radical abolitionist movement, a “sideshow” of “the nation’s more bizarre and racist concepts.” The study of the American colonization movement, however, has experienced a renaissance over the last several years.⁷ Historians more sympathetic to the cause have interpreted colonization’s activities as being central to nineteenth-century American debates on slavery and race.⁸ Yet, scholars have written surprisingly little on the role of women in the movement. The few historians who have studied women in the colonization movement have examined the rise and decline of female support in the South, particularly Virginia, which had a very active colonization movement. Elizabeth Varon’s examination of female colonizationists in the state reveals the significant impact these women had on the slavery debate in antebellum Virginia and dispels the notion that

⁷ This quote is from Marie Tyler-McGraw’s recent book, *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007), 1. Scholarship on slavery and anti-slavery from the 1970s and 1980s depicted colonization as being racist and in opposition to the more radical and egalitarian abolitionist movement. This scholarship views the ACS as a masculine endeavor, chameleon-like in character, and deceptive to its constituents. Some of the more important works include Douglas R. Egerton, “‘Its Origin Is Not a Little Curious’: A New Look at the American Colonization Society,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 (1985): 465–80; Douglas R. Egerton, *Charles Fenton Mercer and the Trial of National Conservatism* (Jackson, MS, 1989); Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701–1840* (Athens, GA, 1986); Lawrence J. Friedman, “Purifying the White Man’s Country: The American Colonization Society Reconsidered, 1816–1840,” *Societas* 6 (1976): 1–24; Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley, CA, 1998).

⁸ Some historians have placed the ACS back in the antislavery circle. Eric Burin, in *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution* (Gainesville, FL, 2005), examines the national history of the ACS and argues that colonization tended to undermine slavery. Other studies focus on emigration by using regions as a window into the intentions and realities of African colonization. See, for example, Kenneth C. Barnes, *Journey of Hope: The Back-to-Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004); Claude A. Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004); Richard Hall, *On Africa’s Shore: A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834–1857* (Baltimore, 2003); and Alan Huffman, *Mississippi in Africa: The Saga of the Slaves of Prospect Hill Plantation and Their Legacy in Liberia* (New York, 2004). Others examine the role of religion and colonization. See James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998); Eunjin Park, “White” Americans in “Black” Africa: *Black and White American Methodist Missionaries in Liberia, 1820–1875* (New York, 2001); John Saillant, “Missions in Liberia and Race Relations in the United States, 1822–1860,” in *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home: Explorations in North American Cultural History*, eds. Daniel H. Bays and Grant Wacker (Tuscaloosa, AL, 2003), 13–28. Still other works have shown how conceptions of manhood influenced colonization, such as John Saillant’s essay “Missions in Liberia” and Bruce Dorsey’s, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY, 2002).

southern women did not express their opinions about political issues. Marie Tyler-McGraw argues in *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* that Virginia women supported colonization for the same reasons they were prominent in other reform efforts. It gave them an opportunity to influence and remake not only American society at large, but also their worlds on a personal and local level. While there are significant continuities between southern and northern female support of colonization, there are also important differences that necessitate a focused study of northern women. Perhaps most obvious, as Eric Burin has shown, the majority of southern women colonizationists were slave owners and had the power to participate directly in the colonizing process by emancipating their own slaves. For northern women slavery was usually a distant abstraction.⁹

In one sense it is not surprising that historians have slighted northern female support for colonization. Initially, colonization leaders gave little thought as to how women might contribute to the cause. Despite its posture as a religious and benevolent organization, the colonization society promoted itself as a political movement.¹⁰ This was, in part, because the group emerged before the ascent of the powerful benevolent movement in America. It was also a practical move. Not only would colonization be very expensive, but it also would involve a high level of interaction among the group, state governments, and foreign countries. So the group headquartered in the nation's capital, held annual meetings in the Hall of the House of Representatives, and boasted of the political male elite who served as leaders. For two decades it aggressively sought federal support.

⁹ Elizabeth Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998); Tyler-McGraw, *African Republic*.

¹⁰ The birth of the American missionary movement inspired both ACS founder Robert Finley and early promoter Samuel Mills. An unplanned event in rural Massachusetts, the famous "Haystack Prayer Meeting," had a profound effect on the African colonization movement. In 1806, Mills and several other Williams College students got caught in a thunderstorm one afternoon as they prayed together outside. They took shelter under a nearby haystack and pledged themselves to missionary service. This event marked the beginning of the American foreign missionary movement. By the time of his ordination in 1815, Mills had helped form the famous and long-lived American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the American Education Society, the American Bible Society, and the United Foreign Missionary Society. Mills had also come to believe that systematic colonization of African Americans would strengthen American society and benefit the emigrating African American. In 1816, Mills learned of a plan being promoted in New York and New Jersey by Robert Finley, a New Jersey Presbyterian minister, for government support of African colonization; he agreed to promote the idea as he traveled around the country raising money for benevolent societies. In 1818, Mills embarked for the shores of Africa as an agent for the newly formed American Colonization Society.

Intent on securing federal funding, the society made only weak attempts to build local organizations—male or female. It was not until the late 1820s, with only limited assistance from the federal government as well as inspiration from the burgeoning benevolent movement, that the ACS turned to the public. Leaders continued to press the federal and state legislatures for endorsements and money, but by the beginning of the 1830s, they had recast colonization as a national benevolent movement and appealed especially to ministers, churches, and women.

In another sense, however, it is surprising that historians have not delved into the subject with more energy, in part because it became a topic of great discussion among colonization supporters in the 1830s and beyond. Female involvement in colonization in the 1820s was confined to a few geographic areas, primarily in the Upper South, and limited to wealthy slave-owning women. But by the mid-1830s, women's colonization efforts had expanded into the North and West and had become more associational. Moreover, colonization attracted some of the nation's most recognized female leaders and writers. Lydia Sigourney, Sarah Hale, and Mary Griffith, as well as popular Sunday school tract writers Helen Cross Knight and Sarah Tuttle, campaigned for the cause. By 1840, white women across the North responded to the call, expressing their support through their churches, fundraising, writing books and poems, and forming auxiliary societies. They also promoted Liberian missions and education, and some even became missionaries to Liberia themselves.

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Women's support for colonization was strong in Philadelphia in part because of the inspiring leadership of the movement's first president, Beulah Biddle Sansom, a Quaker minister who was highly regarded within her community. Originally from New Jersey, Sansom's marriage in 1798 to Joseph Sansom, a well-regarded artist, positioned her in one of the wealthiest and most prominent Quaker families in Philadelphia. With no children of her own, Sansom spent much of her time engaged in numerous benevolent activities. She was especially dedicated to reform efforts in Liberia, which she supported with such zeal that "if she had \$10,000 a year . . . [she] would devote it to the good cause."¹¹ In 1831, she founded

¹¹ Elliot Cresson, Washington, DC, to Mary Blackford, Fredericksburg, VA, Sept. 19, 1835. Blackford Papers, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

two female schools in Monrovia and Caldwell, Liberia, with her own funds and the resources of a few acquaintances. The next year she agreed to become the president of the “Ladies’ Association, Auxiliary to the Colonization Society,” later renamed the “Ladies’ Liberia School Association,” on the condition that the group take over the responsibility of her schools. The association attracted some of Philadelphia’s most well-respected women, including Rachel Blanding, the wife of renowned naturalist and doctor William Blanding, Anne Marie Tilghman, the wife of Benjamin Tilghman, one of Philadelphia’s most prominent lawyers and merchants, and Margaret Breckinridge, a woman “devoted to the work of Foreign Missions.”¹² Margaret was the wife of Rev. John Breckinridge, the president of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, and the uncle to Democratic presidential candidate John C. Breckinridge. The group also appealed to some of Philadelphia’s leading Quaker families, such as the Coates, Morris, Cope, Ellis, Cresson, Yarnell, and Perot families.

Sansom was the typical reformer of the period who had an interest in multiple benevolent activities. When she died in 1837 she left the following sums to various institutions:

Distressed families and individuals—\$500
 Indigent Widows and Single Women’s Society of Philadelphia—\$200
 Friends’ Asylum for the Insane—\$200
 Friends’ Reading Room Association—\$200
 Colored Infant School—\$50
 Adelphia Colored Infant School—\$50
 Four coloured Individuals—\$100
 Abolition Society of Pennsylvania—\$200
 Several coloured individuals at Bassa Cove, Liberia—\$100
 Ladies’ Liberian Association—\$100
 Colonization Society of Pennsylvania—\$1,000

As her will indicated, Sansom, like many other colonizationists, did not view colonization and the abolition of slavery as contradictory. Her goal was “the emancipation of the slave and the preservation of the union.” In her will she acknowledged that she “always approved of colonizing the coloured people of the United States in Africa.” At the same time, she

¹² John Breckinridge, *A Memoir of Mrs. Margaret Breckinridge* (Philadelphia, 1839), 46.

believed in “promoting the abolition of slavery.”¹³ Yet the assertion that Sansom hoped for an end to slavery did not mean that she was an abolitionist. She believed the abolitionists’ efforts were “injuring rather than benefiting the coloured population,” and the country could only pray that good would eventually be brought “out of all the evil, the contention, wrangling, and excitement.”¹⁴ She, like the majority of northern colonizationists in the 1830s, believed that slavery would die a natural death, the result of voluntary action by slaveholders, speeded up through persuasion and peaceful accommodation. Colonizationists stressed that they differed from abolitionists because they refused to interfere with the legally entrenched institution other than by encouraging owners to manumit their slaves for the purpose of colonizing them in Africa. In the end, colonizationists may have deplored slavery but believed it a better option than threatening the political future of the United States and setting hundreds of thousands of African Americans free to take up residence across the nation.

Sansom’s leadership was not the only reason colonization support thrived in Philadelphia. The colonization movement also benefitted from the city’s close economic connections with the South. The city was the home of a multitude of manufacturers who depended on cotton textiles from the South, and they, in turn, supplied southerners with machines and manufactured goods. As Gary Nash has noted, few Philadelphia ministers after 1830 preached against slavery because their congregations were filled with southern-born parishioners and individuals whose economic well-being depended on slave labor. Instead, many ministers adopted the position of Albert Barnes, the pastor of Philadelphia’s First Presbyterian Church, who argued that slavery was just one of several evils plaguing America and that ministers should focus their sermons on issues “which are near and not those that are remote.”¹⁵

Furthermore, colonization support flourished in Philadelphia because, as the southernmost northern city, thousands of free African Americans lived there, and by 1830 it had become the most important urban center

¹³ Beulah Sansom, Germantown, PA, to Mary Blackford, Fredericksburg, VA, Sept. 1, 1835, Blackford Papers; Beulah Sansom, “Last Will and Testament,” Oct. 13, 1837, book 12, no. 182, microfilm, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. List compiled from Sansom’s will. Spelling is Sansom’s.

¹⁴ Beulah Sansom, Philadelphia, to Mary Blackford, Fredericksburg, Apr. 13, 1835, Blackford Papers.

¹⁵ Gary Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia, 2001), 189; Barnes is quoted in Elizabeth M. Geffen, “Philadelphia Protestantism and Social Reform,” *Pennsylvania History* 30 (1963): 197.

for blacks in the country. As such, the city served as the base for anticolonization activism and the growing organizational efforts of abolitionists. Most of Philadelphia's black community was hostile to the colonization movement because it represented the possibility of forced removal.¹⁶ Distrustful of the ACS's slaveholding leadership, many suspected that the movement wanted to remove the free black population in order to strengthen slavery and that it was part of a larger strategy to strip the free black population of its political influence. The flood of negative reports about the conditions in Liberia only intensified their repudiations. Increasingly vigorous and articulate critiques of the ACS flooded newspapers such as the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Philadelphia's leading abolitionist newspaper. The abolitionist press deemed the ACS a nefarious scheme whose real intention was to send free African Americans away from the United States in order to remove them as advocates for freeing slaves. White abolitionists, led by William Lloyd Garrison, joined in on the attack, decrying the movement as a slave owners' ruse that would encourage Liberia to absorb the South's free blacks in order to continue the slave system in America.¹⁷

Abolitionism and black activism, however, met with resistance and helped foster a climate of racial fear in northern cities like Philadelphia. The city witnessed recurring antiabolitionist and race riots during the 1830s and 1840s as fears of immediate abolition spread. There were at least nine race riots in Philadelphia between 1834 and 1838 alone. In August 1834, antiblack rioters invaded the black community, killed two African Americans, and destroyed two churches and twenty homes. The most notorious example of antiabolitionist violence occurred with the burning of Pennsylvania Hall in May 1838. The hall had been built to serve as a meeting place and a headquarters for abolitionists. On May 13, the building opened for four days of antislavery meetings with national

¹⁶ It is important to note that not all black activists agreed on the issue of colonization. There were blacks who encouraged voluntary emigration and who actually chose to emigrate themselves.

¹⁷ On black activism and patriotism among antebellum free blacks, see Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American? Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784–1861* (Chicago, 2008). On Philadelphia, see Emma Lapsansky-Werner, *Neighborhoods in Transition: William Penn's Dream and Urban Reality* (New York, 1994); Nash, *First City*; Bruce Dorsey, "Friends Becoming Enemies: Philadelphia Benevolence and the Neglected Era of American Quaker History," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18 (1998): 395–96; Jean R. Soderlund, "Priorities and Power: The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society," in *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne (Ithaca, NY, 1994), 69–70; Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women*, 425.

abolitionist leaders in attendance, but by the morning of May 18 all that remained of the building was the foundation; a white mob had destroyed it. The next evening rioters set fire to the Friends Home for Colored Orphans and nearly destroyed two black churches.¹⁸

Most white Philadelphians did not participate in such extreme behavior, and colonizationists were not known to have promoted or engaged in the rioting. Nevertheless, colonizationists did benefit from public perceptions of abolitionists as agitators and played on white racial fears. In the 1830s and early 1840s, most white Philadelphians were appalled by the militant antislavery agitation spreading across the north and the violence that had erupted in their own streets. Rev. John Breckinridge, president of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, argued that it was white Philadelphians' duty to "stave off the Goths and vandals of Garrisonism."¹⁹ The Presbyterian Synod of Philadelphia condemned abolitionists as "reckless of consequence, and desperate in spirit" and warned that the abolition of slavery would "rend the Church and the Union in twain." The synod urged pastors and churches to unite behind the "great redeeming cause of African colonization."²⁰ Not surprisingly, by the middle of the 1830s, Philadelphia was the headquarters of an energetic, independent state colonization society and the home to at least three separate women's colonization groups, including the most conspicuous one—the Ladies' Liberia School Association.

Ironically, Philadelphia was the home of the first abolitionist society, founded in 1775. The city's Quaker population instigated Philadelphia's early antislavery impulse. Nearly all American Quakers opposed slavery during the nation's early years, yet two different approaches to solving the problem of slavery emerged in the 1820s. Differences over how to treat slavery arose as a result of the accommodation some Quakers made with the emerging industrial world or the softened stance of Quakers who lived in slave states. Disparities also appeared in the context of an internal battle within the Society of Friends. In April 1827, American Quakers experienced a bitter schism, known as the Hicksite schism, after

¹⁸ On Philadelphia race riots, see Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 273–76; John Runcie, "Hunting the Nigs' in Philadelphia: The Race Riot of August 1834," *Pennsylvania History* 39 (1972): 187–218. For antiabolitionist riots, see Leonard L. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York, 1970).

¹⁹ Breckinridge was the uncle of 1860 Democratic presidential candidate John C. Breckinridge. Quote in Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 235.

²⁰ "Abolitionists," *Philanthropist*, Jan. 1, 1836.

a group of Quaker reformers separated themselves from the main body of Friends and formed their own independent meeting during the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. The schism reverberated around the country. By the end of the decade there were two factions of Quakers with two distinct responses to slavery. The majority, known as the “Orthodox” party for its attachment to traditional Protestant doctrines, embraced colonization as a means of gradually ending slavery. The other faction acquired the label “Hicksite” for its sympathy with the ministry and teaching of New York Quaker Elias Hicks. Hicksite Quakers nearly universally opposed colonization and commonly served as the core of immediate abolition societies. In Philadelphia, Hicksite Quakers were prominent among those joining Garrison’s American Anti-Slavery Society, and they comprised between 60 and 70 percent of the known Quakers in Philadelphia’s anti-slavery societies during the 1830s. Philadelphia’s orthodox Quakers, on the other hand, were prominent in the Pennsylvania Colonization Society. Perhaps the best-known Quaker colonizationist was Elliot Cresson. Born in Philadelphia in 1796, he acquired a fortune as a merchant and then made colonization his life work. He was the leading figure of Philadelphia’s Young Men’s Colonization Society of Pennsylvania (YMCS), the state’s independent and leading colonization society.²¹

Leaders of the YMCS believed the ACS’s inept financial management and reluctance to broaden its constitutional objectives to include the gradual abolition of slavery had alienated many of its northern constituents. They hoped to attract, on the one hand, the support of those who were dissatisfied with the ACS’s confusing position on slavery and financial mismanagement, and, on the other, those disturbed by the abolitionists’ radical tactics and uncompromising attitude. Combining their efforts with the newly independent New York Colonization Society, the two societies established a settlement in Liberia called Bassa Cove in 1834.²²

Male leaders believed women were crucial to their success. Cresson argued that the YMCS should expend maximum effort to organize women for “the various features of our enterprise—some for missions—

²¹ See Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women* and “Friends Becoming Enemies,” and Soderlund, “Priorities and Power”; On Quaker support of the Ladies’ Liberia School Association, see the association’s annual reports, 1833–41.

²² On the independent colonization movement in Pennsylvania, see Kurt Lee Kocher, “A Duty to America and Africa: A History of the Independent African Colonization Movement in Pennsylvania,” *Pennsylvania History* 51 (1984): 118–53.

some for schools—some for erecting a particular Church.” The *Colonization Herald*, the YMCS’s newspaper, filled its pages with accounts of women’s work for colonization. The YMCS’s 1837 annual report noted that “wherever the voice of humanity calls, there is woman to respond like a ministering angel, to pity and relieve.” Rev. George Bethune compared women’s generosity to that of the woman who anointed Jesus with expensive perfume. “We may say of these ladies,” asserted Bethune, “what one said to a woman who had done him [Jesus] a sweet service—‘She has done what she could’ . . . these Christian ladies have rocked the cradle of a nation.” Rev. Alexander Proudfit, the agent and corresponding secretary of the New York Colonization Society, appealed to female church members to designate their pastors as either life members or directors of the society. “Will you not, madam, strengthen our hands, and aid the cause of Colonization,” asked Proudfit, “and thus you may bring on you and yours the blessing of many an African ‘who is ready to perish, without God, and without hope.’”²³

The Philadelphia Ladies’ Liberia School Association had ambitious colonization plans and expected those working for them to share their aspirations. The first annual report boasted of three schools under the care of the association, two prosperous female schools with over one hundred students, and a recently established school for Africans rescued from slave ships by American troops. Elizabeth Johnson Thomson and Elizabeth Caesar headed the female schools in Monrovia and Caldwell. The association had also recently employed James Eden, a freedman from Charleston, South Carolina, to operate the school for recaptured Africans in New Georgia, Liberia. Before leaving South Carolina, Eden was the chairman of a group of free African Americans in Charleston contemplating immigrating to Liberia. Eden was convinced that Africa held the most promise for African Americans. At a meeting on December 6, 1831, he told the group that “the sacrifices that will be made here [Africa] are not worth a thought, when compared with the advantages we will have in Africa. There we and our children will enjoy every privilege, as well as civil and religious liberty.”²⁴ The next year, 157 free men, women, and

²³ Elliot Cresson, Woodstock, VT, to Samuel Wilkeson, New York, Nov. 28, 1838, American Colonization Society Records, 1792–1964, Library of Congress. “Report of the Board of Managers,” *Colonization Herald*, Mar. 18, 1837; G. W. Bethune, “Speech at the New York City Colonization Society Annual Meeting,” *Colonization Herald*, May 21, 1836; Alexander Proudfit, “Circular,” *Colonization Herald*, Mar. 19, 1836.

²⁴ “Emigration to Liberia,” *Friend*, June 30, 1832.

children, including Eden, his wife, and 7 children, left Charleston for Liberia on the ship *Hercules*. They arrived at Monrovia on January 16, 1833.²⁵ Not long after, the colony's governor, Joseph Mechlin, appointed Eden a teacher at the school in New Georgia on the condition that the Ladies' Liberia School Association approved the governor's selection. The women confirmed the governor's choice, and by the spring of 1834, the school had over sixty male and female students, and construction had begun for a thatched schoolhouse. Eden would stay at the school until he moved to Monrovia, Liberia, in 1839.²⁶

Confident in their cause, the women began plans to build a high school on Factory Island, a fifty-acre island off the coast of Bassa Cove, Liberia. At the time, the country had numerous primary schools but no secondary institution. In February 1839, the association gave \$650 dollars to Thomas Buchanan, an agent of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, before he left for Bassa Cove to begin building the school.²⁷ In an effort to broaden support for the high school, the association issued a circular that encouraged women throughout the United States to form societies to help raise funds for the school. Issued in May 1839, the circular appealed to female benevolence and explained that all women could contribute regardless of their position on colonization because support of education in Liberia was an impartial benevolent cause. Whatever women's "difference of opinion . . . on the subject of African colonization," the circular asserted, "few would object to any intelligent plan for elevating the intellectual and moral condition of those already settled on the shores" of Africa.²⁸

The Philadelphia women echoed colonization writers, editors, and lecturers who also emphasized that female efforts were nonpartisan. When Rev. George Bethune addressed the New York City Colonization Society,

²⁵ Within ten years, at least 40 percent of the immigrants had died, including four of Eden's children and a brother. Tom W. Shick, Roll of the Emigrants to the Colony of Liberia Sent by the American Colonization Society from 1820–1843 [computer file] and Tom W. Shick, Liberian Census Data, 1843 [computer file] (Madison, WI: Tom W. Shick [producer], 1973, Data and Program Library Service [distributor], 1973 and 1996), both at <http://dpls.dacc.wisc.edu/Liberia/index.html> (accessed Nov. 15, 2005).

²⁶ *Second Annual Report of the Ladies' Association, Auxiliary to the American Colonization Society* (Philadelphia, 1834), 14–16; *Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Ladies' Liberia School Association* (Philadelphia, 1840), 10–12.

²⁷ *Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Ladies' Liberia School Association* (Philadelphia, 1841), 7–11.

²⁸ "Circular," *Friend*, May 25, 1839; "Liberia High School," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16 (1840): 164–69.

he encouraged the women in his audience to feel a special and exalted status in colonization efforts. He compared them to the women of the Roman republic when the Romans and the Sabines went to war. The Roman women "threw themselves between the enraged parties, and by their success . . . placed the foundations of the Roman greatness beyond the possibility of being shaken." Likewise, female colonizationists "throw themselves between the North and the South," "pacify" the sectional tensions, and "allay those quarrels which threatened to shake our republic to its foundations." Others pointed to the "disinterested benevolence" exhibited in the educational work of women in Liberia as evidence that colonization advocates were interested in the well-being of African Americans and were not simply seeking to "rid the United States of coloured men." "It has been thundered against the friends of the colony, that their only object is to rid the United States of coloured men," noted an editor of the *Colonization Herald*, most likely Quaker Elliot Cresson. But the advantage "the colony must reap from such disinterested benevolence" refutes such an assertion. The article ends with the proclamation that male leaders around the country should exclaim, "God bless you, ladies."²⁹

Colonization leaders understood the power women exerted in benevolent causes and hoped to benefit from it. They encouraged women to focus their efforts on supporting Liberian schools, churches, and missions. They should act as peacemakers, using their influence to promote social consensus and conservative principles. ACS secretary Ralph Gurley argued, "The seal of their good opinion is the best and surest passport to general favour." Other leaders shared Gurley's conviction that the support of females indicated "a most propitious omen to the future hopes and prospects of the Society." Henry Clay, speaking at the annual meeting in 1829, declared, "Our fair country women . . . have manifested a warm

²⁹ "N.Y. City Colonization Society," and "Schools in Liberia," *Colonization Herald*, May 21, 1836, and Oct. 24, 1835. The Rape of the Sabine Women is a mythological event that supposedly occurred shortly after the founding of Rome. In an effort to expand, the new city of Rome had granted citizenship to criminals and lawless persons. Though it was winning the wars against its neighbors, a lack of women resulted in a shortage of male offspring. The neighboring town refused Roman requests to marry its women, but it accepted an invitation to a huge religious celebration in honor of Neptune. In the middle of the party, the Romans rushed in and abducted the Sabine women, who were forced to marry their rapists. The Sabines, horrified at this violation of the rules of hospitality, went home to prepare for war. When they later returned in arms to take back their women by force, the Sabine women had reconciled with their new husbands; they stopped the battle before it started by placing themselves between the two groups. With war averted, the city of Rome prospered.

approbation of that of the Colonization Society. . . . Their co-operation was wanted to complete the circle of moral exertion." Benjamin Latrobe, an agent for the ACS in Maryland, believed that success depended upon the involvement of women because "by getting women enlisted for us we may move the men, who may ultimately move the government."³⁰

Ironically, the same male colonization leaders who claimed females were uninterested in political matters sought to prevent women from supporting abolition. There was a fear among many male colonization leaders that women were especially vulnerable to the immediatists' cause. Elliot Cresson argued, "The calls are so loud & frequent, that if the Ladies are not enlisted with us, we shall find very many of them carried away by their feelings & made very efficient foes."³¹ So while colonization leaders' rhetoric asserted that female colonizationists were disinterested in the politics of slavery, colonizationists understood that women could have an intense interest in race relations and the well-being of the country. Moreover, the very presence of female colonization supporters legitimized the assumption that women had a duty to bring their moral principles concerning race and slavery into the public sphere.

The Philadelphia Ladies' Liberia School Association leaders pointed with pride to their impartiality regarding slavery and how their efforts fit unequivocally within the "separate spheres" ideology that defined a woman's role as being domestic and private, separate from the public sphere. The group's purpose, they asserted, was to promote education in Liberia, a cause "every American" could support. They had "no concern" regarding the ACS's efforts. The next year's annual report repeated in bolder terms the society's claim to impartiality. "While it belongs to the male part of a population to determine the political institutions of a country," they hoped "to enlist the sympathies of all, as the importance of education is universally acknowledged."³²

Yet, while they alleged to be neither for nor against colonization, their work was clearly linked to the movement. In fact, they worked intimately

³⁰ "Colonization Society and the Ladies," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 4 (1829): 350; *Twelfth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society* (1818; repr., New York, 1969), x; Benjamin Latrobe, Baltimore, to Ralph Gurley, Washington, DC, Jan. 10, 1829, American Colonization Society Papers.

³¹ Elliot Cresson, Woodstock, VT, to Samuel Wilkeson, New York, Nov. 28, 1838, American Colonization Society Papers.

³² *First Annual Report of the Ladies' Association*, 3; *Second Annual Report of the Ladies' Association*, 10.

with ACS leaders and Liberian leaders. Several of the women were the wives or daughters of leaders in the Pennsylvania Colonization Society and Young Men's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania. Male colonization leaders spoke at their annual meetings. Article 2 of their constitution stated that funds would be applied "with the consent of the American Colonization Society." The organization's name, even, revealed the close ties it had with the ACS: the Ladies' Association, Auxiliary to the American Colonization Society. When it changed its name in 1834 to the Ladies' Liberia School Association, it remained connected to the colonization movement, working closely with the Young Men's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania. For instance, Quakers Edward Y. Hankinson and his wife were among the first white settlers in Bassa Cove. The Philadelphia Ladies' Liberia School Association sent the couple to be teachers at a new manual labor school, but Edward Hankinson was also to assume the position of governor of the colony.³³ Another example of the close working relationship between the Ladies' Liberia School Association and the YMCS occurred in February 1839. The women employed Thomas Buchanan, the agent who was headed to Bassa Cove to serve as the colony's governor, to oversee the building of their high school.³⁴

The women of the Ladies' Liberia School Association most often justified their participation in the colonization movement as an extension of their natural capacity as educators. Female educational efforts received new and intense attention in the 1820s and 1830s and had a society-wide impact on women's roles. Some of the most vocal proponents, such as Emma Willard, Catharine Beecher, and Sarah Hale (who were also colonization supporters), argued that the fulfillment of women's proper roles as wives and mothers began with a proper education; they also believed that women had a duty to receive an education so that they could become

³³ "Formation of Auxiliary Societies," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 8 (1832): 190; *First Annual Report of the Ladies' Association*, 3; *Third Annual Report of the Ladies' Liberia School Association* (Philadelphia, 1835), 9–10.

³⁴ *Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Ladies' Liberia School Association* (Philadelphia, 1839), 10; *Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Ladies' Liberia School Association*, 7, 10–11; *Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Ladies' Liberia School Association*, 10–11; "Auxiliary Societies," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 11 (1835): 214–21; "A Leaf from 'Reminiscences of Liberia,'" *African Repository* 41 (1865): 244. The YMCS formed in 1834 as a result of a grievances with the ACS. In 1837 it united with the largely inactive PCS and adopted its name. See Eric Burin, "Rethinking Northern White Support for the African Colonization Movement: The Pennsylvania Colonization Society as an Agent of Emancipation," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 127 (2003): 210–11.

responsible teachers of the young. Many of these schools emphasized missionary work in the hopes that some graduates might carry the cultural and civilizing influences of the Gospel to “heathen lands” and into the West and South as missionary-educators. For female colonizationists, educational work in Liberia seemed an obvious venue for women’s great task of enlightening the world. The women agreed that their educational work in Africa meant that “our own sex can co-operate” without “infringing on the moral delicacy which her nature and her station in society alike impose on her.”³⁵

By the mid 1830s, the majority of women’s groups looked to societies like Philadelphia’s Ladies’ Liberia School Association as their model and focused their efforts on education in Liberia, a field considered “pure, peaceful and pious.” In an 1844 speech before a ladies’ colonization auxiliary organization in Wheeling, Virginia, Richard Henry Lee confirmed the direct association between women’s participation in colonization and education. “There are various forms in which you may apply any pecuniary aid you may be able to command. It may be applied to support common schools in the colonies, for children of colonists and natives; or schools for females alone . . . or to educate colored men for missions among the native tribes.” Lee’s speech simply echoed what had become the reality for women’s associations by the mid 1830s.³⁶

Colonizationists explained that educational efforts in Africa were peaceful and reflected disinterested benevolence in contradistinction to the divisive and combative tactics of abolitionists. Into the 1830s, it seemed to many that the power of benevolent suasion could bring a peaceable end to the slavery system, as it had done in Britain. Colonization would allow the country to avoid a civil war and keep fragile denominations united, and female colonization efforts would help foster accord and harmony. Beulah Sansom wrote to her southern, slave-owning

³⁵ On female education, see Anne Firor Scott, “The Ever-widening Circle: The Diffusion of Feminist Values from the Troy Female Seminary, 1822–1872,” in *The Social History of American Education*, ed. B. Edward McClellan and William J. Reese (Urbana, IL, 1988), 137–64; Tiffany K. Wayne, *Women’s Roles in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, CT, 2007); Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York, 1976); Willystine Goodsell, *Pioneers of Women’s Education in the United States: Emma Willard, Catharine Beecher, Mary Lyon* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1970); Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries* (Oxford, 1997); “Education in Africa” (n.p., n.d.), 2, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

³⁶ “Address of Richard Henry Lee, Before the Ladies of Wheeling,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 20 (1844): 323; “The Boston Ladies’ Society,” *Colonization Herald*, Dec. 17, 1836; *Second Annual Report of the Female Society of the City of New York for the Support of Schools in Africa* (New York, 1836), 12; “Education in Africa,” *American Ladies’ Magazine* 9 (1836): 655–56.

friend Mary Blackford that one reason she supported colonization was because it promoted “emancipation of the slave and the preservation of the union.” Catharine Beecher argued that, unlike abolitionist women, who stepped outside the bounds of propriety, colonizationists acted on “principles which furnish no matter for anger and strife, and fierce denunciation and hate; nor are they . . . susceptible of causing agitation and alarm among the fellow citizens in other parts of the union.” According to Beecher, female colonizationists did not aim to abolish slavery or establish colonies. Instead, their educational efforts in the colonies would make “those who by any means may receive the boon of freedom, wise and good.” No one, she concluded, could oppose this type of benevolent activity.³⁷

Colonization leaders believed that female participation proved the righteousness of their cause. “There is a delicacy in the perception of woman’s heart, which seizes, with the certainty of instinct, on that which is good, and shrinks from that which is wrong,” proclaimed George Bethune. “When I remember that the [Colonization] Society has been assailed by those who have done us cruel wrong, though they have not been able to destroy us, my heart goes up to heaven thanking God that he has given us the testimony of these faithful women, and they are not a few, that we are right, and that our opponents are wrong.” Thus, the participation of women helped justify colonization at the same time it condemned abolitionists.³⁸

For the Philadelphia women and other female colonization supporters, the obligation to act was a clear extension of religious faith. Often women turned to religious terminology to describe the nature of their cause. In its first annual report, the Ladies’ Association interpreted its efforts as part of God’s providential plan to Christianize Africa. It believed its work would result in a time when the children of emigrants, trained and nurtured in the “paths of religion and virtue,” would spread their faith to the surrounding country and help convert the continent to Christianity. The managers of the Female Society of the City of New York for the Support of Schools in Africa informed their first two teachers that in “guiding so many immortal souls into the paths of righteousness, and instructing them in the things pertaining not only to this life, but that which is to

³⁷ Catharine Beecher, *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females* (Philadelphia, 1837), 46, 102; Beulah Sansom, Germantown, to Mary Blackford, Fredericksburg, Sept. 1, 1835, Blackford Papers.

³⁸ “N.Y. City Colonization Society,” *Colonization Herald*, May 21, 1836.

come . . . we send you forth as leaders to the blind, and a light to those who are ready to perish for lack of knowledge." While they were anxious for the intellectual improvement of the students, the women were more concerned that "the great principles of evangelical truth be carefully and perseveringly instilled" so that all their instructions "should have reference . . . to moral and religious improvement."³⁹

Their word choice revealed the magnitude of the change that they sought to produce and the sacred process in which they felt engaged. It also revealed that they perceived their efforts to have global implications. The Ladies' Baptist Colonization Society in Philadelphia agreed. Shortly after forming in 1836, the group circulated an address to "The Females of the Baptist Churches." It solicited the cooperation of Baptist women, noting that "there is a claim upon us—the vast Peninsula of Africa lies in thick darkness, it must be civilized, and evangelized." Colonization, it asserted, was the best means to accomplish this work. "The dark-browed race treads our soil, but it is to them a stranger's land and a home of degradation. Can we, who enjoy the blessings of liberty, the light of that gospel which alone places woman in her proper sphere . . . withhold our aid from Africa's sons and daughters."⁴⁰

Women who joined colonization societies believed that maternal responsibility had global implications. Indeed, American women first exerted their benevolent powers internationally through the colonization movement and the establishment and supervision of schools in Liberia. Female colonizationists felt that the United States was a specially blessed place and saw their own sex as being exceptionally privileged. This status encouraged them to act as the conscience, not just of the nation, but of the world. Just as benevolent women might extend their concerns to the poor, the widow, and the orphan in America, so too might women legitimately engage in moral and religious reform in locations outside America. Moreover, Liberia was the first place outside of the United States where white and black women worked together towards a common purpose. Ironically, the racial prejudice that encouraged white women to view black Americans as foreigners also fostered cooperation between northern white and black women. Several northern colonization groups, including Philadelphia's Ladies' Liberia School Association, interviewed

³⁹ *First Annual Report of the Female Society of the City of New York for the Support of Schools in Africa* (New York, 1835), 6–7.

⁴⁰ "Circular," *Colonization Herald*, Dec. 3, 1836.

and hired black men and women to teach in Liberia, paid their yearly salary, and supervised their work. Despite significant differences on a number of issues related to colonization, both black American teacher-missionaries and white female colonization supporters stressed the “otherness” of Africans and shared a belief in an expansionist Christian ideology.

In 1832, several years before the formation of racially integrated female antislavery societies, Philadelphia's Ladies' Association hired Elizabeth Caesar as a teacher at a salary of two hundred dollars a year. The same year, they hired Elizabeth Johnson Thomson, another African American who had recently arrived in Liberia.⁴¹ Caesar had begun a girls' school in Cadwell in December 1831, and Thomson had started a school in Monrovia after her arrival. Both schools were immediately popular among the inhabitants, and white observers praised the schools as “the soul and spirit of education in the Colony.” Thomson complained that her school was too well attended. “The number continues quite large, entirely too large for one teacher. Justice is not done to either class.” Thomson's school averaged seventy students, ages six to fifteen, and Caesar's school had around sixty. Although both teachers requested an assistant, the Ladies' Association did not have the funds to hire one.⁴²

Both women, committed Episcopalians whose husbands served as missionaries in the colony, understood their efforts as being primarily religious in nature. For almost four years, the women labored in overcrowded and undersupplied schools. Both experienced sickness and faced the death of loved ones yet remained committed to their schools and the colony. Thomson stated confidently, “You doubtless have heard of all my afflictions and misfortune that I have met with . . . [yet] I have never regretted one moment coming to this place.” She believed God had made her “an instrument in his hands of doing good.”⁴³

Caesar died on December 24, 1835, exactly four years after she opened her school in Caldwell; she was thirty-eight years old. In one of her last letters, she expressed gratitude to Beulah Sansom: “You have set a good

⁴¹ See Brewer, *History of Religious Education in the Episcopal Church*, 243–46; Burkett, “Elizabeth Mars Johnson Thomson,” 23–24.

⁴² J. B. Pinney, “Extracts of a Letter Addressed to the President of the Ladies' Association Auxiliary to the American Colonization Society,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 10 (1834): 89; *Second Annual Report of the Ladies' Association*, 4–5.

⁴³ Elizabeth Thompson, “Liberia,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 10 (1834): 188. Thomson's name is frequently misspelled Thompson, as it is in this article.

example in Liberia; I hope the rising generation will follow your good works. . . . I hope God will reward you a Hundred fold, for what you have done for our race."⁴⁴ Thomson would go on to become a major figure in Liberia, and she died in 1864 at the age of fifty-six. Like other educated settler women, she helped form and lead benevolent and charitable societies, encouraging American Christian values among settlers and the African population. Her unusually long tenure in Africa earned her the title "Mother of Missions."⁴⁵

The optimism that characterized the Ladies' Liberia School Association in the 1830s waned by the early 1840s. In 1840 only ten new members joined the group. The next year only eight joined, even as donations to the general fund dropped precipitously. In 1841, with memberships declining and funds falling off, the group transferred control of the two girls' schools and the school in New Georgia to the Methodist mission. This was done in part to allow the women to focus their efforts on the high school. Certainly financial deficiencies also contributed to the transfer. The high school on Factory Island was finally in operation in the spring of 1842, but the society had underestimated the difficulties of building a school thousands of miles away. The association hired Dr. Wesley Johnson, a white physician from New York who had first gone to Bassa Cove under the direction of the New York and Pennsylvania state colonization societies, as the principal of the school at a salary of one thousand dollars a year. Just one year later, in May 1843, Johnson returned to Hillside, New York, for health reasons; he died two months later.⁴⁶

The women encountered staffing problems as well. After Johnson returned to America, the association suspended the school and put the building under the care of George Seymour, who would later become a well-known African American explorer of Africa. Seymour lived in the building for nearly two years as the society searched for a teacher and raised funds. The society finally found its new teacher, Ishmael Locke, an African American originally from Salem, Massachusetts, who was educated at Cambridge University with support from the Society of Friends. Immediately upon his arrival at the school in 1845, however, he reported that he was "dissatisfied with every thing connected" with the school.

⁴⁴ Pinney, "Extracts of a Letter," 89.

⁴⁵ Harriette G. Brittan, *Scenes and Incidents of Every-Day Life in Africa* (New York, 1859), 79.

⁴⁶ *Twelfth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Ladies' Liberia School Association* (Philadelphia, 1844), 1–10.

Locke recommended spending two to three hundred dollars to repair the building.⁴⁷

After the poor report from Locke, the Ladies' Liberia School Association offered to transfer the high school on Factory Island to the Presbyterian mission. The Presbyterian foreign mission board declined the offer to buy the land and school, most likely because of strategic issues related to where the mission board wanted to locate mission stations in Liberia. Discouraged and disappointed, the association limped along for another three years, ultimately giving up its educational efforts in Africa in 1848 when it handed over the property and school to the Pennsylvania Colonization Society on condition that it be used for educational purposes. But by 1849 the schoolhouse was rapidly decaying. An Episcopal missionary reported that weather and, especially, ants had severely damaged the roofs and floors, and the formerly well-cultivated grounds were overgrown with bushes, weeds, and brambles.⁴⁸

The decline of northern female colonization support had several causes. First, overall support for colonization diminished in the 1840s in response to the successful denunciations by black activists and abolitionists. Scholars have rightly maintained that colonizationists ignored those most fundamentally concerned with the issue—the blacks themselves. From the outset, black Americans proved, on the whole, to be unwilling recruits to the resettlement plan. Three thousand free blacks rallied together in Philadelphia in 1817 to denounce the project. In the following years, prominent free black leaders vehemently condemned colonization

⁴⁷ Before leaving for Liberia, Locke taught school in Salem, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. While in Liberia he met and married Sarah Shorter Hawkins, who was from Kentucky. Locke and his wife returned to America around 1849, and he served as headmaster of a school in Providence, Rhode Island, and as principal of the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia. He died in 1854. Locke's grandson, Alain LeRoy Locke (1885–1954), was a distinguished philosopher who was the first African American Rhodes Scholar and an important figure in the "Harlem Renaissance." See Michael R. Winston, "Locke, Alain LeRoy," in *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, eds. Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston (New York, 1982), 398–403; "The Ladies' Liberia School Association, of Philadelphia," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16 (1840): 164; *Ninth Annual Report of the Ladies' Liberia School Association*, 3–8; *Twelfth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Ladies' Liberia School Association*, 1–10; Elizabeth Morris, Germantown, to Walter Lowerie, New York, Aug. 7, 1846, Mission Correspondence and Reports, Liberia Letters, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia; "High School at Factory Island," *Colonization Herald*, Feb. 26, 1845. On George Seymour, see James Fairhead, Tim Geysbeck, Svend E. Holsoe, and Melissa Leach, eds., *African American Explorations in West Africa: Four Nineteenth-Century Diaries* (Bloomington, IN, 2003).

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Morris, Germantown, to Walter Lowerie, New York, Aug. 7, 1846, Mission Correspondence and Reports, Liberia Letters; J. Rambo, "Late from Liberia," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 25 (1849): 279.

through the emerging black press, from pulpits, and at national Negro conventions. Black opponents stood alone for more than a decade before white abolitionists developed an ardent anticolonization stance. But following the publication of William Lloyd Garrison's *Thoughts on African Colonization* in 1832, black and white abolitionists stood together and vehemently protested colonization as a racist scheme. Scholars have also demonstrated that the abolitionist movement threw colonizationists into crisis. Their public statements and harsh criticism successfully discredited colonization as, at best, logistically impossible and, at worst, a slaveholder's scheme to perpetuate slavery. Abolitionist attacks and the defection of key colonization supporters, such as Arthur Tappan, Theodore Weld, Gerrit Smith, and James Birney, pushed northern colonizationists to insist that the ACS broaden its constitutional objectives to include the gradual abolition of slavery in order to attract the support of the thousands of northerners who were dissatisfied with the ACS's confusing position on slavery. But the ACS refused and instead attempted to position itself as a centrist friend of both slave owners and antislavery advocates.

As the slavery issue intensified in the 1840s, with proslavery and abolitionist forces growing more forceful and vocal, colonization's promise of friendship to both parties in the debate increasingly seemed unworkable and even subversive. Abolitionism and black activism negatively affected female support for colonization. Whatever hopes female colonizationists held out for Liberia dissipated with the growing hostility and tumultuous political environment. In the context of racial violence, and mounting hostility and polarization over slavery, they found it increasingly difficult to promote colonization as a cause that embraced female values such as peace, consensus, and unity.⁴⁹

Female colonizationists faced other obstacles, however, unique to the female northern colonization movement and which have gone largely unexamined by historians. The logistical difficulties associated with building and sustaining schools thousands of miles away contributed to the disintegration of the Ladies' Liberia School Association, as well as other northern female groups. As early as 1835, Beulah Sansom was experiencing the "disadvantages which we endure for want of regular offi-

⁴⁹ Recent examples that show the damage of abolitionism and black activism on colonization include Goodman, *Of One Blood*; John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, MA, 2002); Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828–1865* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2003).

cial information.”⁵⁰ More damaging to female efforts was the failure of the YMCS as an independent organization. The YMCS's colony at Bassa Cove never thrived, and in 1838, after just four years, the YMCS agreed to return to the ACS under a new constitution that allowed state organizations more autonomy. The YMCS's goals changed thereafter. Rather than establish a model colony full of moral, temperate, educated, and religious citizens, the state society reduced its efforts to sending African Americans from Pennsylvania to Bassa Cove and monetarily supporting the parent society. No longer did the YMCS look for assistance in building schools and promoting education. The reorientation of the YMCS stripped the Ladies' Liberia School Association of a primary source of cooperation, encouragement, and support.⁵¹

These complications were only compounded when the ACS recast itself once again in the late 1840s, this time privileging politics over benevolence. Financial difficulties plagued the ACS. As a private corporation it encountered considerable expense administering the colony and, especially, transporting blacks to Liberia. Organizing, promoting, transporting, and caring for thousands of emigrants was an expensive and demanding operation. When Liberian leaders expressed their desire for independence in 1846, the ACS readily acquiesced. Liberian independence in 1847 freed the ACS of its greatest financial liability and encouraged its leaders to refocus their attention. The organization adjusted its message to accommodate its new role as an emigration agency rather than a colonizing project. Leaders stressed the political and economic benefits rather than the missionary aspects of colonization and touted the remarkable progress of the new nation. Efforts to improve Liberian society were increasingly viewed as issues for the Liberian government or mission organizations. While the ACS continued to appeal to benevolence, after 1847 the emphasis shifted in a decidedly political direction. State governments showed renewed interest in the ACS plan and backed up their support with legislation and funds. In 1850, the Virginia legislature appropriated thirty thousand dollars annually for five years to support emigration. In 1852, several free-state legislatures made appropriations to aid colonizing efforts. New Jersey set aside one thousand dollars a year for

⁵⁰ Beulah Sansom, Philadelphia, to Mary Blackford, June 6, 1835, Blackford Papers.

⁵¹ Kocher, “Duty to America and Africa,” 131–35; P. R. Fendall, “Thursday, 10 O’Clock, A.M., Constitution,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 15 (1839): 24–25; Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 241.

two years and in 1855 increased the appropriation to four thousand dollars. Pennsylvania agreed to give two thousand dollars to emigration efforts. The General Assembly of Indiana passed a bill placing five thousand dollars at the disposal of the state authorities for the purpose of removing African Americans from the state. The Maryland legislature renewed its aid in 1852, reserving ten thousand dollars a year for six years to aid Maryland's colonization society. In 1855, Missouri passed an act appropriating three thousand dollars a year for ten years to help the state's society. In 1856, the Kentucky legislature pledged five thousand dollars annually, without limitation of time, to aid colonization.⁵²

Inspired by the state legislatures' actions, the ACS once again looked to the federal government for assistance. The society was jubilant when prominent politicians like Daniel Webster, Edward Everett, and Henry Clay publicly commended the society's work and called for federal appropriations for African colonization. The ACS appealed to Congress to make a mail contract with the society to support a steamship line that would carry both freight and emigrants to Liberia four times a year.⁵³ The society also pressed the United States to recognize the newly independent republic of Liberia. The ACS did not succeed in either of these efforts but did persuade Congress to continue to appropriate money to the navy to resettle recaptured Africans from seized slave ships. In 1855, Congress also agreed to establish a consulate at Monrovia.⁵⁴ Practically, this meant the ACS no longer tried to balance volunteerism and politics. Male leaders looked squarely to the government for support. They no longer praised or publicized the work of female auxiliaries. Women seem to "disappear" from the pages of the *African Repository*. Benevolent activity, volunteerism, and moral suasion—privileged activity in the 1830s and early 1840s—had become less compelling to the organization, and, consequently, the role of women in the organization became nonessential.

At the same time that the ACS looked toward government and away

⁵² *Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society* (1854; repr., New York, 1969), 10–12; *Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society* (1857; repr., New York, 1969), 6; *Fortieth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society* (1858; repr., New York, 1969), 8.

⁵³ The ACS proposed two options. First, the government would pay the ACS to deliver the mail to Liberia four times a year; the ACS would use the money to build its own steamship. Second, the navy would make four voyages a year to Liberia carrying mail, allowing room for emigrants. *Thirty-Seventh Annual Report of the American Colonization Society* (1855; repr., New York, 1969), 11.

⁵⁴ Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 246. The United States recognized Liberia as an independent republic in 1862. England recognized Liberia in 1848 and France in 1852.

from benevolence, Liberian missions developed and progressed. All the major missionary agencies exerted an intensive effort in Liberia beginning in the 1840s. Liberia was the first overseas mission location for the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal denominations. Liberia was also the first place where all the major denominational mission boards recruited and employed black American missionaries. After twenty-five years of hardship, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Baptists had established viable mission stations and were devoting tens of thousands of dollars each year to the cause. In 1851, the Methodist Church appropriated \$22,000 to Liberia, twice the amount given to their other foreign mission stations. That same year, the Episcopal Church devoted \$14,226, nearly half its total foreign mission income, to Liberian missions. Education was an important aspect of mission activity in Liberia, and supporters believed it critical for mission work to succeed. Male and female missionaries started schools immediately upon arriving in Liberia. The *Biblical Repository* reported "four times as much missionary money is laid out upon their [West Africa] schools . . . as upon any other people of the same size on the face of the earth." In 1852, Methodists reported fourteen day-schools with nearly 300 students; the Southern Baptists reported six schools with over 350 students. Joseph Tracy estimated that the Episcopal, Presbyterian, and northern Baptist missions in Liberia operated another nineteen schools, with approximately 600 students, as well as three high schools.⁵⁵

As religious organizations increased their educational efforts in Liberia and opened and operated their own schools, female colonization efforts appeared unnecessary. As early as 1835, Beulah Sansom recognized the challenge missionary societies posed to the efforts of the Ladies' Liberia School Association. In response to letters published in the *African Repository* by Methodist missionary John Seys extolling the denomination's educational efforts, she responded, "I do not know how to keep up with bodies that press forward at this rate."⁵⁶ In time, it became increasingly evident to Philadelphia's Ladies' Liberia School Association and other female societies that their efforts were poor imitations of bet-

⁵⁵ "Missionary Correspondence," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, May 21, 1851; "Missions in West Africa," *Biblical Repository and Princeton Review* 30 (1858): 440; Joseph Tracy, "Education in Liberia," *African Repository* 28 (1852): 174-77; *Proceedings of the Board of Missions of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society* (Hartford, CT, 1851), 23, Episcopal Church Archives, Austin, TX.

⁵⁶ Beulah Sansom, Philadelphia, to Mary Blackford, June 6, 1835, Blackford Papers.

ter funded and staffed mission schools. Moreover, the competition for funds made it increasingly difficult for the women to sustain their independent efforts. Denominations with large memberships, more money, and an established organization did with relative ease what it took a small group of women years to accomplish. For example, the Ladies' Liberia School Association worked for over three years to establish a high school. The Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, on the other hand, completed a high school in little over a year. In 1848, the mission decided to begin a high school at Monrovia. One year later, an ironclad building was raised with a library filled with two thousand volumes of all kinds of historical, scientific, and Latin and Greek classics.⁵⁷

The mobilization of white women in the 1830s did not culminate in the formation of a widespread colonization movement among women. But what happened to these women? Despite the growing invisibility of women's groups and auxiliaries in the colonization movement, women's work for colonization did not end. Wealthy females continued to leave large legacies, and individual women continued to send financial donations to state societies and the ACS throughout the 1850s. On the other hand, like many of their male counterparts, the majority of women appear to have distanced themselves from the ACS. Perhaps these women poured their money and energy into denominational missions or aligned themselves with the emerging political antislavery movement that provided a moderate and conservative alternative to immediatism. It is essential to understand, however, the difference between support of the ACS and support of colonization in general. Even as the ACS declined as a dynamic movement, the idea of colonization of black Americans outside the United States as a solution to the race question remained popular. So while many rejected the feasibility of the ACS's project, they nevertheless embraced colonizationist discourse that painted Africa as the "promised land" for black Americans.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ "Alexander High School" *African Repository* 26 (1850): 284; H. W. Ellis, "Letter from the Rev. H. W. Ellis," *African Repository* 27 (1851): 3.

⁵⁸ Abraham Lincoln and many in Congress considered the possibility of a black exodus. In March 1862, Congress passed a resolution that established a Select Committee on Emancipation and Colonization and earmarked federal money for emancipation. The following month, federal legislators passed the District of Columbia Emancipation Act, a law that paid Washington slaveholders for their slaves and set aside one hundred thousand dollars for colonization. In December 1862, Lincoln devoted nearly two-fifths of his address to Congress to the subject of compensated emancipation and colonization. As part of his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln offered financial assistance to states that wanted to end slavery and colonize their black populations. Ultimately, Lincoln

So, in the 1850s prominent northern women continued to promote the ideals of colonization, namely that black Americans belonged in Africa, through their writing. Lydia Sigourney published poems like "Sympathy with the Lowly," which extolled colonization's missionary efforts in Africa, and "To Africa," which highlighted the gifts of democracy and Christianity brought by colonization efforts. Helen Cross Knight's children's history of Liberia, entitled *The New Republic* (1850), promoted Liberia as the "father-land" of African Americans where "none can molest or make them afraid." Sarah Josepha Hale, the secretary of Boston's female colonization group, asserted in the preface to her novel *Liberia* that her story would "show the advantages Liberia offers to the African, who among us has no home, no position, and no future." Even Harriett Beecher Stowe, a self-proclaimed opponent of colonization, portrayed Africa as the home to black Americans. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe's protagonist, George Harris returned to Africa, proclaiming, "I want a country, a nation, of my own. . . . As a Christian patriot, as a teacher of Christianity, I go to my country."⁵⁹ Perhaps this is the greatest legacy of northern female support for colonization. These women helped popularize and affirm the notion that, while black Americans did not deserve to be enslaved, neither did they belong in America.

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repudiated the idea that the liberation of black Americans required their subsequent removal. Congress, too, turned against colonization. Several bills that proposed setting aside western territory for black settlement were defeated in 1864.

⁵⁹ Lydia Sigourney, "Sympathy with the Lowly," and "To African," *African Repository* 32 (1856): 158, and 41 (1865): 206; Helen Cross Knight, *The New Republic* (Boston, 1850), 245; Sarah J. Hale, *Liberia; or, Mr. Peyton's Experiments* (New York, 1853), iv; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852; repr., New York, 1998), 467–70.