THE SWEET, SWEET SOUND OF LIBERTY:
BLACK SETTLERS AND THEIR EARLY EDUCATION INITIATIVE IN LIBERIA
1820-1860

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation examines early educational initiatives in Liberia, West Africa, from 1820–1860: a period where colonization to Liberia was voluntary, supported by the American Colonization Society, and therefore attracting many colonists. The traditional narrative of Liberia’s unique history was built on colonization, Christianization, and Westernization. The history of silencing the voices of Black Americans has been a practice in early historiography of Liberia. As a result, it has overlooked the important role freed Blacks from the United States played in the formation of Liberia’s educational system. Black Americans arrived in three successive waves; each group contributed to the development of Liberia’s educational, social, and political institutions. While struggling to survive malaria and negotiate conflicts with white colonists, native Africans, and each other, Black settlers navigated their new environment while transplanted their acquired Western culture and Christian faith from the United States. By charting this process, this study also offers a unique social history as well as an educational history during a time where Black settlers’ identities begin to change from American to Americo-Liberian. Through a critical examination of archival documents—including narratives from Black and white colonists, journals, and memoirs—I provide a multilayered account of the processes that led to the foundation of Liberia’s existing educational system.
Dedication

To my children, Silas, Samaia and Sidney
To my parents Adib and Bertha Saleh
To my siblings, Jandi, Fadi, Samer, and Shadi

Lastly, to my partner in crime, best friend, better half and my gracious blessing from God,
my husband Douglas.
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Table of Contents

Map of Liberia ........................................................................................................................................ v

Map of the Early Settlement .................................................................................................................... viii

Chapter 1 Liberia: Its Founding, Its People, and Its Plan to Civilize and Christianize Africa .................... 1

Chapter 2 The American Colonization Movement, 1800–1820............................................................... 26

Chapter 3 The Foundation of American Education on African Soil: The First Wave of Settlers, 1822–1830 .......................................................... 55

Chapter 4 Their God and their Education: The Second Wave of Settlers, 1830–1850.............................. 91

Chapter 5 Higher Education in the Era of Independence, 1848–1860 ................................................. 125

Chapter 6 Conclusion ............................................................................................................................. 147

Bibliography ....................................................................................................................................... 156
Map of the Early Settlement
Chapter 1

Liberia: Its Founding, Its People, and Its Plan to Civilize and Christianize Africa

If Asked to describe my homeland in a sentence, I might say something like this: Liberia is a wonderful, beautiful, mixed-up country struggling mightily to find itself.

—Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

In her memoir, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman elected president of Liberia (the first female president in Africa) describes Liberia in a sentence that beautifully expresses the complexities and richness of its unique history.¹ Liberia is a country with an identity tied to America’s peculiar history of slavery and racism, a country founded on the premise of freedom and liberty, which developed into an independent nation on the western coast of Africa governed by and for Black Americans. Johnson Sirleaf grew up a part of the elite class in Liberia, attended one of the country’s best private schools, and continued to the United States for college. She achieved this status in part because her father, a native Liberian, was reared and educated by one of the elite Black American descendants to become a lawyer. Her mother was mixed race (German and native Liberian) who never met her father. Although Johnson Sirleaf grew up privileged, her native Liberian roots reminded her of the experiences of the side where a vast majority of Liberians lived for the 150 years before ending the rule of the American-Liberian (descendants of free Blacks from the United States) class in the 1980 military coup that eventually led to fourteen years of civil war.² How could a country, described as being


wonderful and beautiful, a land of the free, create hostility and division amongst its people? What role did education play in this unrest?

Liberia

In 1821, a small colony on the Western Coast of Africa became the home to free and emancipated Blacks who left the United States with hopes and dreams of starting a new life in a country where their basic freedoms would not be denied. This colony became known as Liberia. It was founded by the American Colonization Society (ACS), an organization of white men who saw colonization as the only way of decreasing the number of free Blacks in the Southern states. As Black Americans journeyed to Liberia, they brought with them a culture that assimilated aspects of the Western world, Christianity, and slavery.

Upon their arrival, they faced many challenges. First and foremost was the challenge of staying alive, as many succumbed to malaria, also known as the African fever. Second, Liberia was already inhabited by native Africans who had created their own societies with particular traditions, religions, cultural norms, and education styles before the arrival of the Americans. When these groups came in contact with each other, conflicts and tensions ensued. These tensions also existed between white and Black settlers as each group negotiated power and control in its new home. As a result of this struggle, a system of hierarchy was instituted where the white colonists continued to rule

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3 Southern whites saw the growing population of Blacks as a threat to the ideological underpinnings that rationalized white supremacy and the preservation of slavery. Northern whites supported this movement, for the most part, because they believed it was a way “to repair the injuries” inflicted on Africa by sending back “partially civilized Christians” who would also benefit from a better living situation and at the same time will Christianize Africans. P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement 1816-1885* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 17.
Liberia until its independence in 1847. Despite these challenges, Black Americans built and governed their own nation outside the United States and they created a society in the image of the only homeland they knew: America. Even as Black Americans ruled Liberia, those small numbers of settlers with education and economic status ruled every aspect of Liberia’s institutions.

Although the history of Liberia is fundamentally connected and forever linked to the history of Black Americans in the United States, the voices and the experiences of the Black settlers who shaped the early education, social, economic, and political fabric is missing in the narrative of Liberia. The early historiography on Liberia is completely void of any discussion of the educational history and the early education initiatives made by Blacks. More contemporary scholarship has begun to chronicle the lived experiences of Blacks, but these studies still only provide limited analyses of the role they played in the rich context and educational history of Liberia. One accepted fact in this scholarship

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is that the founders of Western education in Liberia were missionaries who represented seven denominations (Baptist, Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Anglo-Catholic) and were supported by powerful colonization societies with supplemental aid given by educators, businessmen, and governments. As such, the development of education in Liberia has been synonymous with mission schools. Christianizing and civilizing were themes that dominated education, with emphasis placed on teaching religion. Although education was important to the founders of the ACS—they were all highly educated—their focus was on relocating Blacks to Liberia and not on developing a formal education system. Once they were in Liberia, the ACS made one attempt to set up a public school system in the colony, and when that attempt failed shortly after the death of Rev. Calvin Holton, a white colonist who was asked to spearhead the development of a formal education system, the ACS never replaced him.

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However, early settlers operated schools in the first decade to serve the children of free and emancipated Blacks. Individual settlers began and continued schools for almost ten years before the settlers’ arrival in Liberia.\(^9\)

Despite the recent growth in research on the history of Liberia and the Black settlers who emigrated there, historiography on educational development in the antebellum era is scant. What has been written about education in the foundational years of Liberian history is limited and found only in unpublished dissertations.\(^10\) There are four dissertations on education in Liberia during this period that informed my study. Written in 1959, Advertus Arthur Hoff’s, “Higher Education For A Changing Liberia: An Analysis of Emerging Needs, With Proposals For An Expanded, Strengthened Program,” which explores Liberia’s higher institutions, its challenges and recommendations for a stronger program.\(^11\) Mary Antoinette Brown’s “Education and National Development in Liberia, 1800-1900” was written in 1969 and it provides a more comprehensive histories of educational development in Liberia in the nineteenth century. However, Brown’s narrative does not take into account the Black settlers’ history both in the United States and Liberia and the influence it had on their contributions to the early development of institutional education. Joanna D. T. Hoff’s important dissertation, “The Role of Women in National Development in Liberia 1800-1900,” gives voices to women and their efforts in educational development. It focuses on the influence of native women and their own


educational experiences, but it is limited in that it focuses only on women (Black settlers and African natives) in the nineteenth century and overlooks the complexities of Black American women’s experiences with freedom and liberty, which were tied to their belief in the value placed on education in the United States. Estrenda C. Dillon’s “The Role of Education in the Rise and Fall of Americo-Liberians in Liberia, West Africa” uses a historical case-study method to construct a narrative that analyzes the role education—specifically, higher education—played in creating the Americo-Liberian identity and elite status. Dillon provides a history of how education and social stratification contributed to the rise and fall of the first republic (1980); however, it is less comprehensive than Brown or Hoff’s work, as she covers 150 years without looking at the role of native African settlers who assimilated and became part of Liberia’s elite as well as the role the ACS played in creating this social stratification. Presently, there are no publications that provide a historiography of Liberia’s educational development in its formative years. There is a huge gap to be filled from Brown’s dissertation (1969) to now.

My dissertation will contribute to this educational history by filling in that gap. My study looks at the educational development during the first four decades of the ACS’ relocation efforts in Liberia. During those decades, emigration to Liberia was at its peak. It is also during this period that the foundation of education was being shaped by Black settlers’ experiences and social forces (sickness, lack resources, adaptation, tension, and conflicts from natives) around them. It will highlight the role Blacks played in the development of an education system in Liberia during the first four decades of their arrival while constructing their own social environment outside of America’s complete control. It complicates the interpretations proffered in previous scholarship, which details
the early history of Liberia and the shifting identities of Blacks who transitioned in Liberia from former slaves or quasi-free second-class persons in the United States to become the ruling-class. Rather than a historical analysis of only Westernized education, this study brings to light how the evolution of their identity in a newly formed country, where race, citizenship, and freedom were being shaped and reshaped in their presence, helped determine the types of schools and society Liberia would develop in the first four decades of its existence.

Arriving in 1822, Lott Cary and Collin Teage were two of the earliest settlers to start mission schools in Liberia. Because the Liberian government did not take part in the education of its citizens until after the 1860s, most of Liberia’s educational history is one-sided and linked to that of the missionary societies. Much research has been made available, books written, and stories told about how Liberia was founded by the ACS; however, the focus has moved away from those Black settlers who gave up their citizenship in America to make Liberia their home. The ACS and other benevolent societies silenced their experiences and voices. The primary goal of this dissertation is to provide this history.

The story of Black Americans headed to Liberia is one of migration, and in some ways, their story is no different than that of the Irish or German or Chinese coming to America in this time period. They left their homeland for something more and better for themselves and their children in Liberia. There were no fables of streets paved with gold or illusions that opportunities were boundless in Liberia, but Black Americans who emigrated there in the first decades believed that through hard work, dedication, advancements in learning, and their belief in the transformative power of democracy,
they could transform Liberia into their own land of milk and honey. This dissertation explores this larger narrative into the educational history of African Americans and tells this untold story.

**Literature Review**

Histories on Liberia surfaced in the early twentieth century when historians began writing about colonization and the continent of Africa. One of the first was Early Lee Fox’s 1919 publication *The American Colonization Society, 1817-1840*. Fox offers an historical analysis of the colonization movement from its origin in 1817 to 1840, when the point of view of the ACS changed from solving the Black problem to building a model Black Republic in Africa. This history, however, is partial to the Society, arguing that colonization created an opportunity for thousands of emancipated slaves to Christianize Liberia. In addition, Fox concludes that the ACS was the primary force suppressing the slave trade coming out of Africa.\(^\text{12}\) Historians of African colonization never really accepted his work. The reason is that it whitewashed history of white colonizationists. Nearly a half-century later, in 1961, P. J. Staudenraus wrote a more comprehensive study of the ACS, which has become the foundational work on colonization in the nineteenth century. His book, *The African Colonization Movement 1816-1865*, relied mostly on ACS papers, and investigates the ideologies behind the movement and the ACS’s 50-year involvement. Staudenraus was the first to assert that the success of the ACS was directly attributed to both the need for the religious conversion of Africans to Christianity and racist beliefs in the United States that

\(^\text{12}\) Fox, *The American Colonization Society*
emphasized white superiority over people of African descent. These two beliefs were the driving force behind the emigration of Black Americans to Liberia and a leading cause of the conversion of Africans to Christianity. However, like Fox, his predecessor, Staudenraus failed to include Black Americans’ experiences in the Antebellum era.\(^{13}\)

Many of the historians who wrote about Liberia during the early twentieth century devoted little attention to the experiences and expectations of Black Americans in the colony.\(^{14}\) The early years of the settlement were difficult. Loss of lives and loved ones from disease, civil strife, financial difficulties, and legal issues were common issues encountered by Black Americans. Acknowledging the need to include the Black settlers’ experience, Tom W. Shick’s *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia* provides a glimpse of the social dynamics in the emigrating settlers’ society in Liberia’s early decades.\(^{15}\) Shick also includes quantitative data and statistical evidence. He examines another side of emigration movement as not always being voluntary. Some emigrants were forced to emigrate by slave owners. Shick used data collected and published from his previous work, *Emigrants to Liberia, 1820-1843: An Alphabet Listing*, a book containing quantitative analysis of emigration to Liberia through 1843. Names, ships, date of arrival in Liberia, free or emancipated status, place of origin, and date and place of death of emigrants can

\(^{13}\) Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement*.


\(^{15}\) Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*. 
be found in this work. Shick’s work led the way for scholarship to include Black settlers’ experiences. Another method of including the Black settlers’ experiences was through their written letters to and from Liberia.

In *Dear Master: Letters of a Slave Family*, Randall Miller documents the life of a slave family, the Skipwiths. Separated by their master—one group emigrated to Liberia and the other was sent to a cotton plantation in Alabama—the dismantled family corresponded through letters that traced bits of their lives in Liberia and Alabama. Through this correspondence, we learn firsthand, from the pens of former slaves about the intricacies of starting anew in Liberia as well as in Alabama. The book is one of the few edited records left by an American slave family. However, the letters preserved are only from those from the former slaves to their master. Unfortunately, correspondence to the slaves from their former owners was not preserved, so we only have a one-sided experience. Nevertheless, these unique materials provide a firsthand look at the lives of manumitted slaves in Liberia. Miller’s scholarship explores the complexities, hardships, and everyday experiences of Black settlers in Liberia.

In addition to Miller’s work, Bell Irvin Wiley’s *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia 1833-1869* and Robert Starobin’s *Blacks in Bondage: Letters of American Slaves* further illustrates the hardships faced by emigrants. In their respective publications, both scholars (Miller and Wiley) concentrated on letters from black emigrants to their former slave masters and families residing in the United States. Their personal testimonies

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echoed the level of hardship Black Americans experienced in the colony upon arrival.\textsuperscript{18}

Starobin, in particular, provides a glimpse of the level of communication some newly settled blacks maintained with their former masters. These relationships were often paternalistic and revealed the innate ability of formerly enslaved Black Americans to survive despite hardships and inadequate resources. Wiley and Starobin are among the few historians who have offered a documentary history of these Black settlers. Their publications regarding what these Black Americans experienced and how they adjusted to the conditions in their new country provide insight into their endurance and perseverance, and how they eventually developed personal and societal relationships with their new African brethren. John Wesley Smith adds to this dialogue in \textit{Sojourners in Search of Freedom: The Settlement of Liberia by Black Americans}. He offers a political history up to the achievement of independence in 1847, and examines the first and second waves of settlers and their search for freedom.\textsuperscript{19}

Although the previous scholarships document history of ex-slaves with the former slave owner, analogous testimonies exist for freeborn African Americans as well. \textit{Liberian Dreams} documents the communications of four freeborn Black American men who relocated to the colony in the 1850s.\textsuperscript{20} These narratives were edited by Wilson Jeremiah Moses, and they add a nuanced layer of analysis to ensure that historians recognize the diversity that exists within the Black American experience. Moses’ edited


volume captures some poignant facts about emigration in the first couple of years: the class disparities, the malaria epidemic, the lack of education, the involvement of the American missionary organizations, and the politics within the colony. Another addition to the narrative of free Black emigrants is, Richard Hall’s *On Africa’s Shore: A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834-1857*. It presents the experiences of freeborn and emancipated blacks who were settled by the Maryland Colonization Society in a settlement they called Maryland in Liberia. This settlement remained independent of Liberia until 1857 when it joined the Republic. Hall narrates the story of these 1,100 emigrants and their experiences governing their own settlement.\(^21\)

More contemporary scholars are becoming more inclusive of the everyday experiences of Black Americans in Liberia. Marie Tyler-McGraw’s *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* provides an excellent addition to the ACS’s history by focusing on Black and White Virginians and their contributions to the development of the Liberian Republic. Her inclusion of Black Virginians—who represented the largest number of emigrants and leaders in Liberia—adds to the historiography of struggles and triumphs in Liberia and the emergence of the Americo-Liberian identity amidst the issues of race, citizenship, and freedom.\(^22\) Claude A. Clegg III’s *The Price of Liberty: African-Americans and the Making of Liberia* examines North Carolina’s Quaker and Black emigrants and their contributions to the development of Liberia in the nineteenth century. He examines their socioeconomic experiences in


Liberia and the irony of replicating the United States’ oppressive system there. He also analyzes the devastating impact of malaria on the settlers. Like Tyler-McGraw, Clegg is amongst the list of contemporary historians who concern with the national debate over colonization, slavery, abolition and placing the voices of Black Americans in that discourse. For him, North Carolinians became his case study.

Historians have used case studies to provide an analysis of the Black life and culture in Liberia. For example, In *Journey of Hope: The Back to Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s* by Kenneth Barnes examines the arrival of emigrants after Reconstruction—from Arkansas—in Liberia and Alan Huffman’s *Mississippi in Africa: The Saga of the Slaves of Prospect Hill Plantation and Their Legacy in Liberia*, which tells the story of the legal challenges faced to emigrate and the experiences of Isaac Ross’s slaves in Liberia. They were the largest number of freed slaves in a single group to emigrate and formed their own settlement, Mississippi in Africa. The twentieth century was a turning point in Liberia’s history as the country ended its Americo-Liberian rule through a violent political unrest. James Ciment’s *Another America: The Story of Liberia and the Former Slaves Who Ruled It* provides a narrative of the settlers’ experiences from the beginning into the twentieth-century Liberia. He examines issues pertaining to the division within Black communities in Liberia as they relate to skin color, educational level, and elitism and connects this with the fall of the Americo-Liberians in

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political and social leadership in Liberia.\textsuperscript{25} Today there remains room to provide fresh insights and analysis of the Black American settlers and their experiences, inclusive of their educational initiatives in Liberia.

The government of Liberia did not take part in the education of its citizens until after the late 1860s. As such, most of Liberia’s educational history has had a one-sided focus, mostly linked to the ACS and the missionary societies that labored in the country. Historians have produced in-depth examinations of the ACS and its movement to colonize free and freed Black Americans in Africa. Rarely, however, has the focus been on the educational contribution of Black Americans who left their loved ones and gave up their citizenship in America to make Liberia their new home. Histories of the ACS and other aspects of the colonization movement have overshadowed their contributions as reflected in the limited number of sources on Liberia’s educational history. Although missionaries and the ACS played an important role in the initial development of education in Liberia, most scholarships overlooks how the social systems created by Blacks entering Liberia during different time periods affected every area of their lives, including education.\textsuperscript{26}

**Objectives of the Study**

The shaping and reshaping of Black Americans’ identities in a newly formed country amidst the conflicts and tensions with white settlers, native Africans, and


amongst each other, played out in educational experiences and the types of schools and
society Liberia would develop in the first half decade of its existence.

In order to further understand this unique history, this dissertation explores the
following questions:

1. How did Black Americans who left the United States influence the educational
   system of Liberia between 1820-1860?
2. How did the experiences of each wave of settlers into Liberia affect the kind of
   society and education they went on to develop?
3. How did the early education initiative affect the native people already residing in
   Liberia?

**Significance of the Study**

The history of Liberia is fundamentally connected and forever linked to the
history of Black Americans in the United States, but the voices and the experiences of the
Black settlers who shaped the early education initiatives in Liberia is scant in both
historical narratives of United States and Liberia. Early historiography of Liberia is
completely devoid of any discussion of the educational efforts made by Black settlers.
Research has primarily focused on the social history of the ACS and the founding of
Liberia, which has left a huge gap in the literature. In fact, most of the history of
education in Liberia is documented in unpublished dissertations. The most significant of
this unpublished scholarship was written in 1969, over four decades ago. There is huge
gap in the literature to be filled. The significance of this dissertation is to close this gap in
the literature and provide an educational history through the examination of the
delitutes of those Black emigrants who settled in Liberia during 1820–1860.

This study theorizes that while Black Americans struggled to construct their new
lives and identities in Liberia, their quest for education did not stop once in Liberia.
Amidst their struggles and their triumphs in Liberia, they founded schoolhouses for their
children. This study, while focusing on the early development of Liberia’s educational
system, adds its rich social history in its narrative. It includes their interactions with, and
influences upon the native Africans they met, their negotiations of space with those who
inhabited the land before they arrived, and their desire to spread their Christian faith to
Africans. These negotiations and tensions fostered a society and an educational system
different from any other in Africa’s history.

Another significance of this study is to assist anyone interested in conducting
research in post-conflict societies. By providing a glimpse of the methodological
challenges in gathering my research in Liberia; this study can serve as a road map in
understanding the importance of agility in the field and flexibility when looking at
societies coming out of civil wars and political unrests.

**Methodology Conundrum**

My quest to understand the history of education in Liberia took a transnational
approach, unfolding both in Liberia and the United States. In the latter, it is quite simple
to find and access an archive. You are given all the necessary tools to approach your
research in an organized manner. The finding aids are there to guide your steps; an
archivist is available to answer questions and set you up; even the records are where and
how they are listed. Unfortunately, there is not a road map for doing archival research in a country coming out of a 14-year civil war. This was apparent on my first trip to Liberia.

I spent two weeks in December of 2009 navigating a country still marked by war. I learned in that two-week period that most official businesses shut down during the month of December, particularly, close to Christmas. Although I was able to make some connections and contacts that got me closer to seeing an archive, I was unable to visit one. I was told that the archive had been relocated; however, no one knew where the particular documents I needed were housed. Returning to the United States in January of 2010, I spent the next two years in contact with my connections, which helped to get me closer to finding the archive. I returned again in March of 2013 for ten days. The infrastructures of the country had improved since I was last there. For one, most government offices had electricity as opposed to the generators that kept them open previously. I spent the first day trying to locate the temporary archive that housed the nineteenth-century historical documents. Upon arriving at the Ministry Building, I was directed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and told that the records were located there. I found that getting around became easier when I told the gatekeepers that I was a Liberian studying in the United States. This information helped me move around government offices more easily.

The archive director's office was in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but once there, I realized that the office was an archive in name only, for it was only a room with windows but no documents. The directors sent me down to meet the Director-General, Dr. Augustine Konneh, a former Morehouse College professor and chairman of their history department. After sharing with him my research interest and anticipated findings, he got up from behind his desk and walked me a couple of doors down to meet with the Advisor
to the President of Liberia on foreign affairs, Ambassador George W. Wallace, Jr.

Unfortunately Ambassador Wallace’s information was limited to twentieth-century Liberian history. However, he knew a former justice minister from the Samuel K. Doe administration who had a well-stocked private library and whom he thought could help me. While I was with Ambassador Wallace, he called the minister on the phone and got us in to see him that day.

That day was a big breakthrough. Although I was not physically closer to the archive, I had made connections with some of Liberia’s historians. We (my husband, brother, and a childhood friend traveling along for my comfort) had chartered a car for the day, so we were able to adjust our plans accordingly. At the minister’s house, he shared with me his private collections. I was able to scan some of the documents with a portable scanner.

Also, while speaking with the minister, I learned that Dr. D. Elwood Dunn—a Liberian emeritus professor at Sewanee: The University of the South and a historian whose work I’ve cited—was his good friend and was also visiting Liberia. Dr. Dunn had been instrumental in the preservation of some Liberia’s twentieth-century history with the University of Indiana’s Liberian Project. He was in Liberia to serve as a member of the Constitution Review Committee. A phone call was placed to Dr. Dunn and he agreed to meet with me within the hour on the outskirts of the city at a little local Lebanese restaurant. It was through this visit that I learned about his research and contribution to the scholarship. Dr. Dunn studied the nineteenth-century Episcopal movement in Liberia and was able to share a lot of insights about key historians in Liberia whose work could benefit me. From him, I learned that historical documents were being stored at the
National Archive Building in Sinkor, which was a 15-minute cab ride from where we were. He also connected me with the director of archives in Sinkor, C. Morris Kollie.

My first encounter with the historical documents brought defeat. There were two rooms filled with boxes of documents piled on top of each other. These boxes were stacked up to six feet high in piles that covered the entire room, leaving very little space for movement. There was no specific order or organization to the documents. Those documents visible to me showed clear signs of neglect, as letters were faded of documents and some ripped apart. I was given permission to explore the documents with no further instructions. I spent three days closed up in 20 by 15 foot room in excruciating heat with little ventilation with few results. The devastation of a 14-year war had not only left the country behind in terms of its infrastructure but had robbed it of its rich history, which was apparent from the unkempt pieces of paper fading behind closed doors in the unbearable heat.27

On my fourth day, I engaged the archivist about the conditions of the archive. I was then informed that during the war, documents were ransacked, looted, and used by the locals in the marketplace as wrapping paper for goods and for fire. Sadly he explained, “Survival was the locals priority, not papers in boxes. In fact, the looters thought we had something of value in here.”28 Although Liberian archivists bartered with the townies for the return of these documents, many were never retrieved. Also, the

27 Based on a conversation with the head of The Liberian Collection at Indiana University, Dr. Verlon Stone, I learned that the Liberian National Archive in Monrovia, Liberia, suffered two major catastrophes: heavy rainfall in 1985, which left the archives flooded and damaged documents, and the 14-year civil war.

human and financial resources are limited, so the archive is filled with boxes and documents that have not been organized or restored. Feeling disheartened about these conditions, I left the country. No classroom or lectures prepared me for what I would experience. Historians doing work in post-conflict societies need to understand the challenges they will encounter. Training will not prepare you, but being flexible will get you far. Although I left with very little source consideration, I came back more inspired to keep Liberia’s history relevant.

**Methodology**

This research utilizes archival sources, both primary and secondary source materials. My quest to understand this history took a transnational approach, both in Liberia and the United States. In the latter, the ACS’s records at the Library of Congress
(LOC) constituted a principal source of data. During the ACS’s involvement in Liberia, detailed records were compiled and maintained on the day-to-day activities of both white and black settlers in the colony. When the ACS dissolved in 1964, it donated all of its records, including all copies of its journals and emigrant demographic information, to the LOC. I utilized these records and was able to find information about the conflicts with the natives as well as how the colonists interpreted the native people’s culture and values, along with maps, pictures, and lists of emigrants headed for Liberia. Within the collection of documents were letters from settlers to family members and their former slave owners in the United States, as well as letters from the United States to Liberia. All of the Annual Reports of the ACS up to 1860 were reviewed, along with the ACS’s quarterly journal, *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, which is known now as *The African Repository*.²⁹

Two other major sources that help me understand and situate Black Americans in Liberia were the Roll of Emigrants to Liberia and the 1843 Census of Liberia. Information pertaining to their occupation, their status (free or emancipated), their city of origin, names and dates of the ships that settlers sailed to Liberia, the location they settled in once they were in Liberia, their educational status, and their date and possible age at death. The emigrant roll did not always provide every possible type of information about the settlers. Some categories were left blank. In order to corroborate the list of emigrants into some of the reports and letters, I consulted the census of Liberia. Often it was the case that names were misspelled, so using both sources to match demographic information helped avoid mix-ups of settlers and their experiences.

A final source of primary documents was located online through the University of Illinois’ Library’s Gale databases, which provided such sources as the Annual Reports of Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia and the Annual Reports of the Board of Managers of the Ladies’ Liberia School Association, an auxiliary group of the ACS that contributed to the development of schools and orphanages in Liberia.

Other universities’ online archives were utilized via digitized libraries such as Archive.org and HaithTrust.org. Within these online archives, I was able to locate journals, memoirs, letters, speeches, and rare books from universities around the United States. The Virginia Emigrants to Liberia is another digitized site that contains information about Virginia’s emigrants and emancipators, stories from emigrants, and tables, timelines, maps, and links to other Library sources. Other secondary sources were identified as follows: unpublished dissertations, journals, biographies, speeches, scholarly literature on Liberia and its Black settlers, a published dissertations of Methodist missionaries in Liberia and Episcopal Church in Liberia, and various reports about mission activities in Liberia. Using these sources allows my dissertation to detail the interplay of those who initiated formal schooling in Liberia.

**Limitations**

While some of Liberia’s education history is available orally, supporting those stories with primary sources was challenging. This study has been limited by the access to primary data in Liberia, the selection in time period and the lack of research on Liberia’s education development. Because of the military coup in 1980 and the 14-year civil war, many of Liberia’s records have been lost, destroyed, or not preserved. I
traveled to Liberia twice in search of archival documents. Unfortunately, staff at the national archive had not received the proper training or funding to preserve what was left of the historic records saved during the civil war from being looted, burned, or used in the marketplace. With limited access to primary documents, I had to rely largely on secondary sources, such as an unpublished dissertation written in 1969 about the educational and national development in Liberia in the nineteenth century. Another limitation was the lack of scholarly research published on the history of education in Liberia. Research on Liberia’s educational development was found in 20th century unpublished dissertations.

Lastly, this study is further limited by concentrating on the first four decades in which Black settlers arrived in Liberia. I adopted this focus because emigration was high during this period and it was the period where the early stages of a society were being formed and the foundation of education was being laid. It was also during this time that the Liberian social hierarchy, identities, and political climate were being shaped.

**Dissertation Overview**

My study unfolds over the course of six chapters. My first chapter introduces my dissertation and provides a literature review, along with the objectives, significance of my study, methodological conundrum, methodology, and limitations.

Chapter 2 offers a historical overview of the colonization movement in the United States and Liberia from 1800–1820, exploring the history and ideology behind the ACS movement that led to the founding of Liberia. It also provides contextual knowledge necessary to understand the educational experiences of Blacks in America during the
period. This chapter concludes by turning to the African natives who resided in Liberia. It pays particular attention to their social, religious, and educational history (their “Bush schools”) before the arrival of Black settlers in order to understand their reactions to and interactions with Americans colonists. Understanding this historical background sets the stage for understanding how Liberia, as a country, came to be.

Chapter 3 details the first wave of emigrants from 1820 to 1830, the first cohorts of Black colonists to move to Liberia. These cohorts were all free men who emigrated from Virginia, Maryland, Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, D.C. They represented those of higher education and economic status. Three of Liberia’s early presidents came from this cohort. What is unique about these cohorts is how their socialization and beliefs as free Blacks influenced the way they saw themselves and the institutions they created. This chapter traces the early development of education by Black settlers in Liberia before the arrival of missionary organizations. In this chapter, I draw upon the experiences of such Black settlers as Lott Carey to document this history.

Chapter 4 covers the 1830 to 1850 period. It starts by examining opposition of Blacks and white abolitionists to colonization in the beginning of this period. This was the period where the second wave of settlers arrived with little to no education. Many were manumitted slaves from Southern plantations. These emancipated slaves dominated the Liberian landscape and outnumbered free Blacks. This period also coincided with the influx of missionaries into Liberia and their development of schools and mission schools for children of settlers and native children. This chapter examines four missionary groups in Liberia: Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Episcopalians. In addition, this

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chapter identifies the various legislative acts set in place to govern education in Liberia. The chapter concludes with the experiences of Black settlers in Liberia during this era and their struggle for a government-funded school system.

Chapter 5 examines the period from 1850 to 1860. After the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act and the *Dred Scott* ruling, an increased number of free Blacks from the North and Black abolitionists joined the list of emigrants. This chapter opens with a profile of Liberia as an independent country and of its first leader, President Joseph Jenkins Roberts. It examines Roberts’ ideology on education and his push for higher education, which led to the opening of Liberia College, the first higher education institution in Liberia. The chapter concludes with a descriptive history about the college and introduces the confrontational years with Edward W. Blyden as president.

Chapter 6 concludes my study on the early educational initiatives of Black settlers in Liberia between 1820 and 1860. It analyzes the social and educational experiences of Black settlers during each of the three waves of emigration into Liberia. It reinforces how important education was to the advancement of the republic and the Black Settlers or Americo-Liberians, as they were called in the 20th century, hegemony over the native Liberians. It concludes by addressing the need for further research on Liberia’s educational history.
Chapter 2

The American Colonization Movement, 1800–1820

On a cold winter morning on February 6, 1820, the *Elizabeth* sat in the icy waters of New York City’s harbor while a naval ship, the *Cyane*, waited to serve as an escort for its transatlantic journey. The freezing weather may have prolonged the trip but did not stop the well-wishers and spectators who had gathered ashore to watch a ship full of free Black Americans eagerly speeding toward their promised land on the western shores of Africa. Unlike the brutal migration history of the *Mayflower*, the faces of families and loved ones who were together on the *Elizabeth* exhibited the same expression of hopefulness, bravery, inspiration, and willingness to move and start life anew that is shared by most immigrants who leave their homelands in expectation of a better future.

Understanding American history in terms of the history of slavery, its economic development, the laws it shaped, and the ways in which it defined citizenship is to understand why Black Americans would leave everything behind in America, including family members, to journey across the ocean to what was deemed the “dark continent” in search of something better. This chapter will explore the reasoning behind and movement that led to the colonization of Liberia by Black Americans.

As controversies around the moral and economic issues related to slavery persisted in white America, a new quandary was forming: the rise of the free Black population. The dominant ideology of the nineteenth century favored a strong republic of free, independent men who were physically and culturally homogeneous, and it did not include free Blacks. In fact, including free Blacks would have been the antithesis of this ideology. As a class, free Blacks were feared, mistreated, and considered to be inferior to
To many white Americans, free Blacks did not represent their ideal of American society: a society consisting of white Protestants. They were shaped by the racism of that era, and many felt that Blacks could never be good citizens of the republic. In addition, Southern slaveholders felt that the growing number of free Blacks posed a serious threat to them and their peculiar institution of slavery. They feared that free Blacks might influence those who remained enslaved and create a hostile environment with the potential to produce an uprising like that experienced in Haiti. What could, or should, be done with the growing population of free Blacks? This question permeated debate halls and social gatherings, as far as the elite political and religious arenas. Equally debatable was the quest to find a solution for the rising free Black population.

Considered inferior, Blacks were never to be allowed to stand on equal footing with whites. This manifest racism was seen in the social, political and economic disparities between white and Black Americans. The answer to solving the free Black problem arrived with the founding of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1816. Among the members and supporters of the ACS, solving the Black problem in America meant sending Blacks to Africa. The ACS became the face and financier of the biggest Black relocation effort during the nineteenth century.

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32 In 1804, Black Haitians executed a revolt that resulted in the death of the remaining white population. Up to 5000 white men, women and children in the French Colony of Saint-Dominque were murdered. This lead to the elimination of slavery for Black Haitians. News of the massacre reached the New World, putting feared in hearts and mind of southern slaveowners. The idea of a slave revolt was not foreign to them. For instance, a slave rebellion was planned in 1800 by a slave known by his master’s name, Gabriel Prosser. Although the revolt never came to fruition, twenty-seven Blacks—including Prosser—were executed for their role in the planning. On the episode—dubbed “Gabriel’s rebellion”—see Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Michael L. Nicholls, *Whispers of Rebellion: Narrating Gabriel’s Conspiracy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013).
Free Blacks in the United States

Throughout early American history, the number of free Blacks in the United States continued to increase significantly. From 1790 to 1800 the free Black population increased by 82 percent and another 71 percent a decade later. During this time period, Blacks constituted 18.9 percent of the population, (1,002,037 out of 5,309,000). Of this number, 11 percent (roughly 110,000) were considered free.\(^3\) By 1830, the number of free Blacks living in the United States had tripled to 319,000 and increased to 488,000 by 1860—with 44 percent of them living in the South Atlantic states and 46 percent in the North.\(^3\) In addition to birth to a free mother, there were several other reasons for the increase in the free Black population. Many slaves purchased their freedom if their master made that option available; some found freedom by running away; and some were freed by their masters through deeds of manumission or through their wills.\(^3\)

As early as 1691, laws were passed to limit the number of free Blacks by forbidding the emancipation of slaves unless they were to be relocated out of the colony within six months from the time they were manumitted. This law was enacted to discourage masters from freeing slaves by placing the responsibility on them to transport their manumitted slaves. Manumission, however, increased the number of free Blacks in

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\(^3\) Ibid.
the South when the law was lifted in 1782.\textsuperscript{36} Virginia had one of the largest populations of free Blacks when it passed the Virginia Manumission Act of 1782, which allowed for the emancipation of slaves by an owner at death through a will or while alive via a deed of manumission.\textsuperscript{37} This act increased the Virginia population of free Blacks to 20,000, and they made up 40 percent of the free Black population in the United States by the early 1800s.

However, freedom did not necessary mean being free. Blacks were denied all of the privileges that whites enjoyed as citizens, except paying taxes. In all aspects of their lives, they were treated as outsiders. Their basic rights were denied on so many levels. As historian Henry N. Sherwood writes:

\begin{quotation}
The free Negro was objectionable to the slaveholder because existing side by side with slaves, he made them discontented and refractory; he was objectionable to the tax payer because there was more expense for poor relief, police, and constabulary; and he was objectionable to the average citizen because the next demand would be for social and political equality.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quotation}

Politically, they could not vote or serve on juries; socially, they were denied access to public accommodations; and economically, they were restricted to basic and unskilled employment. Although all free Blacks felt the impact of slavery and oppression, free Southern Blacks faced the brunt of white efforts to remove them.

Blacks in the antebellum South lived in fear. Among free Blacks in the United States, the fear of having a White person claim that they were slaves was a visible reality.


\textsuperscript{37} For more on Virginia’s free Black population, see John Henderson, “The Free Negro in Virginia, 1619-1865” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1913).

\textsuperscript{38} Sherwood, “Early Deportation,” 486.
Since all Southern states required Blacks to have passes or certificates of freedom, traveling without one posed a serious threat for free Blacks. Laws were enacted to prohibit the free movement of Blacks. By 1835, the right of assembly was taken away from all free Blacks in the South. Religious gatherings were also prohibited without a licensed white minister present.

On the other hand, the North eradicated the institution of slavery either through state constitutions, as in Vermont in 1777, or judicial proceedings, as in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Other states gradually emancipated slaves through legislative acts. For example, in 1780, Pennsylvania passed the first act decreeing that the children of slaves be set free on their twenty-eighth birthday. Connecticut, New York, Rhode Island, and New Jersey followed with similar acts by 1804.39 Although slavery was abolished in these Northern states, Blacks still experienced racism in housing practices, schooling, job opportunities, and more. Given the circumstances of the Black experience in the United States, it is surprising that many Blacks, when offered the opportunity to emigrate to Africa, did not find this to be their best option. Between 1820 and 1860, the ACS was able to relocate only 10,517 free and emancipated Blacks to Liberia.40 Nevertheless, colonizing Liberia had an impact on many levels. Historian Eric Burin argues that the impact of colonizing Liberia was that it provided slaveholders who had religious consciences an avenue to emancipate their slaves and allow them to emigrate to Liberia.41

In addition, Liberia served as a home for the recaptives or liberated Africans en route to


40 Staudenraus, African Colonization Movement, 251.

the New World. These recaptives made up one fourth of the settler population in Liberia by 1863. Also equally important were educational efforts to educate Blacks for emigration, which were sparked by the colonization movement. Southern slave masters and Northerners (mostly philanthropists and missionary organizations) were very much part of these educational efforts. Despite the limited success in educating Blacks for emigration, the ACS kept its focus on relocation.

The ACS’s name became synonymous with Liberia and emigration. The founders used the success of Paul Cuffe’s relocation experiences and the establishment of the British colony in Sierra Leone, West Africa, as a model. Sierra Leone became home for the first settlers to leave the United States in 1815 under the direction of Paul Cuffe, the first and only Black man to have singlehandedly financed and transported free Blacks to Africa. Cuffe used Sierra Leone as a transplant site, and he set the stage for Black emigration from the United States. Cuffe, an evangelical Quaker of mixed-race ancestry, was born of a Native American mother and an African father who had been freed by his Quaker master. Cuffe’s love for ships led to a career, which made him one of the richest men in Massachusetts.

The success of the British colony in Sierra Leone showed Black colonization was an option for Blacks. Cuffe knew he could transport Blacks from the United States to Africa. His initial plan was to use evangelism and commerce as a means of “civilizing”

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42 “Recaptives” was a term used to describe those Africans who were captured and later liberated by the U.S. government, who were either en route or had already arrived in the New World to be sold in to slavery. They were also referred to as “Congo people.”

43 In 1787 British Philanthropists founded Province of Freedom, which later became known as Freetown, Sierra Leone for the purpose of relocating Blacks. In 1792, 1200 freed slaves from Nova Scotia emigrated and by 1800 another group of slaves from Jamaica followed. The colony became a crown colony in 1808 and by 1855, over 50,000 freed slaves had settled in Freetown. For more information on Sierra Leone, see J. J. Crooks, The Colony of Sierra Leone, Western Africa (Dublin, Ireland: Browne and Nolan, 1903).
Africa, but he later changed his agenda to promoting the eradication of American racism through Black Nationalism in Africa. He recruited free Blacks from Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. Unfortunately, the cost and Cuffe’s health allowed him just one opportunity to visit Africa. On his first and last voyage to Sierra Leone, he resettled 38 Black Americans before his death shortly afterward in 1817. His efforts set the stage for the colonization of Liberia by free American Blacks. The pro-emigration movement became possible as a result of Cuffe’s experiences and the active community of Blacks that had settled in Sierra Leone. This experience gave birth to the notion that a country outside the United States could be a home for free Blacks. The idea that the free Black population could be removed—particularly, from Southern states—opened the minds and pockets of some Southern slave owners, as well as Northern whites, to the idea of colonization.

American Colonization Society (ACS)

The concept of colonization as a way of returning Africans to their ancestral homeland had been around since the beginning of the antislavery movement. However,

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45 Inspired by George Keith as early as 1713, the Quakers developed the plan for colonization. It was based on the assumption that incorporating Blacks into society was a lost cause—a situation that numerous Quakers lamented. On Black colonization see Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro in Our History* (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, 1922). That said, a number of Blacks in the United States also wanted to leave. For instance, the state of Massachusetts received a petition in April of 1773 from four African American men—Peter Bestes, Sambo Freeman, Felix Holbrook, and Chester Joie—requesting that slaves in the colony be given one day in the week to work for funds that could purchase their freedom and a return to Africa. On this proposal, see James T. Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006). Many prominent whites—including Thomas
given the growing free Black population and racial divide in America, colonization offered hope to both Blacks, who saw it as their only avenue to a better life, and whites, who felt that the two races could never co-exist in harmony. Cuffe’s concept of freeing the Black race for economic empowerment set in motion the idea of what would later be known as The American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color in the United States, which later became the ACS.  

Given the momentum for the removal of free Blacks, Rev. Robert Finley, a Presbyterian minister from New Jersey who believed that colonization was a means for improving Blacks’ morals and manners, initiated a plan. Finley traveled to Washington, D.C., and assembled a public meeting on December 16, 1816, with his influential friends, among them Speaker of the House Henry Clay; General Andrew Jackson; Secretary of Treasury William Crawford; Francis Scott Key, an aristocratic lawyer and author of “The Star Spangled Banner”; and Bushrod Washington, the nephew of President George Washington. During that meeting, the constitution for the Society was drafted, including its stated purpose:

To rescue the free colored people from the disqualifications, the degradations and the proscriptions to which they are exposed in the United States; to place them in a country where they may enjoy the benefits of free government, with all the blessings, which they were exposed in the United States; to avert the dangers of a dreadful collision at a future day, of two castes, which must inevitably be objects of mutual jealousy to each other; to spread civilization, sound morals and true religion throughout the

Jefferson—favored Blacks being sent to Africa in the early part of the eighteenth century. They offered a bevy of reasons supporting this argument, including racist separatism, deference to black autonomy, the conversion of Africans to Christianity, and abolitionist sentiments. Regardless of their motivation, each pushed for colonization.


vast continent of Africa, at present sunk in the most hideous state of barbarism; to arrest and destroy the African Slave trade; and last, though not least, to afford slave-owners who are conscientiously scrupulous about holding human beings in bondage, asylum to which they may send their manumitted slaves.48

Colonization was attractive to many for various reasons. For Blacks like Cuffe, colonization was a means of improving the economic, social, and political condition of American Blacks. Other Blacks, like John B. Russwurm, an abolitionist, editor, politician, and one of the nation’s first Black graduates of an American college, believed colonization gave Blacks the opportunity to rise above the oppression inflicted by racism. However, many Black Americans felt that colonization was a scheme to rid the country of them and protested against it. Black Americans formed organizations that sought to foster self-reliance, race pride, and empowerment to speak against the injustices experienced by all Blacks. Blacks used the power of the press in their fight against oppression. It was through these agencies that they were able to speak against the colonization of Blacks.49 During the early development of the Society, white abolitionists pushed colonization in the hope that slave owners would free their slaves and that the United States would establish laws that restricted or abolished slavery. They later changed their agenda when Blacks resisted emigration efforts. The majority of the ACS’s Southern members opposed free Blacks living in the United States. Most were determined, as Henry Clay put it, to “rid our country of a useless and pernicious, if not dangerous, portion of its population.”50 Given the focus on the removal of “free” Blacks

48 Ibid., 106.


and not those still kept in slavery, both the Black population and the abolitionists regarded this movement as a deportation scheme. Historian Ella Forbes contends that:

By emphasizing that the colonization was for freedmen, not slaves. Clay voiced the true motive of the American Colonization Society. Because White supporters had a rabid fear of freedmen, they advocated the emigration of the troublesome free Black population to Africa.\(^{51}\)

However, not all parties saw the ACS as a deportation scheme. Guyatt argues that the ACS styled itself as a charity that sought public assistance rather than government financing. It reached out to respectable Americans, some of whom believed that the Society acted strategically in marketing its cause in order to obtain financial and moral support from multiple interest groups. Sherwood contends that the Society carefully marketed its scheme to appeal to public and private religious agencies by seeking to Christianize Africans; to Southern slaveholders who feared that more free Blacks might pose a problem for the peculiar institution of slavery; and to abolitionists who wanted to emancipate Blacks.\(^{52}\) Despite the recruitment efforts, Charles Foster argues:

Beneath all of the attractive arguments which embellished colonization was race prejudice, a rank nativism which was pushing the Indians out of the way, had imposed social penalties on free Negroes and now wanted to

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\(^{52}\) Henry N. Sherwood, “The Formation of the American Colonization Society,” *Journal of Negro History* 2 (1917): 209–28. Sherwood argues that the ACS lost its momentum after the 1830s when it could not fulfill its original promise to remove all free Blacks from Virginia. He provides the crucial contextual point that the area that was to become the United States had had discussions about removing the Black population as early 1714. Sherwood also argues that this was not the first time that the debate about ridding the country of the Black population—it had been contemplated as early as 1714—it came to fruition with the assistance of the ACS. Most important, however, was Sherwood’s identification of the paradox posed by the colonists’ dual arguments. Indeed, Sherwood showed that it was paradoxical to suggest that the very dangerous element they were seeking to remove from the general population would be effective at prosylethyzing Africans. See also Catherine Reef, *This Our Dark Country: The American Settlers of Liberia* (New York: Clarion Books, 2002).
rid the country of them too, Slavery was not its true target because slavery was, after all, a solution; emancipation created the problem.\(^{53}\)

Certain elements of the ACS founders’ racist ideology suggest that the society was not geared towards abolitionism. Samuel J. Mills, one of the leading figures behind the Society, stated that “We must save the Negroes or the Negroes will ruin us.”\(^{54}\) For him, saving “Negroes” meant Christianizing them outside of America since his life’s work was spreading the “Gospel among the ‘Heathens’ in foreign lands, by means of missionaries from this country.”\(^{55}\) As Christianizing and civilizing became a theme in the ACS’s recruitment efforts, Sherwood reiterates that there was difficulty explaining “how the colonizationists could argue that one of their objects was to remove a dangerous element from our population and at the same time take civilization and Christianity to Africa.”\(^{56}\) The goals of the ACS’s African colonization have been widely debated among historians regarding their fundamental purpose. No matter how one views this purpose, in the end a country on the western coast of Africa was developed in America’s image and scarred by some of the same oppressive ideologies Blacks experienced in the United States.

In order to facilitate the development of the new republic, the ACS first had to secure a location in Africa. The ACS recruited Samuel Mills, who then recruited Ebenezer Burgess, for the purpose of traveling to Africa to explore and purchase land for


\(^{55}\) Gardiner Spring, *Memoirs of the Rev. Samuel J. Mills. Late Missionary to the South Western Section of the United States and Agent of the American Colonization Society, Deputed to Explore the Coast of Africa* (New York: Evangelical Missionary Society, 1820), 16

the settlement of Blacks. Mills had been in contact with Burgess and introduced him to the work of the Society. In his letter asking Burgess to join him as one of the two agents who would facilitate the purchase of land for the ACS, he wrote:

My brother, can we engage in a nobler effort? We go to make freemen of slaves. We go to lay the foundation of a free and independent empire on the coast of poor degraded Africa. It is confidently believed by many of our best and wisest men, that, if the plan proposed succeeds, it will ultimately be the means of exterminating slavery in our country. It will eventually redeem and emancipate a million and an half of wretched men. It will transfer to the coast of Africa the blessings of religion and civilization; and Ethiopia will soon stretch out hands unto God.  

Before making contact with the people and culture of Western Africa, Mills already thought of them as poor degraded people in need of salvation: a paternalistic attitude that dominated the ideology of the ACS. Historian Amos J. Beyan argues that it was apparent that even during the first explorative visits only certain institutional values adopted within these African colonies by Africans impressed such ACS members as Mills and Burgess. For example, Mills was impressed with the Westernization of schools established in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and commented on it in his communications. However, he referred to the African villages he visited as places of darkness. Beyan concludes,

The failure of the early ACS’ representatives to appreciate anything African was to force them to rely heavily on only those things and Africans they considered westernized. But this attitude would long persist and it was to slow down the advance of the ACS on the West African coast.  

57 Ibid., 117.

Although Mills never returned home—he died from malaria contracted in Africa while *en route* to the United States—Burgess presented a picture of Africa that showed a land filled with promise. With the help of John Kizell, a former slave from South Carolina working as a merchant in Sierra Leone, Burgess reported that their explorations secured a location twenty-two miles in length and twelve miles in width.\(^59\) With this location in sight, the ACS was motivated to approach Congress for financial support. It had to replenish the funds used to explore the new settlement and quickly.

The ACS used its political clout, hoping that the U.S. government would be its biggest supporter. In 1819, President James Monroe (a member of the Virginia chapter of the ACS), sought an opportunity to enforce the Slave Trade Act of 1807 passed by Congress in order to abolish the buying and selling of slaves. Monroe lobbied politicians who agreed to fund the expedition using federal money. His support for the ACS facilitated the interception of Blacks, mulattoes, and persons of color from ships seized as part of the prosecution of the slave trade by commanders of U.S. armed vessels.\(^60\) Despite its continuous lobbying efforts, the ACS never received more than its initial $100,000 from the U.S. government for developing the colony and aiding recaptives traveling to Liberia. Nevertheless, the ACS received public and private financial support for its emigration effort from several other sources. These sources included Masonic lodges in Pennsylvania, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Vermont, and Virginia,\(^{59,60}\)

\(^{59}\) Yarema, *The American Colonization Society*, 36.

along with women’s organizations and auxiliary groups. Their support continued the transportation of Black Americans to Liberia.  

**Educating Blacks**

In addition to securing funds and approval, the ACS recognized that the new colony would benefit if educated free Blacks and Christian missionaries led its efforts in Africa. Historian Vincent P. Franklin notes that “the need for educated Blacks to run the colony at Liberia established by the American Colonization Society was also a manifest. Colonial agents, skilled craftsmen, merchants, bankers, farmers, teachers, ministers, etc., all were needed in the West African colony if the settlement was to survive as a modern, Christian, democratic state.” As a result, the ACS and other religious groups attempted to establish schools to train and prepare Black emigrants for Liberia.

The ACS solicited support from religious groups for the purpose of educating free Blacks to serve as Christian missionaries in Liberia. This appeared more acceptable to members of the ACS than the alternative of educating Blacks for full U.S citizenship. Despite the undeniable need to educate Blacks, many continued to oppose any sort of Black education. Every effort to set up schools for the purpose of emigration failed either for a lack of funding and/or low student enrollment. Franklin argues that failed attempts to establish such schools in America were due to the opposition by both Blacks, who were not enthusiastic about emigration, and the White community, which feared that

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Blacks, once educated, might not leave the United States.\(^6^3\) Black Americans opposed the ACS’s education efforts, which speaks volumes about how it viewed the organization, since recent scholarship on the education of Blacks in the United States acknowledges the immense value Blacks placed on obtaining education at any cost. They saw education as a tool for uplifting themselves and their race.\(^6^4\) This lack of interest in any emigration-centric education efforts during the colonization movement reflected their mistrust of White society.

Black Americans were quite active in educational endeavors during the early nineteenth century, despite opposition from Whites, anti-literacy laws, and even the risk of death. In her historical study of Black education during slavery through emancipation, Heather Williams notes that despite the numerous obstacles in their path—opposition often involved violence from White Southerners—Blacks became their own agents. Blacks funded and taught in schools, which they often constructed themselves in the secrecy of their slave quarters.\(^6^5\) In addition to Black self-help endeavors, Christian

\(^6^3\) Ibid., 103.


\(^6^5\) Williams, *Self-Taught*, 1-45.
abolitionists, abolitionist organizations, and individual philanthropists also supported Black education prior to 1820.\footnote{Woodson, \textit{Education of the Negro}, 18-50}

Eugene Van Sickle argues that the primary obstacles to colonization on the part of Blacks during the eighteenth century were prejudice against improving the status of Black Americans through education, the lack of financial stability for the mass transportation of Blacks, and the lack of unity among early supporters.\footnote{Eugene S. Van Sickle, \textquotedblleft Transnational Vision: John H.B. Latrobe and Maryland’s Africans\textquotedblright{} (PhD diss., West Virginia University, 2005).} By the late 1820s, the ACS abandoned its educational efforts in the United States and redirected its focus to the development of Liberia. Franklin suggests that this move ultimately caused the entire organization to fail.\footnote{Franklin, \textquotedblleft Educating for Colonization,\textquotedblright{} 102.}

In Liberia, support for education was never a central priority of the organization, and responsibility eventually fell to individual Black Americans and missionary organizations. However, the Society’s failed education attempts in the United States gave anti-slavery supporters, who rallied against the ACS, grounds for promoting the idea that it was focused on the deportation of free Blacks. They argued that the organization choose to support education efforts not for citizenship but emigration and that it concentrated on emigration instead of improving the conditions of Blacks currently in America. These attacks eventually crippled the popularity of the organization in the 1830s and led to a lack of interest among free Blacks regarding emigration to Liberia. With funding been secured from the U.S. government and the location determined in
West African, the ACS ship, the *Elizabeth*, embarked on its first transatlantic journey from New York City.

**The Beginning of Transatlantic Migration**

The Society sent an agent, Samuel Bacon, and two government-appointed agents who were to oversee the recaptives program, along with 86 freeborn Blacks (33 men, 18 women, and 30 children) from New York, Philadelphia, Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. Little is known about the passengers’ desire to emigrate, but historian James Ciment suggests that the more religious emigrants were swayed by the ACS’s rhetoric about delivering the light of the Gospel to Africa, while others saw economic opportunities denied to them in the United States. Nevertheless, they had one thing in common: their willingness to leave the United States for a better life that would provide them with more opportunities and religious freedom. Among the volunteer passengers were David Lee of Virginia, a successful 55 year old who relocated without his children but was able to offset the costs for friends who accompanied him; Elijah Johnson, a native New Yorker and veteran of the War of 1812; and Daniel Coker, a 35-year-old minister and educator from Baltimore.

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69 Staudenraus, *The African Colonization*, 59. See also Tom W. Shick, *Emigrants to Liberia 1820 to 1843, An Alphabetical Listing* (Newark: Department of Anthropology, University of Delaware, 1971). This list documents the names, origins, ages, occupations, literacy status, servitude status, and the year and cause of death of the colonists. While some pertinent information is missing, it gives important information regarding the colonists who came to Liberia.


Daniel Coker was an ideal fit for the colonization scheme. He was free, educated, a minister, and influential in the Black community. He was born as Isaac Wright, the son of a white indentured servant mother and a slave father in 1780. Maryland law did not permit Black American children their freedom even if they were born to mothers who were free; therefore, he was considered to be a slave. Coker was registered at birth as a mulatto born to a slave mother to spare the embarrassment to his mother. As a slave, he was educated with his half brother, Daniel, whose father was master of both his parents. Coker later escaped to New York and adopted his brother’s name. While in New York, he completed his education and began his career as a preacher in the Methodist Church where he was later ordained a deacon. Coker returned to Baltimore after a local Quaker abolitionist bought his freedom. He became an important figure in the educational and religious movements there. He opened the first school for Black children and youth and Baltimore’s first Black Methodist Church.\(^\text{72}\)

Coker was very active in the anti-slavery movement. In 1810, he published a pamphlet that addressed White supremacy and racial injustice, *A Dialogue between a Virginian and an African Minister*. In this pamphlet, Coker had a dialogue with a man who owned 52 slaves regarding Black protest against slavery and white racial stereotypes.\(^\text{73}\)

On the religious side, Coker became a co-founder of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and was part of the Black independent churches movement in  

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Baltimore. He was respected by his peers for his intelligence and influence, which earned him the title of the founder of the Southern Branch of African Methodism. In 1816, Coker led a delegation of local preachers to the General Convention in Philadelphia where the AME was recognized a denomination. Richard Allen was the chair, and Coker was the vice-chairman of the convention. Numerous resolutions for Black churches were adopted. For example, the Baltimore African Methodist Bethel Society changed its name to the Bethel African Methodists Church. At the convention, Coker was voted Bishop-elect, but declined, leaving Richard Allen to serve as the first Bishop of the new denomination. In 1819, at the annual conference, Coker was charged with an unknown offense that stripped him of his ministry and the AME Church. He appealed. Although his appeal was granted, Coker never returned to ministry in the United States, and he set sail for Africa the following year. Given his anti-slavery stance and influence, it may come as a surprise that he became a supporter and advocate of the ACS. In her article “Exodus and Colonization,” Rhondda R. Thomas suggests that the ACS won Coker’s support by promising that he would become the president of Liberia and receive other privileges.

After a month at sea, the Elizabeth arrived at the African coastal region of Sierra Leone on the ninth of March. After a short stop there, the settlers made their way south to Sherbro Island, where they found themselves renegotiating for land that had been promised to them. The island was unsuitable for the settlers; swamps infested with


mosquitoes surrounded it. Within a year of their arrival, nearly a quarter of the settlers had succumbed to malaria, including all of the agents. The surviving settlers found that making a living was difficult. The soil was unsuitable for planting American food, the only thing they knew how to farm. They did not care for the traditional local food and had limited resources to import their food. With frustration building up, tensions begin to arise among the settlers, especially when Coker assumed leadership after the death of the white agents. Most of the settlers rejected his authority because they felt his allegiance was to white authorities not them. Feeling restless and hopeless, the remaining settlers took refuge in Fourah Bay near Freetown, where they lived as guests of the British until the arrival of the next U.S. ship in November 1821.

On January 23, 1821, the *Nautilus* left Hampton Roads for the second attempt at colonization ordered by President Monroe, who sent two government agents on the voyage: Ephraim Bacon, Samuel Bacon’s brother and Jonathan Winn. In addition, the ACS sent two of its own agents along with the 33 emigrants. They included Coker’s family and Lott Carey, a missionary. The *Nautilus* arrived in Sierra Leone on March 8, 1821, with the intention of relocating the settlers. By November of 1821, no site had been purchased, the two agents were dead, and another had fled for his life. A new principal agent, Eli Ayers, a Baltimore physician, arrived to meet the disgruntled group of settlers. These settlers had lost friends and loved ones to malaria and were struggling to cope with uncertainty and broken promises.

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77 Beyan, *The American Colonization Society*, 61

Cape Mesurado, 225 miles south of Sierra Leone, had been previously considered due to its harbor and a river route, which led to Liberia’s interior and fertile lands. However, King Peter refused to sell the land to the ACS. However, King Peter and five other leaders were held at gunpoint and agreed to sell the land to the colonists in exchange for items such as guns, tobacco, clothes, shoes, rum, beads, gunpowder, and household items. The value of these items was less than $300. Beyan contends that this intrusion of the natives’ land helped to reinforce the tensions and resentments among the tribal leaders towards the colonists. By the spring of 1822, Dr. Ayers and the remaining emigrants left Fourah Bay for their new colony. However, Coker and his family remained in Sierra Leone.

**Liberia**

In the nineteenth century, the new colony was known as the Grain Coast. However, it had been in existence for centuries before the arrival of the American settlers. Its first encounter with Europeans came in the fifteenth century; Portuguese explorers covered the area between Sierra Leone down to Cape Palmas (the eastern end of the colony) for goods to trade with Africans. They named the coastal region “Malagueta” after its main product, the malagueta pepper. Because of trading, Africans in the region

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80 Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 65


became familiar with Europeans and often formed friendships with them. The Portuguese attempted to colonize and Christianize the people with whom they came in contact but were unsuccessful; therefore, their influence was limited to trading goods. Although the Portuguese involvement in trading of humans was limited to the domestic slave market, their interest was in gold. By the mid-seventeenth century, other Europeans had arrived in West Africa seeking profits. The Dutch became a powerful force, forming the Dutch West Indies Company, the strongest and most active European influence in West Africa.\(^{83}\) Because of the possibility of profit sharing, West Africa became a battleground where Europeans fought for commercial supremacy.\(^{84}\)

By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, trade shifted from products and goods to slaves. Interest in the slave trade dominated the West African coast as the New World demand for plantation crops increased the demand for labor. Slavery had existed before the Christian era in Rome, Greece, and China. However, it wasn’t until the twelfth century, after the Arabs invaded the kingdoms of the Sudan, that Africans in large numbers were sold as slaves in North Africa and the Middle East. The slaves captured and sold were never regarded as inferior. In fact, most slaves were granted their freedom and achieved positions of power. Fred Burke suggests:

> Africans had a concept of slavery different from that of Europeans. Within Africa, wars sometimes led to the enslavement of the captured. But most of these slaves in time were absorbed into the victor’s society rather than relegated to perpetual bondage. Unlike the Arabs and Europeans, the Africans did not regard slavery as total ownership of another human being. In fact, such a condition was inconceivable to them.\(^{85}\)

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\(^{83}\) Hoff, “The Role of Women in National Development,” 9

\(^{84}\) Ibid.

When the people of America and West Indies could not meet the demand of the market, they saw the opportunity for profit and sought slave labor from Africa. Africans were looked on favorably for their hard work in the tropics. By the time the slave trade ended in 1860, about 11.5 million surviving Africans had been involuntarily forced across the globe to the New World and sold into slavery.

Given the atrocities perpetrated as a result of the slave trade in West Africa, most of the Grain Coast contact with Europe came through trade. By 1822, when American settlers arrived on the Grain Coast (which they later named Liberia, land of the free), they found 16 ethnic tribal units inhabiting the region. The oldest were the Gola and Kissi people, both part of the Mel group. The Mande, which included the Mandingo, Vai, Gbandi, Kpelle, Loma, Mende, Gio, and Mono, came from the northern savannas in the fifteenth century. The Bassa Dei, Belle, Gbee, Grebo, Krahn, and Kru occupied the southern and eastern areas of Liberia and were linguistically connected to peoples in the Niger Delta. The settlers also found many small towns on the coast governed by their own chiefs or kings. These communities were different in many ways, including their political ideologies, which led to many small conflicts between groups.

Their new home, the size of the state of Ohio, was estimated to be from 42,000–48,000 square miles with several capes lining the coastal area. One of these, Cape Mesurado, became the first stop for the settlers. Historian and former minister of education Mary Antoinette Brown found in her research that there was a distinct

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87 Liebenow, Liberia, 11.

difference between tribes they encountered, categorizing them as coastal and interior tribes. She suggests that the coastal tribes were those the settlers came in direct contact with upon arrival.

It was these tribes whom they first attempted to incorporate into the new nation, which they tried to forge. The strong prejudice which the coastal or beach tribes held against the interior or “bush” tribes must have contributed to delaying the contact between the settlers and the latter. Undoubtedly, the great reluctance on the part of the settlers to penetrate the interior regions was due as much to geographical barriers, which were accentuated by the lack of transportation, and communication facilities as to the psychological barriers based on ideas concerning interior tribes, which the settlers formed through their intercourse with the coastal tribes. It was, therefore, with the coastal tribes which tended to be smaller in numbers and to cover smaller geographical areas that the settlers had their initial competition, including their major conflicts, but also their initial alliances.⁸⁹

In his memoir about the founding of the colony, published in 1826, Jehudi Ashmun, a resident agent for the ACS from 1822–28, documented his observations about the tribes he came in contact with. He mentioned five tribes: the Deys, which lived 25 miles north of the cape; Queah, a small and quiet group east of the cape; Gurrah, who live the north of the cape; Condoes, located further inland and considered the terror of their maritime neighbors; and the Kroomen or Kroos, located on the beach one mile north of the settlement. The latter were the most distinct of the tribes in origin, language, and character. Ashmun describes them as the most active, enterprising, intelligent, and laborious.⁹⁰ The Condoes and the Queah no longer exist in the present day Liberia, which

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is unfortunate because although there’s a strong interaction with the Condoes and
documentation in the African Repository, little is known about the Queah.\footnote{Brown, “Education,” 27–8.}

**Religion and Education in the Tribal Communities**

The religion of the people on the Grain Coast involved the “mysteries of life and
death, of God and man, the universe, good and evil, the spiritual world and other forces
such as magic operating through animate or inanimate objects.”\footnote{Hoff, “The Role of Women in National Development,” 17.} Although Africans believed in God, they strongly believed that spirits (good and bad) inhabited the world. To them, evil spirits were the creators of sickness and death. For this reason, there was an association between medicine and religion. The medicine doctor practiced sorcery and witchcraft, although s/he had many valuable remedies.\footnote{Gilbert R. Dale, “History of Education in Liberia” (PhD diss., University of Missouri, 1947), 212.}

The exposure of these tribes to early Western civilization did not change or influence their culture. Thus, the absence of Western education did not denote a lack of education and/or schooling for African tribal children. In fact their educational experiences came through their religious and cultural practices. Liberia’s religious culture was dominated by secret societies for men and women called the Poro and Sande, respectively. Their basis was supernatural; however, their members were sworn to secrecy. Although visual documentations display images of ritualistic activities and ceremonies in public settings, what remained concealed was characterized by settlers who
viewed them as “devil-like” rituals.\textsuperscript{94} Although the majority engaged in such practices, it is important to note that not all tribal groups espoused the cultural beliefs of these secret societies.

The Poro have been in existence on the Grain Coast for more than four centuries.\textsuperscript{95} Although there is no concise historiography of how they moved there, it is clear that their influence spans the coastal areas of Sierra Leone and northwestern Liberia.\textsuperscript{96} Membership in both the Poro and Sande societies was enforced, and serious consequences like death were imposed for any outsiders or informers. These societies were established to maintain and impose the African tribal traditions, beliefs, and culture. They established schools in isolation where students were divided into classes to receive training to enter one of the three social strata: commoner, chief, or a priest. However, trainees shared some experiences during initiation, where they learned sign languages, symbols, and passwords.\textsuperscript{97} As such, this institution was use to inculcate the culture and norms into the youths.

The transformation of culture was purposeful and took place some distance from the villages and towns, in the “bush.” There was no age limit, but generally boys studied at the bush schools from 7–19 years of age. Once they entered the schools, they were not allowed to return to the village until the training was completed. The length of time a boy was to remain in the schools varied based on his tribe. His stay ranged from several


\textsuperscript{96} Brown, “Education,” 30.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 31.
months to eight or ten years. No one, other than members of Poro society, could enter the bush schools. Once the bush schools were in session, peace within the country had to be maintained. There could be no tribal wars or other hostility. Entering a bush school as a non-participant meant being banished or killed. Brown contends that:

The “bush” school’s ostensible aim has always been the transformation of the immature individual into an adult member of his society. The oath-taking ceremony climaxes this transformation of boy to man to which the entire period of training has to be geared. The boy must gain the physical, intellectual, and moral development necessary for being at home in his world and recognizing his social obligations. Specifically, the school aimed to train him in those ideas, attitudes, skill which his culture valued in a male, adult, such as, respect for the elders, pride in the traditions of his tribe, sharpness in wit, and ability to work for the support of his family and for the discharge of his kinship obligations.

The Sande society, like the Poro, was conducted in secrecy. It began after the Poro school closed. Entrance into the Sande society was a rite of passage for any native woman who wanted to be respected. Girls were generally admitted between the ages of four and twelve and would typically stay in session from a few months to seven years. On entry, girls were taken into the forest for a rite of passage that included female circumcision. The aim of the Sande society was to provide education that would transform a girl into an adult female with the cultural values, attitudes, and skills required for serving as a responsible woman, good wife, and mother. She was also taught about sexual relations. The focal point of her training was family life and domestication; however, she was taught some dancing and singing.

98 Ibid., 67.
99 Ibid., 69.
100 Ibid., 76.
Although those who came into early contact with the native Liberians had some familiarity with African culture, they still could not accurately write about the culture practices of the African people. Rather, a number of assumptions and comparisons with Western domestic units like the family were made. One example is the way in which women were perceived. Joanna Hoff, a Liberian researcher, argues that these very assumptions about the African culture misrepresented “the hardworking affectionate mother, laborious wife portrayed as an oppressed and exploited individual.” 101 This became evident when Gilbert R. Dale, in his study of the history of education in Liberia, described the woman as her husband’s source of income even though she played a much larger role in the context of youth socialization and education. 102 Hoff contends:

   Women were not chattels nor did they occupy unfavorable positions. They were committed to their families and society and were actively involved in their communities. Women were mothers who taught, disciplined, trained and accurately performed all customary rites of their children, particularly daughters to become good wives…Women preserved tradition and became custodians of custom in individual families and also in the society. 103

Although the role of women was misrepresented in early Liberian historiography, it is crucial to note that it was the duty of women to hold their family unit together in terms of passing along their culture and religion. While women provided informal education at home, the secret societies allowed for the formal education of children elsewhere. The misrepresentation of tribal culture led to settlers erroneously labeling their schooling experience as “bush school” or “devil bush,” which had a sinister connotation.

The notion that education and religion were nonexistent until the settlers brought their religion and Western education is erroneous. The Poro and Sande societies played a crucial role in the education and socialization of children until the American settlers arrived. The introduction of Western education and religion disrupted the meaningfulness of tribal African culture. Using their assimilated Western lens, the American settlers came to view the Africans they encountered as “uncivilized” “heathens.” This misguided notion helped foster tensions between the newly arrived Blacks and those already residing in Liberia.

During the first decade after their arrival, the American colonists faced hostility and resistance as they forged their way on African soil. They began this tenuous relationship with the unfair barter for African land that the chiefs had no intentions of selling. Unfortunately, the white colonists could not see it from this perspective. For this reason, building a new nation upon the promise of freedom and liberty was not to come easy. Despite the tribal tensions, the increasing mortality rate due to malaria, and the lack of an organizational structure or financing from the ACS to sustain the migration effort in Liberia, Black Americans persevered and created another homeland on their ancestors’ soil.
Chapter 3

The Foundation of American Education on African Soil:

The First Wave of Settlers, 1822-1830

The thing most to be deplored in this colony, is the want of a good school, and an enlightened teacher for poor children, whose parents cannot school them; for, in this tropical country, where there is an abundance of gold, ivory, camwood, coffee and sugar, indigo, and many other lucrative fruits, we could have an enlightened Christian community. There is nothing to hinder it from rising to level in point of eminence, wealth, and power, among the most refined nations of the earth. There is no way in which those in America, who feel friendly to this infant colony, can confer so great a favour on it, as to establish a free school for the benefit of the poor children in it. This, I hope, you will influence them to do.  

-A letter from Rev. George M. Erskine, a black minister from the Presbyterian Church in TN who migrated to Liberia in 1830, to his brother in the States

Less than two weeks after the arrival of Rev. George M. Erskine in Liberia, he wrote to his brother in the United States to inform him about his pleasant forty-two day journey to his new home. Even though his letter starts with a discussion of the pleasantness of the colony, the homely feeling he received upon his arrival, and the potential for making it into a flourishing colony, he ends by discussing the thing the colony desired most: the need for schools and the education of its children. Although Erskine’s letter showcased the pleasantries and potential of Liberia for Blacks, and was used for this purpose by the ACS to encourage more free Blacks to consider emigrating—particularly during this time when the opposition against colonization was at a high level—his understanding, as expressed in his communication with his brother, concerned the importance of education and the development of schools. How did Erskine come to

104 William Innes, Liberia; or The Early History and Signal Preservation of The American colony of Free Negroes on the Coast of Africa (Edinburgh, Waugh & Innes; 1833), 137.
understand the value of education? Perhaps his own background of success as a highly respected minister of a Presbyterian Church in Tennessee, or his lived experiences as an oppressed Black person in the U.S during this period, informed his opinions. Nevertheless, Erskine saw a colony that had the potential to develop into a great nation through the education of its children. Erskine was like many Blacks in the U.S who expressed opinions about the value of education during this time period. His desire to aid Liberia and its founding generation was no different than the opinions of many free and enslaved Blacks in the U.S. Unfortunately, Erskine never lived to experience his new promised land nor was he able to inform us about the response to his request for educational aid from the U.S. Erskine, like many Black settlers, died shortly after arriving in Liberia.105

For Black Americans in the U.S, both free and enslaved, education was a powerful tool for their uplift, with schools serving as the institution in which cultural and social values were maintained and perpetuated. Black Americans living in the antebellum era—an era when severe restrictions on educating Blacks increased—education served as

105 George M. Erskine was listed on the rolls of emigrant as a 51 year old that could write. His death was listed that same year. In fact, twenty-one of the fifty-two passengers on the ship with Erskine died that same year of fever. Erskine’s death was listed as a Casualty- prescribing for himself. See http://www.ccharity.com/contents/roll-emigrants-have-been-sent-colony-liberia-western-africa/

In a study, “The Experience of Former Slaves and Free-Born Blacks in Liberia,” Paul Schrimpf found, for example, that by 1829, more than half of the emigrants died in the colony less than a year after arrival. He further concludes that those colonists who were former slaves faced higher risk of mortality than those who were born free. He argues that voluntary migrants were likely to be in better health and eager to face challenges they might encounter, characteristics that contributed to lower mortality among the freeborn. However, slaves who were given a choice regarding emigration or remaining in bondage have a different willingness about facing challenges. See Paul Schrimpf, “The Experience of Former Slaves and Free-Born Blacks in Liberia,” http://web.mit.edu/~paul_s/www/liberia.pdf
a means of achieving more complete freedom and empowerment.\textsuperscript{106} The purpose of education has individualized meaning and may serve different agendas in different societies. For Black Americans who witnessed the direct uplift and empowerment of themselves and their communities, education meant liberty and freedom. Education offered the promise of hope. Seeing the advantages of advancement through ‘book knowledge,’ Black Americans found ways to educate themselves, sometimes with deadly consequences.

This desire to uplift and free themselves encouraged many to journey to Liberia. In the context of a new colony, education for those emigrating, as well as for the young and natives, often referred to as “heathens,” was crucial to the development and sustaining of their new home. In addition to nation-building, many (including the ACS and philanthropic organizations) saw education as a means of Christianizing Liberia. During the first decade after arrival, the purpose of education in the colony was geared towards a missionary agenda. What better way to bring the ‘dark’ continent out of darkness? Educating its people with the Christian values and doctrine offered some form of control over the way in which they lived. In order to accomplish this, the recruitment and leadership efforts of the ACS during the first decade was selective and partial to those they considered to be of ‘good character.’ Educating Blacks in America for missionary work before their departure for Liberia was one of the earliest unsuccessful plans of the ACS. Even with the limited funding tailored with the racist ideology that prevented this early educational endeavor, the ACS’s relocation efforts still attracted

missionaries, both Blacks and Whites, to Liberia during the early decades of the colony’s development. This was due to the message of Christianizing the continent. Fawoni Nguma, who provides one of the most comprehensive lists of writings on education in Liberia in his unpublished dissertation, noted that Liberia was unique in being a missionary republic with more missionaries per square inch than any other country in the world. He adds:

Like Sierra Leone and Cameroons, its origin comes in part from a colonization scheme which included not only colonizing Liberia with Afro-American Christians but sending missionaries with them so that together they would make Liberia the center for the “Christianizing” of Africa. Missionaries and men of religious fervor held posts as administrators in the government.¹⁰⁷

Beginning with the earliest colonization efforts, missionary work became an essential part of the dialogue. Educating Blacks for missionary work in Liberia became another avenue for Black education. Historian John Saillant argues, “The existence of black missionaries in West Africa and African-American governors and citizens in Liberia forced into public discourse the notions of educability and competence of blacks in a way that had never before occurred in the United States.”¹⁰⁸ This idea manifested as early as 1780, when Thomas Jefferson, in his Notes on the State of Virginia, proposed education and colonization for Blacks.¹⁰⁹ A decade later, Samuel Hopkins, a White

¹⁰⁷ Fawoni NGuma, “Missions and Education in Liberia: A Check List of Annotated Writings” (1824-1977) on Western Education in Liberia with Emphasis on its Mission Origins” (PhD diss., The University of Missouri-Kansas, 1979), 74.


minister in the First Congregational Church of Newport, RI formulated a plan that called for the education and emigration of Blacks as Christian ministers to Africa. He selected two Black Americans who had been sent to Princeton University in New Jersey to study Theology. However the British occupation of Newport during the American Revolutionary War interrupted Hopkins’ emigration missionary plan, and it eventually ended after his death in 1803. His trainees never completed their education, but nevertheless found their way to Liberia through the ACS.110

Starting with the onset of the colonization movement, the ACS, in dealing with the huge expenses needed to transport and sustain the colony with the basic necessities for growth (such as food, equipment, medical supplies, to name a few) directed its efforts into engaging religious organizations for educational support. These mission schools took root among the Liberian tribal groups and concentrated their efforts not only on Christianizing and civilizing Africans, but projecting Western culture and realities based on a White patriarchal view. In fact, the idea of civilizing them meant Westernizing them. Using the Bible as the center of their curriculum, they encouraged their way of living and enforced their Westernized culture on African youths.111

Missionaries found the Western coast of Africa attractive because thriving Black communities in Sierra Leone were already in existence there. Fiona Leach’s analysis of the missionary efforts in Sierra Leone during the arrival of free Blacks found that


111 For more about mission schools in Liberia, see Brown, “Education.”
missionaries entering West Africa during the nineteenth century brought with them their own narrow constructions of what it meant to be an educated person, particularly in relationship to girls and women. She concludes: “From the earliest days of mission schooling in Africa, CMS [Church Mission Society] missionaries drew on narrow ideals of middle-class femininity to create a new Christian identity for young African girls.”\textsuperscript{112}

The educational agenda brought to Liberia by the arrival of mission schools and missionaries fostered tensions between the recently-arrived settlers and those natives who were already residing in the colony. For one thing, the White colonists saw themselves, as General Robert Goodloe Harper puts it, as being there to spread the “blessings of knowledge and freedom on a continent that now contains 150 millions of people, plunged in all the degradation of idolatry, superstitions and ignorance.”\textsuperscript{113} African natives were the object of their efforts and were seen as being in need of cleansing from their morality of sin. They never accepted that the natives’ religion and/or values were worth saving or learning. Their complete refusal to acknowledge and accept others, specifically those they met in their own homeland, left no room for negotiations.

The missionaries proved to be the best possible source for educating natives about the White colonists’ culture and religion as well as educating Black Americans (meaning those who chose to emigrate) who needed to have their standards of good moral character reinforced. Ashmun wrote a journal entry dated August 22, 1822:

\begin{quote}
The Settlement requires better schools than it has ever yet had; an able and faithful Missionary, who should be entirely and exclusively occupied
\end{quote}


in his work, and the presence of a greater number of persons, whose character would command respect, and possess a weight that should be felt.\textsuperscript{114}

Ashmun was a trained minister who never enjoyed the opportunity to fulfill that calling in Liberia, but his commitment to the stability of the colony and the Christian values he hoped to promulgate fell within the limits of his early training. Ashmun’s early years catapulted his desire to teach the Christian values which he had learned as part of his training. He was the third of ten children born in Champlain, New York on April 21, 1794. Ashmun intensely applied himself to studying books.\textsuperscript{115} He entered Middlebury College in the fall of 1812. Illness forced him to leave Middlebury. He later returned to complete his education at Vermont College in 1816. Upon graduation, Ashmun landed a position as a Principal of the Maine Charity School, which sought to increase the number of educated ministers. He served as a missionary for two months under the authority of the Trustees of the Maine Missionary Society.\textsuperscript{116} During those years Ashmun’s interest in foreign missions developed. Ashmun was attracted to the cause of the ACS. His review of the Second Annual Report of The American Colonization Society, expressed the following words:

Never, perhaps in the History of man, has an object affording equal scope for the exercise of Christian benevolence, been found capable of engaging in its support such a compass and variety of powerful motives, as that of the American Colonization Society…. On a subject so important as that of the character and capability of those who are to act as the Instructors and Magistrates, and to administer the affairs of the Colony, there can hardly be any discrepancy of opinion. That instructors should be men of piety—

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 30

\textsuperscript{115} Ralph Gurley, Life of Jehudi Ashmun late Colonial Agent in Liberia: with an appendix containing extracts from his journal and other writings; with a brief sketch of the life of Rev. Lott Cary: 18. Can be accessed via https://archive.org/stream/lifeofjehudiash00gurl#page/n121/mode/2up:

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 29.
that magistrates should be upright, prudent, and discerning – that both should exhibit a strict moral and virtuous deportment, none can doubt. And that all should be decidedly Christian in profession, principles and temper, who will hesitate to decide, that considers nature of the establishment, the durability of all impressions made upon its early character—and the influence which the example of such as hold conspicuous stations, never fails to exert.¹¹⁷

When Ashmun became a colonial agent, his views shifted radically. He faced the sickness that overtook the newly arrived settlers, including his wife. Ashmun also faced tribal attacks and hostility from the natives; and the colony’s dependency on the ACS, forcing him to adjust his views. He highlighted agriculture instead of commerce, but soon discovered that the colonists favored trading in preference to farming and planting. This observation would prove appropriate because the newly arriving settlers did not have the manpower or resources in the midst of war and sickness to orchestrate farming and planting.

Ashmun became the force behind the recruitment of educators via many missionary societies in Liberia. However, Staudenraus states that his initial motive for Liberia was to make it a working enterprise where he could benefit from trading while making it a commercial haven for Americans. He contends:

Ashmun had not come to Africa to design forts, mount cannon, raid slave depots, or beat off intruders. When he sailed from Baltimore in May, 1822, as a representative of the Baltimore Trading Company, he intended to become a rich merchant dealing in ivory, gold dust, palm oil, camwood, and beeswax.¹¹⁸

Ashmun saw the need to increase wealth, but his religious affirmation and need to civilize and Christianize Africans became central to his African experiences. He also

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 61-62.

extended his Christianizing efforts to include emigrant Blacks. In his letter to the Society, he expressed: “About thirty of our colonist of all ages and characters, indiscriminately, have, as the fruits of this work, publickly professed their faith in the Redeemer.”

Forming a highly civilized nation based on strong Christian values dominated Ashmun’s efforts in the colony. He saw the natives differently than he saw Black Americans. For one thing, Black Americans had been exposed to the White man’s religion and culture, supposedly making them more civilized and easier to inculcate with the values of the Christian faith. The African native, on the other hand, was looked upon as savages. In his report about the natives, *Traits of the African Character*, Ashmun writes:

> They have minds which never received culture. The voice of paternal instruction is never heard in the black man’s cabin. A mother’s fondness never displays itself in bridling the impetuous passions, in restraining the mischievous and vicious propensities, or even in teaching the “young idea” of her infant charge, “how to shoot…” No village school receives the growing boy. The very expediency of virtue is not believed; its principles are unknown: its effects on the character in this world, and influence on man’s condition in the next are truths which never entered into the minds of the wisest of their tribes. Then, who shall inculcate maxims of which all are ignorant? God is only known truly by revelation. The mind never instructed in this knowledge, must want it forever. Behold, then, the just description of the African’s mind! A depository for boundless knowledge—all its capacious champers are vacant. A tablet on which the name and perfections of the Deity may be inscribed in immortal capitals—it is covered over with an universal blot.

Ashmun’s opinion of the natives he was to encounter varied little from the opinions of other colonists, both Whites and Blacks. He saw the Africans as inferiors who were in need of the sort of enlightenment that only a White missionary could provide. As a

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121 Ibid., 122.
twenty-eight year old on board the brig Strong en route to the new African colony in 1822, Ashmun brought his romantic ideas of how to transform the natives and the colony at large. According to historian Staudenraus:

Ashmun’s dream of vast tropical colony guided his work. He envisioned the high, narrow cape wrested from King Peter’s people in 1821 as the nucleus of an American empire in Africa. With the goal he set about to strengthen colonial agriculture, exploit commercial opportunities in the interior and annex neighboring tribal lands.

He was not prepared for the negotiations, tensions and resistance he would confront as an administrator. Ashmun and the arriving settlers, including the first recaptives, who had been freed after being liberated from a slave-vessel that made its way to Georgia, and the settlers already in the colony, did not exceed a total of 130, including women and children. Being small in number forced the participation of both women and men in the struggle against the natives for the stability of the colony.

Upon arrival, Ashmun promised the ACS that he would report on the condition and prospect of the colony. He also gave his word that he would remain in Africa until another individual agent was appointed and could replace him. Arriving during the rainy season, Ashmun was stunned to find that the currently-assigned agents had left the colony.

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122 Staudenraus, The African Colonization Movement, 150.

123 Those recaptives were placed under the care of ACS so as to avoid compelling the state of Georgia to pay any of the expenses for their freedom. Recaptives had been part the ACS plan since its inception. Funding for the colony was provided based on the resettlement of recaptives and their role in halting the slave trade. From 1820 to 1843, the U.S. Navy sent 287 recaptives to Liberia. Their presence was relatively small, making up 6% of the population at that time. However, by 1860, the number of recaptives increased significantly, and they outnumbered the settler population during that time. They integrated well into the settlers’ societies, and referred to themselves as Americans. Their ease of acceptance into the settlers’ society was based on their initial acceptance by Ashmun. After their first arrival from Georgia, Ashmun instructed that those already settled should “treat them in all respects as settlers, the natives of the U.S.” With no reservations expressed by the Board, Ashmun incorporated the recaptives, ranking them above the natives. See Ralph Gurley, Life of Jehudi Ashmun late Colonial Agent in Liberia: with an appendix containing extracts from his journal and other writings; with a brief sketch of the life of Rev. Lott Cary: 336; and, Tom W. Shick, Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, 66-67.
Being the only white man among the colonists put Ashmun in a position where he had to rely on the support of the Black colonists.

Ashmun was not deterred by the challenges. In addition to securing more land for the colony, as colonial agent, through negotiations with town chiefs and preparing the colony for battle with natives, he urged the ACS to support the schooling efforts of the colony.\(^{124}\) Ashmun’s appeal for the participation of missionary movements in Africa was published in religious publications, and attracted interest from international missionary associations. Letters from European countries reached the ACS and expressed interest in evangelizing the natives of Africa. The idea that Ashmun was creating a Christian nation impressed the Board. In addition, Ashmun had reassured the Board that the new colony was well-organized and was becoming a thriving Christian society where he had extended the territory to accommodate more emigrants.\(^{125}\) Ashmun also communicated the need for stability within the colony. The resistance from the natives regarding the dispute over land encroachment left Ashmun at the mercy of the U.S Navy.\(^{126}\)

\(^{124}\) *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 1, No. 10 (December 1825): 317. Ashmun had secured a large and fertile territory between Montserado and St. Paul’s river. The river St. Paul is nine miles from Montserado and a two-hour boat ride from Monrovia. Ashmun secured a spot of land off the St. Paul River for the settlement of Virginians for engaging in enterprising.

\(^{125}\) Ibid., 306-7.

\(^{126}\) Jehudi Ashmun writes in a letter to Capt. Spence dated 31 March 1823 about the conflicts with the natives that lead to the death or disablement of seven of the thirty settlers in the colony at the time by the natives. For that reason, he sought the help from his ship. Ashmun worried about being outnumbered and taken off guard by the natives. For more on his letter, see “Minutes” from *The Seventh Annual Report of the American Society for the Colonizing of Free People of Colour of the United States*, February 20 1824 (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 54. Although Ashmun acknowledged some level of fearlessness, this was not the case for all of the settlers. These tensions left a level of uncertainty and discomfort within the settlement as the colonists’ notions about safety became an issue of concern. As the number of colonists grew, the natives could not fight the armed colonists on an equal basis, given that they were equipped with weapons backed by the U.S., as Ashmun noted in his report to the Society, “There is not a king or head man, within 50 or 80 miles of us, who can arm, properly, 50 men.” See, “Minutes” from *The Sixth Annual Report of the American Society for the Colonizing of Free People of Colour of the United States*, February 20 1822 (New York: Negro
The first four years brought annual arrivals of emigrants to the Liberian coast. However, by 1826, the arrivals grew from twice annually up to four times per year, which happened in 1828. However, Ashmun’s enthusiasm was never on exhibit more than during the arrival of Rev. Calvin Holton, who had been sent by ACS in 1826 to establish a system of Colonial education and serve as superintendent of the educational endeavors in the colony. Education was targeted for the children of the colonists; the native children living in the settlement; the recaptives brought to the colony; and there was special instruction for young men and women preparing to teach, or already engaging in, the teaching profession. The Lancasterian method of instruction was chosen as the method in which education would filter down to lower class while the upper class would benefit from the personal lectures of the Principal.\footnote{Ibid., 309. Lancasterian method of teaching was founded by Joseph Lancaster who was known as the pioneer of education for the working class. His method for transforming education for poor in the early 19th century incorporated a monitoring system, where trusted student monitors’ delivered simple yet well-defined lessons. His method included using the sand for students to form their ABCs and standing around big pages of a book to practice reading. In our current education practice, his method would be called peer-to-peer teaching. In its early development, the Lancasterian method combined two innovations: 1. The teaching of poor children generally left to Sundays schools, with the idea that teachers should be trained, raising, their social status and improving the education of the children in their care. 2. The arrangement of classes so that all that students were facing the front. For more on Lancasterian, see, Pen Vogler, “The Poor Child’s Friend,” *History Today* (February, 2015): 4-5.} Given Ashmun’s strong affirmation for missions, the ACS Board instructed that Rev. Holton should act, not only as a school administrator, but also as a Missionary in Africa. The excitement that overtook Ashmun was retired soon afterward upon the immediate passing of Rev. Holton, and a number of those who arrived with him, due to malaria. The Board never replaced Rev. Holton. Ashmun was determined to maintain his position regarding the provision of a system of religious teachings. He reorganized the initial school plan by replacing the deceased Holton with a newly-arrived settler by the name of George McGill. McGill was a free
Black schoolteacher from Maryland who left Maryland at the age of forty and journeyed to Liberia in 1827. Although there is little documentation of his life in the U.S and Liberia, it is clear that his religious and education values placed him in the forefront of Ashmun’s plan.

Meanwhile, in the U.S, particularly the slave South, manumission was gaining some momentum among slaveholders. Manumitted slaves began to make their appearances in the roll call of emigrants to Liberia starting in 1826. Although manumitted slaves were few in number, by 1828, all three of the four ships arriving that year included manumitted slaves from the South. On January 15\textsuperscript{th}, aboard the \textit{Doris}, sixty-seven of the one hundred and seven emigrants were liberated from Maryland by Mr. Daniel Murray, Esq.; February 19\textsuperscript{th} brought 164 from North Carolina, who were emancipated by Mr. Peele; and, on July 17\textsuperscript{th}, twenty-six had been liberated by a single individual, Mr. McDermitt from Georgia.\textsuperscript{128} While the population of Liberia increased, the settlement had also increased to include the St. Paul River’s Left Bank- Caldwell, and Right Bank - Millsburg.

\textbf{Liberia’s New Educated Blacks During the First Decade}

Although the settlers’ physical journal was complete, their mental journey had just begun. During the first decade on Liberian soil, the price of freedom seemed too harsh a reality. Malaria had taken the lives of many of the newly-arrived emigrants. Resources were limited, their appointed leadership and trust in ACS had been questioned and their security was threatened as they rallied to battle the resistance among the natives.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 318-382; Also see the roll of emigrant to Liberia \url{http://www.echarity.com/contents/roll-emigrants-have-been-sent-colony-liberia-western-africa/}
Of the 1,670 who emigrated during this period, 29 percent had died by the end of the first decade. The fear of dying from malaria, the challenges of negotiating two cultures, ensuring that their children would be successful, having sufficient resources to prosper, and, the fear of Liberia’s leadership abiding under the same white oppressive state, were all parts of the mental journey many Blacks faced. Their “Promised Land” had taken on the appearance of a “death trap.” Many felt dispirited, and emigration became a two-way street. A handful chose to return to the U.S. or the nearby British colony of Sierra Leone. Nevertheless, many felt euphoria in knowing that their life circumstances could improve.

In remembrance of the only life that the Black settlers knew, they navigated their new land in the hope of making it look and feel like the home they had left behind. It became important for them to maintain connections with their previous lives, be it through letters to home or by replicating U.S. society on African soil. They constructed communities modeled upon the southern plantation lifestyle. Their resistance to the African way of life and adjustments to a new way of life and culture were based upon maintaining the white man’s conception of ‘civilized’ societies. Their efforts fostered an attitude, which resulted in the creation of their own civilized societies, which were devoid of the African characteristics of the cultures they encountered.

Those who arrived in Liberia during the first decade were mostly free Blacks who volunteered to relocate. Seven hundred and twenty of the arriving settlers were southern free Blacks who, for the most part, represented the Black elites. This group of free Blacks

played a key role in the developmental years of the colony due to the education, trade experiences and religious status they had obtained in the States.

When the first groups of free Blacks arrived in Liberia, one immediately visible difference between them and the natives was their lighter skin color. There was a high percentage of mixed race people or mulattoes from the U.S. Historian Tom W. Shick noted that this phenotypical feature was one noticeable mark of free Black Americans during the early years of emigration to Liberia. He further construes this to the fact that manumission was the means that allowed slaveholders to offer better lives to their mulatto offspring. Therefore, those freed by their slave-owner fathers also enjoyed opportunities to advance themselves through education.¹³⁰ These elites emerged as leaders, passing on their privileges and social status to their own offspring, for over a century and a half. Another shared commonality was their Christian faith. Many felt the desire to spread the gospel to the natives of Liberia as part of their religious obligations, and some specifically traveled with that agenda in mind.

Monrovia was the first settlement in the colony, so upon their arrival and per the law established in the first decade, each settler or family was given a town lot. Land was distributed as follows only to immigrating Blacks and recaptives residing in the Colony: Every married man, in addition to a town lot, shall have for himself five acres of plantation land, two for his wife and one for each child, not to exceed ten acres in a single family.¹³¹ It was the goal of the Agent that each settler had his or her acquired land to


¹³¹ *Twelfth Annual Report of the American Society For Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), Appendix, 40. Town lot was issue as follows per the law: All settlers, on their arrival, shall draw town lots and plantations, for which the Agent is to give them certificate, specifying their number, and the time of drawing. If within two years from that date, two acres of land on the plantation shall have been brought under cultivation, the town lot cleared and enclosed, and a
start anew. However, interactions with any natives were prohibited when it came to dealing with the purchasing of land.

Those who had experienced some economic success in the States came in the hope of economic success devoid of racism and oppression. This was the case for Joseph Jenkins Roberts, who became the first elected president of Liberia, and his family members, who arrived at the end of the first decade. Amelia Roberts, described as a light mulatto, arrived with nine members of her family on the Harriet on February 9, 1829. A single mother who had acquired a considerable amount of wealth and respect within her community in Petersburg, VA after the death of her husband, James Roberts, was described as a woman of “intelligence, more character, and industrious habits.”

James Roberts obtained his wealth by transporting goods on his own flatboats from Petersburg to the wharves of Norfolk. By the time of his death, he had accumulated substantial wealth for a free Black of his day, leaving his wife and family two houses and several boats and parcels of land, as well as other properties. The Roberts family was one of the more ambitious free Black families in Virginia. Amelia, a native of Norfolk who moved with her husband to Petersburg, emigrated with her seven children. Amelia was among the rapidly growing number of the free Blacks of the Chesapeake after the American Revolutionary War. Most Blacks gained their freedom through manumission or were self-purchased. Amelia gained her freedom at age fifteen.

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Being freed, respected, educated, with considerable wealthy for a Black person during that era were insufficient to keep a widower in the U.S. The Virginia’s racial law and treatment of Blacks were good reasons for Amelia being willing to give up the familiarity of the South to venture to a new country. Historian James Ciment adds that the restrictions and racism of that era in Virginia were stifling for free Blacks, but to be a Black person of means and nearly all-white ancestry must have been especially exasperating.\(^{133}\) Her religious beliefs were also an important factor in their emigration. They were faithful members of their predominantly white Union Street Methodist Church in Petersburg, and were captivated by the missionary zeal and the recruitment activities of the ACS. The upbringing that Amelia and her husband, James, provided for their children influenced their life decisions. Three of five sons achieved important positions in the colony. Along with the presidency position, the two younger brothers, Henry J. Roberts left Liberia to study at the Berkshire Medical School in Massachusetts and returned to establish a popular medical practice in Monrovia. John Wright Roberts became the bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church and ministered to a body of almost 2000 members.

Her second oldest son, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, emigrated with his wife Sarah and infant child, both of who died shortly after arrival in Liberia. As a boy, the young Roberts learned his stepfather’s trade and served as an apprentice in a barbershop, which belonged to one of Virginia’s most educated and outstanding black residents, William N. Colson. Colson was trained in the two of the most lucrative occupations open to free Blacks of his day, and was also a minister of the gospel.

\(^{133}\) Ciment, *Another America*, 82.
Colson had a private library that Roberts was allowed to access during most of his early education without being formally educated. Historian Marie Tyler-Mcgraw expresses that men such as James Roberts were educated through organized free Black schools that operated in several cities. Joseph Shiphard, another early emigrant to Liberia who arrived on the Harriet, operated the school James Roberts attended. Robert and Colson planned to create an enterprise in Liberia to establish a transatlantic trading company that would carry African products to American ports and vice versa. Robert, within a few years of his arrival, had become a rich man from transporting products back and forth between Liberia and the U.S.

Also on board that same ship were nineteen members of the Sprigg Payne family. They included the eighty-year-old mother of Eleanor Sprigg Payne and their relative, James Sprigg Payne, who became the fourth president of Liberia and Beverly Page Yates, another relative of the Sprigg Payne family. Yates was born to free parents on September 2, 1811 in her native Richmond, Virginia. At age eighteen, he seized the opportunity to journey to Liberia. Although little has been written in history about Yates’ life in Richmond prior to his departure, his ability to write was listed on his departure ship rooster, and this reflected some level of educational advantage. In Liberia, he established a major mercantile business, rose to the rank of brigadier general in the militia, was a judge of the court of sessions as a probate judge, and was elected to serve as the Vice President of the Republic. He was also appointed financial agent of the Southern Baptist

134 Matthews, Joseph Jenkins Roberts; 6.
Mission Board in 1854 and was appointed Superintendent of the mission from 1859-1875. As a young man with some education and a desire to achieve success, Yates joined the ranks of the small number of successful aristocrats who ruled Liberia. There was an elite class in Liberia who socialized and married within their own social class. For example, Rev. Colston M. Waring, a thirty-one year old respectable preacher from Petersburg who was commercially successful, returned to Liberia after an earlier visit with his wife and children in 1823. Using funds from his liquidated assets in Virginia, he financed his own successful commercial firm in Monrovia in conjunction with another settler. The Roberts and Warings became linked through marriage when Jane Waring, the daughter of Colston Waring, married Joseph Jenkins Roberts. This class stratification existed not only in the social and political arena it also permeated the educational experiences of Liberians.

These influential men regarded education as being in the forefront of their notion of a successful colony. However, the experiences, good and bad, that they brought with them shaped their values and expectations regarding their new home. Although the number of educated Blacks in Liberia in the first decade was relatively small compared to rest of the emigrants, they dominated Liberia’s institutions using their family relations/connections and financial resources. Notwithstanding, they advocated in favor of institutions of education, independence from ACS control and independent sovereign nation status in the decades to follow. The first decade was a period of adjustment and


development amidst the struggle for peace with the natives. Settlers recreated a society that was familiar to them, from the architectural designs of the American homes to the American food they continued to embrace. Schools were no exceptions. The schools also mimicked those of American society: one founded on Christian principles and values.

**Foundation of Religious Education**

Shick argues that the nature of emigration made all of the settlers missionaries in Liberia. Africa had always been looked upon as the “dark continent” in need of civilization and the Christian God. The rhetoric surrounding emigration stressed the benefits of Christianizing and civilizing Africans. Most Blacks who accepted the ACS program for relocation bought into this rhetoric. The ACS leaders, their agents and the Black leaders in the colony stressed the value placed on their religious faith and their acquired Western culture. The ACS indirectly enforced their values through their recruitment efforts for their new colony. Although recruitment for emigration was completely voluntary, during the first decades many had been recommended or recruited by assigned agents who traveled the states and territories of the U.S to promote the agenda for emigration and garner funding for the ACS’ relocation efforts. However, the majority of the Black population in the U.S did not find the notion of the colonization of Africa to be appealing. In fact, among those who opted to emigrate, many voiced a preference for a settlement within the United States instead of Africa. During the mid-

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1820s, some free Blacks expressed opinions favoring and promoting Haitian emigration.\textsuperscript{139}

The foundation for sending missionaries to Liberia was set in motion during the first decade by the ACS and its financial supporters. The need for education and schools were relevant for the purpose of imparting Christian-based knowledge and wisdom to the younger generation. The need for a Christian-based settlement was pushed by those in authority to make decisions for the newly formed colony. This could best be accomplished if free Blacks who choose to emigrate were educated Christians who espoused a missionary agenda. Eunjin Park adds that, “it was not a mere coincidence that all of the Black missionaries who were commissioned directly by the Missionary Society were teachers.”\textsuperscript{140} The ACS’s agenda of Christianizing Africa was always a priority, particularly when those who went on to recruit emigrants espoused strong religious faith. Of course, the numbers of handpicked Blacks was small, given that resistance to educating Blacks during the antebellum era was strong. Nevertheless, among those who met the qualifications, many were already preachers in the U.S. Within the group of free Blacks who chose missionary status, many were also employed in trades where they earned their livings. For example, Collin Teage, an ordained minister, who was listed on the list of emigrants, was not a minister or missionary, but rather a saddler.

Teage arrived in Sierra Leone in 1821 on board the \textit{Nautilus}, the second ship to go to Africa, as a member of the first group of settlers who would later leave Sierra Leone for Liberia. Teage, like most of those on board, was a native of Virginia who had

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 43.
established himself socially and financially, considering his upbringing. He was born into slavery, but was able to purchase his freedom and the freedom of his wife and his two children (daughter and son) using his earnings as a saddler and harness maker. He had no formal education but was looked upon as a man possessed of great piety, which led to him being accorded respect amongst his peers and community. He began preaching with Lott Carey, and later together founded the Richmond African Missionary Society in 1815. The Teage family, along with the Carey family and another family, founded the Baptist Church while voyaging to Africa. Carey was chosen as the pastor. Shick contends that, “The pattern of forming church congregations before leaving America became a significant characteristic of immigration to Liberia. It contributed to the formation of competing groups among the settlers as well as providing potential leadership for the larger community.”¹⁴¹

The Baptist denomination was the first to reach the new colony and founded the first church in Liberia. While Teage did not remain in Liberia, and left for Sierra Leone, he returned in 1828 to co-pastor the Providence Baptist Church after the passing of Carey.¹⁴² Teage’s untimely death in 1839, while en route to the U.S, was not the end of his legacy in Liberia. Hilary Teage, his son, became an influential figure in the social and political arenas in Liberia. When the younger Teage journeyed to Africa with his parents at fourteen years of age, he had already received some form of education but continued


his formal education while in Sierra Leone with his family. By the time Hilary returned to Liberia, he was a young man with great potential and the political aspirations. He worked as a merchant, journalist and Baptist minister, following the path laid down by his father. In 1835, he became the colonial secretary and editor of the *Liberia Herald*, and served in the latter position until 1849. He used the *Herald* as a platform to share the lived experiences of the native Africans and settlers. His peers respected him because he advocated the importance of Liberian independence. He was the clerk of the convention, which formulated the “Monrovia Draft” of the Commonwealth Constitution. In 1847, he was elected to the Constitutional Convention as a delegate from Montserrado County. After drafting the Declaration of Independence, he launched a vigorous editorial campaign in the *Liberia Herald* to secure adoption of the constitution, which was modeled upon the American constitution. Unlike the U.S constitution, which limited citizenship according to race, the natives of Liberia could obtain citizenship if they adopted Western culture and the Christian values of the Black settlers, standards that dealt not only with adopting culture and values but also with achievement in Liberian society. He served as senator from Montserrado County in 1847, sat for one session and served as attorney general from 1850-1851. His final office was that of Secretary of State from December 1852 until his death on May 14, 1853.

Hilary Teage, like many from elite backgrounds during this time, understood how he had obtained his advantages and privileges, and advocated in favor of the importance of education specially the youth of Liberia. In his speech he adds:

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The education of our youth is the next subject to which I would direct your attention. ‘Knowledge is power’—is an old proverb—but not the less true because it is old. This is the spring that regulates the movements of society—this is at once the lever and the safety-valve of human institutions. Without it society will either not move at all, or like an unbalanced, unhelmed ship, move in a direction and at a rate that must eventually destroy it.  

He saw Liberia as a free society for Black settlers. As regards native Liberians, assimilating Western culture and values were the only routes of acceptance into his conception of Liberian free society. Unfortunately, this standard for acceptance was the norm for the both Black and white colonists. Those who came to Liberia with prior educational experiences and the motivation to succeed became those who were best able to take advantage of the political, economic and social context of Liberia.

**Lott Carey**

Lott Carey, a Black minister who could read and write, became the perfect candidate for the colony in Africa. At thirty-eight years of age, Lott Carey’s African journey began with his family of five on the *Nautilus*, along with Colin Teage and other Virginians who left in 1821. He had been born a slave on the plantation of William A. Christian in Charles City, Virginia, thirty miles from Richmond. Carey faced many obstacles as a slave, including a lack of education. Given that the atrocities of slavery often led to the separation of family members, Carey, as an only child was fortunate to

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145 Anniversary speech from Hilary Teage, delivered in Monrovia, Liberia, 1846 in Calumny Refuted, Facts from Liberia: Extracts from the Inaugural Address of the Coloured President Roberts; An Eloquent Speech of Hilary Teage. A Coloured Senator; and Extracts from a Discourse by H.H. Garnett, a Fugitive Slave, on the Past and Present Condition, and Destiny of the Coloured Slave (London: C. Gilpin, 1848).

have both his parents living together on the same plantation. His father was a respected
member of a Baptist church who instilled the foundation of Christianity early in his life.
Although little has been documented regarding Carey’s adolescence, he remained on the
plantation until age twenty-four when he was hired out as an enslaved laborer in
Richmond.

Carey worked as a laborer in a Shockhoe tobacco warehouse and was not always
an idea role model. Drunkenness and a blasphemous lifestyle plagued his early years until
he converted to Christianity in the First Baptist Church in 1807. Carey was intrigued
by the sermon preached that very Sunday, and it inspired him to read the Bible. He taught
himself the letters of the alphabet asking for assistance from men at the warehouse where
he worked. Carey learned to read the book of John in the Bible and later learned to write.
Carey’s experience in learning reflected many of the experiences of Black American
education endeavors. The only visible textbook available to Black slaves in America was
the Bible. However, Carey’s love for learning the Bible was so strong that he enrolled
in a night school taught by William Crane, a white Baptist from New Jersey who was
passionate about African missions and encouraged both Carey and Teage to pursue the

147 The spelling of Lott Carey (long form) has been used in different ways short (Lot Cary) in historical
documents. The long form will be used for the purpose of this study. See, Miles Mark Fisher, “Lott Cary,
Cary, Late Colonial Agent in Liberia. With an appendix, containing Extracts from His Journal and Other


149 Cornelius, “When I Can Read.”
ACS and African mission agenda.\textsuperscript{150} In Crane’s school Carey, Teage and about twenty other leading men were instructed in elementary reading, writing, arithmetic and the Bible.

Carey’s aptitude for business allowed his master to award him gratuities in the form of five-dollar bills, and allowed him to do a little work outside his duty for payments.\textsuperscript{151} Under this arrangement, Carey gradually saved $850 to buy his children and his own freedom in 1813, after losing his first wife.\textsuperscript{152} He devoted his time to studying the Bible to qualify himself to serve in the ministry of God. He became interested in building God’s ministry among the people in Africa.

By 1815, the Richmond African Missionary Society that he founded with Teage was gaining support from the Black community, contributing $100-$150 yearly to African missions. Carey felt he needed to do more for the people of Africa, which led to him entertaining the notion of relocating to Africa. Carey had secured a successful living for himself and his family. He had a steady stream of income of $700 a year as well as his own small farm. As a minister for over twelve hundred of his people, he was held in high regard by them and was respected by his employees. Given Carey’s level of success as a Black man in the South, many questioned him for wanting to give it all up for Liberia, a place from which came news of the high percentage of death and the difficulties in finding resources to start anew. To these concerns, Carey responded:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{150} Sandy Dwayne Martin, \textit{Black Baptists and African Missions: The Origins of a Movement 1880-1915} (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1989), 18.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Abayomi Wilfrid Karnga, \textit{The Negro Republic on West Africa} (Monrovia: College of West Africa Press, 1909), 16.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Leroy Fitts, \textit{Lott Carey: First Black Missionary to Africa} (Valley Forge, Judson Press, 1978), 15.
\end{itemize}
I am an African, and in this country, however meritorious my conduct, and respectable my character. I cannot receive the credit due to either. I wish to go to a country where I shall be estimated by my merits, not by my complexion; and I feel bound to labor for my suffering race. I wish to go to a country where I shall be estimated by my merits, not by my complexion; and I feel bound to labor for my suffering race.153

Carey had lived his life in the States with the limitations placed upon him as Black man despite his success. He saw Africa as a place he could prosper by delivering the gospel to a ‘lost continent.’ His real motive centered upon his missionary work. For a Black American at this time, missionary work was dominated by race and color. David Killingray contends that although the number of Black missionaries was small in comparison to their white counterparts, they were unique because Black missionaries were the only one ethnic group that had a primary focus on evangelizing to people who resembled them racially.154 Although Carey identified himself as an African in his farewell speech, he did not see himself as the sort of native African he was heading to Africa to enlighten. In fact, he saw his work in Africa as him bringing the gospel to Christianize and civilize them. He saw himself as coming to uplift the people of Western Africa, and stated, “I long to preach to the poor Africans the way of life and salvation.”155

Lott Carey arrived in Liberia at a dismal time for the colony. He, along with other settlers, was vulnerable to attacks by the natives; the overwhelming presence of sickly and dying settlers; and, the underdevelopment of the land and resources. It was during this time that Carey’s second wife succumbed to the African fever/malaria leaving him to


155 Fitts, Lott Carey, 15.
care for their three children. Ashmun realized that Carey’s ability to lead his people was a great asset. Carey quickly became a vital part of the care system for sick settlers. Although he was not trained as a physician, he used his good sense, observations and experience to help care for the sick.156 However, it was Carey’s missionary work and his educational endeavors that brought him even closer to Ashmun, despite his opposition to both Ashmun and the ACS in the early years after his arrival.157 Together, Carey and Ashmun developed various projects for schools in the colony.

As Ashmun pleaded to the Society regarding the need for missionaries and schoolmasters, Carey became involved with the process of building a church in Monrovia as soon as he arrived and appealed for funds to complete it. In 1825, Carey opened a missionary school in Monrovia that instructed the native children on a part-time basis. This initiative sparked the opening of four other schools intended to serve the children of settlers and the African recaptives. Each school served its own separate population. Most of Carey’s students were sons of tribal leaders.

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156 Ralph Randolph Gurley, Life of Jehudi Ashmun: with an appendix containing extracts from his journal and other writings; with a brief sketch of the life of Rev. Lott Cary (Washington: James C. Dunn, 1835), 190.

157 William A. Poe, “Lott Cary: Man of Purchased Freedom,” Church History, 39, no. 1 (1970): 59. In 1823 and 1824 the settlers, with Carey as leader, lead a revolt against Ashmun and the ACS. They accused Ashmun of oppression, neglecting his duties, leaving his post and seizing public property. In response to this disturbance in the Colony, the ACS requested that the U.S send an armed vessel to settle the dispute. In 1824, Rev. Randolph Gurley was sent to Liberia. He was able to settle the settlers after spending a week with Ashmun and drafting a constitution for the Colony. As punishment for leading the disturbances, Carey was forbidden to preach by the ACS until such time as they felt he had repented. By 1826, Ashmun and Carey had reconciled and were working together. Carey served as his vice agent and as Agent when Ashmun left the colony.
Schools in the Colony

The first schooling efforts were founded on the premise of establishing a mission/religion-based education, a notion set in motion by Lott Carey and Collin Teage upon their arrival in 1822. They operated a church and a Sunday school. Lott Carey operated a school solely for the natives. Other than Carey’s school, which was partially supported by the Baptist mission in the U.S, all four of the other schools were supported through trading conducted by the settlers.\textsuperscript{158} The American settlers erected schools to perpetuate their values and norms and prepare their children to succeed in the future. This was one way they knew they could ensure that the colony would prosper as an American colony. Setting up schools for their children became an undertaking among individual settlers. They became proactive in their quest to provide education for the children in the settlement. During a period of peace, followed by the success in trade, they were able to voluntarily support the schools financially. This funding was primarily the main source

Table: 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools operated in the colony during the first decade</th>
<th># Of students enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. McGill School</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Stewart and Ms. Jackson (male and female)</td>
<td>44 and 40 respectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children of settlers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Prout and Mrs. William</td>
<td>52 and 30 respectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children of recaptives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lott Carey and Lewis</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natives residing in the colony</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Ralph Gurley, \emph{Life of Jehudi Ashmun late Colonial Agent in Liberia: With an Appendix Containing Extracts from his Journal and Other Writings; with a Brief Sketch of the Life of Rev. Lott Cary}, 18; \url{https://archive.org/stream/lifeofjehudiash00gurl#page/n121/mode/2up}

\textsuperscript{158} Brown, "Education," 94.
of the schools’ income. In 1827, this funding totaled $1,400. Other source of support came via $300 that Ashmun had at his disposal, which was kept in the Colonial Treasury after civil and military obligations had been paid.159

In the early constitution of the colony established in 1824, which was modified and adopted at a meeting of the Board of Managers on October 22, 1828, the colony’s agents served as overseer of educational governance, which put Ashmun’s influence in the forefront of educational advancement. It stated:

Instructors in all public schools having the sanction of a public charter, or participating in any degree in the public funds, shall be appointed and employed by the regular school committees of the Colony, but with the Agent’s approbation and concurrence.160

In 1825, Ashmun reported that Black American settlers were operating five schools in the colony. This included Lott Carey’s school for the natives, which was partially funded by the Baptist Missionary Society of Richmond, two schools which were operated for the children of settlers and two other schools which were operated for the children of recaptives. The subjects in these schools were limited to basic reading, religious teachings and the English language. In 1827, the Board of Managers reported that several primary schools continued their operations, but the quality and ability of the teachers limited their learning experiences to rudimentary knowledge.161

All of the children in the colony, rich or poor, were provided an education. Students were required to attend schools. Up until 1827, when Carey opened a school for natives outside of the colony, education was limited exclusively to those in the colony.

159 Ibid., 89-94.


161 Tenth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society, 1827, 43.
Therefore, the number of natives who became educated Black settlers was small in number. The native boys who received educations were trained to act as interpreters for American and European missionaries or as religious teachers. However, funding became a major concern not just for the purpose of maintaining the schools within the colony but also for the expansion of the schools it to areas outside of the colony. Carey’s school opened outside of the colony and was headed by a native whom Carey had converted and baptized, a John Revey, but the school closed within a year due to lack of funding. The missionary society abroad could no longer support both schools in Monrovia and schools, which were located outside of the colony in Grand Cape Mount.

Although the majority of settlers, particularly close to the end of the decade, arrived with little or no education, Carey represented the small elite population who had entered Liberia during the first decade. According to Leroy Fitts, Carey’s beliefs about his mission, and his dedication to spreading the gospel, led him to Liberia and shaped his religious and educational contribution to the country for decades to come. Carey focused on his commitment to the socialization of Christian theology (meaning his past experiences in moving beyond slavery to freedom), and tried to relate the gospel to the social context of the African natives. He contends that these beliefs were:

Christian faith must be linked dynamically with a positive view of man in which the concepts of equality and dignity stand out...that through Jesus Christ a person became a “new creature.” Therefore, oppressed people may find in Christ freedom and the initiation or restoration of dignity...that the dynamic power of Christ had freed him from the dehumanization marks of his youthful experience of slavery....Carey

163 Fitts, Lott Carey, 50-51.
believed that African was a “dark continent,” not because of the color of her inhabitants, but because the gospel of Jesus Christ had not been proclaimed to the peoples of Africa.¹⁶⁴

In a tribute to Carey as a hero and martyr for the Christian faith, E.C. Morris, President of the National Baptist Convention, honored him as a hero of his race, “whose love for the cause of Jesus Christ not only caused him to secure his freedom, but to brave the stormy Atlantic that he might plant the banner of the cross on the continent of Africa, his fatherland.”¹⁶⁵

He put a foundation in place for the development of education that neither Carey nor Ashmun would live to see developed fully. Some of these setbacks included the lack of funding, lack of full ACS support, recruitment of qualified teachers, and the resistance from natives. By the end of the first decade, the two educational pioneers, Carey and Ashmun had both died. Ashmun left the colony for the U.S. due to an illness in 1828, and left the entire colony’s governmental affairs in Carey’s hands. On his deathbed, Ashmun advocated in favor of the permanency of Carey as head Agent for the colony. Ralph Gurley became Agent and Secretary of the ACS, and Carey became the governor of the colony, and chose Elijah Johnson as his assistant. Black settlers governed Liberia for the first time. As the agent in charge, Carey stayed in communication with Ashmun, updating him on the colony’s affairs and the state of the colony. On August 25, 1828, Ashmun, at thirty-five years of age, died of his illness. At the time of his death, Liberia’s population had grown to about twelve hundred settlers.¹⁶⁶ Unfortunately, news of Ashmun’s death

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 74-75.


¹⁶⁶ Fitts, Lott Carey, 57.
did not reach Liberia until the unforeseen death of Carey. Mr. Gurley reported Carey death as follows:

The factory belonging to the colony at Digby, (a few miles north of Monrovia,) had been robbed by the natives; and satisfaction being demanded was refused. A slave trader was allowed to land his goods in the very house where the goods of the colony had been deposited, and a letter of remonstrance and warning directed to the slave dealer, by Mr. Cary, was actually intercepted and destroyed by the natives. In this state of affairs, Mr. Cary considered himself solemnly bound to assert the rights and defend the property of the colony. He therefore called out instantly, the military of the settlements, and commenced making arrangements to compel the natives to desist from their injurious and unprovoked infringements, upon the territory and rights of the colony. On the evening of the 8th of November, while Mr. Cary, and several others were engaged in making cartridges in the old agency house, a candle appears to have been accidentally upset, which caught some loose powder…which resulted in the death of eight persons.167

Although the deaths of Carey and Ashmun did not deeply affect the citizens of Liberia, the ACS and friends of Liberia in America saw it as a great loss that would impact the continued development of the colony. Dr. Randall, the agent who replaced Ashmun, noted that Carey’s death “was a great loss to our cause, as he had much influence with his people, both here, and in the United States.”168 In a resolution read at the annual meeting of the Richmond Baptist Missionary Society in 1829 Carey’s death was remembered as unspeakable, but represented a gain for the external life. The resolution stated:

The loss which has been sustained, cannot in our estimation, be easily repaired. This excellent man seems to have been raised up by divine


168 Ibid., 92.
providence, for the special purpose of taking an active part in the management of the infant settlement.\textsuperscript{169}

James B. Taylor, Pastor of the Second Baptist Church in Richmond, VA, in writing Carey’s biography, noted, “In his death the colony, and Africa [itself] lost a devoted friend. His memory doubtless will long be revered by the Liberians, and generations yet unborn will have reason to call him blessed.”\textsuperscript{170}

Even though Carey had secured his legacy with the white Christian leadership in the U.S, they never saw him as their equal. As passionate as he was about his doctrine, Carey was never given the full opportunity to teach the gospel in the context of being free. He was limited by the racism that plagued white Christian minds. When Carey was allowed to speak to his Black congregation, they admired and respected him. Unfortunately, the institution of slavery limited access to most Blacks. His journey to Africa was intended to not only spread the gospel but also explore the freedom to reach people whom he felt needed to know God the most: the natives. For this reason, Carey left behind everything he knew in the U.S to honor the calling of God. Among those families he left behind, the feeling of abandonment overshadowed his good deeds. While his name reigns high amongst the Baptist denomination and friends of the colony, his descendants never spoke about him until a century later. In fact, his great-great-great-grandson Ned Cary recalled in an interview that, “He [Carey] seemed like a traitor more than anything else - he ran away from the family.” However, there is no question about the important role Lott Carey played in the development of the colony. Carey laid the foundation for missionary educational development that dominated Liberian society for

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 93.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 97.
decades to come. In fact, one cannot mention or begin to understand the development of education in Liberia without understanding the role that Carey played. Carey’s goal in Liberia was to spread Christianity to the natives. In a letter to a member of the Board of the Richmond Missionary Society, Carey wrote:

Dear brother, tell the Board to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, for the work is going on here, and prospers in his hands; that the Sunday School promises to be a great and everlasting blessing to Africa; and that on the next Lord’s day there will a discourse delivered on the subject of missions, with a view to get on foot, if possible, a regular school or the instruction of native children; and tell them that they have my grateful acknowledgements for the liberal appropriations they have made.

While educating the natives for the purpose of civilizing them in order to assimilate them to the western standard of living that accepts Christianity, Carey failed to understand their culture and religious practices. Carey did not save the majority of the native population as he had envisioned himself doing. Carey did pave the way for western education to be included both for those in settlement and those in the interior of Liberia. The outcome of this education experience might have been different for the natives had Carey been receptive to their culture, language, experiences and their educational system, instead of viewing them as people in need of saving. Carey left behind the foundation of his mission education, an educational experience that gloried western culture and civilization while placing the African native culture and experiences as inferior.

By the beginning of the second decade of the colony, educational efforts shifted away from individual settlers and moved toward benevolent associations of women and Church Missions in America. Even as the ACS sent out new emigrants, they reinforced

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the idea of religious groups being involved in the establishment of missionary programs among the settlers and the African population.¹⁷²

Chapter 4

Their God and their Education:

The Second Wave of Settlers, 1830-1850

“They now ask for schools—factories—churches.”

“Education corrects vice
cures disorders
abates jealousies
adorns virtue
commands the winds
triumphs over the waves
scales the heavens.”

Hillary Teage speech

The face of emigration changed by the second decade. Those arriving were no longer limited to free Black volunteers of elite status from the South. In fact, those arriving in Liberia around the 1830s were mostly manumitted slaves from Southern plantations who had been offered these options only after the death of their masters in wills or deeds. For this reason, the population of emigrants, being very poor and mostly uneducated, required more resources than the ACS was able to provide. The ACS faced opposition from multiple groups (churches, abolitionists and free Blacks) questioning their purpose and support for emigration efforts, and it became increasingly more difficult to solicit financial support. It had a limited ability to offer financial assistance, so its educational initiatives took a back seat to what was deemed necessary for maintaining

173 Elliott Cresson speaking at the meeting of ACS. Fourteenth Annual Report of the American Society for the Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, 19 January 1831, ix.

the law and order of the colony and combating the increase in pauperism. It focused specifically on running a jail and a courthouse. This decision left most educational development in the hands of Protestant church missions and ladies’ benevolent associations in the U.S. Black settlers had to fend for themselves, typically unable to support the continuing operation of schools.

**The Beginning of the ACS’ problems**

By the 1830s, well into the second decade of the colonization efforts in Liberia, ACS faced several challenges to its activities. The first challenge came from within the organization itself. The original ACS membership consisted of both abolitionists and pro-slavery supporters who held opposing views on the purposes of the colonization movement. The ACS failed efforts to consolidate white Americans’ views on slavery with those of the Black population in the United States caused the Society to become increasingly unstable. This failure on the part of the ACS fractured the core of the movement. This left it vulnerable to attacks from within, particularly from those abolitionists who had once supported the movement and were from the outside.

Beginning in 1829, in a well-known appeal for emancipation, Black Bostonian David Walker wrote:

> Our friends who have been imperceptibly drawn into this plot I view with tenderness, and would not for the world injure their feelings, and I have only to hope for the future, that they will withdraw themselves from it;— for I declare to them, that the plot is not for the glory of God, but on the

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176 Ibid., 103.

contrary the perpetuation of slavery in this country, which will ruin them and the country forever, unless something is immediately done.\textsuperscript{178}

Walker’s \textit{Appeal} inspired and influenced many Black and White abolitionists to question the motives of the ACS. Black leadership, in particular, took a very active part in swaying their communities to oppose the ACS. Many saw colonization as a deportation scheme created to aid the perpetuation and survival of the peculiar institution of slavery and upend the advancements of free Blacks. Black leaders especially denounced those Blacks who actually supported the movement. Black supporters of the ACS, such as Henry Highland Garnet, justified his acceptance of emigration by asserting that he “would rather see a man free in Liberia, than a slave in the United States.”\textsuperscript{179} Still outspoken Blacks opposed to the ACS and colonization argued that America was their home. It was where they had been born; it would be where they died, notwithstanding the expectations of those in favor of colonization.\textsuperscript{180} At a public meeting held on August 5, 1831 in Columbia, Pennsylvania, the ACS members and free Blacks in the Columbia borough of Pennsylvania met to discuss African colonization. ACS members hoped that this meeting would help them garner support from the free Black community. However, many voiced a mistrust of the Society during the meeting, they expressed that “the

\textsuperscript{178} David Walker, \textit{Walker’s Appeal, In Four Articles: Together with a Preamble To The Coloured Citizens Of The World, But In Particular, And Very Expressly To Those of The United States of America} (Boston: David Walker, 1830), 77.

\textsuperscript{179} Campbell, \textit{Middle Passage}, 70.

colonization society is replete with infinite mischief…that we view the country in which we live to be our only true and appropriate home.\textsuperscript{181}

Similar debates were taking place elsewhere in cities such as Pittsburgh, Boston, New Haven, Richmond, and New York.\textsuperscript{182} Notwithstanding, Philadelphia was the hotbed of this growing movement against the ACS because of its prominent and outspoken Black leadership. Leaders such as, Richard Allen, founder of the A.M.E. Church, James Forten, a successful and wealthy businessman, and Absalom Jones, the first Black American ordained priest in the Episcopal Church in the United States. It was here in Philadelphia that these and countless other Black Americans staked their claim of earning that illusive American dream of equal access, opportunity, and protection. Black demands for equality and racial uplift also made Philadelphia an epicenter for racial hostility. Between 1790 and 1800, Philadelphia’s racial climate changed drastically, and conditions worsened when whites began to resent Black efforts to uplift themselves.

In Philadelphia, James Forten helped create a movement that opposed the colonization of Blacks by whites. For him a white-directed colonization effort defeated the fight for Black equality. According to historian Beverly C. Tomek, Forten understood that racial uplift from emigration could only work if Blacks dictate their own destiny.\textsuperscript{183}


Moreover, opposition was not without variation or degree. Some were adamantly opposed, while others were not wholly opposed to the idea of having their own society governed by, and for, themselves outside the boundaries of the U.S. They simply did not want to go all the way to Africa to achieve this society. In fact, many Black leaders advocated emigration to the new independent nation of Haiti. Tomek contends:

> What white colonizationists, first in the Andover group and later the ACS, failed to realize was that blacks might have been interested in settlements founded and operated under black leadership. The last thing they wanted, however, was to be dragged back across the Atlantic by whites who had exploited black labor for centuries but now deemed those laborers and their descendants unfit for citizenship in the nation they had helped forge.¹⁸⁴

Forten was among those who advocated in favor of emigration to places outside of white control. As a fourth-generation American and a member of the elite class of Philadelphia, Forten throughout most of his adult life, pondered whether emigration to Africa or Haiti could best provide successful free Blacks like himself the opportunity of true freedom and self-rule. The alienation of northern free Blacks from mainstream American life led many to consider Haitian emigration. The prospect of financial advancement, and the opportunity to be united as a people in a Black nation, sparked these discussions and enthusiasms for Haitian emigration.¹⁸⁵ Although the free Black population of Philadelphia, New York and Baltimore lived in well-established communities with Black-run schools and churches, they were still a vulnerable population. These Blacks

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¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 146.

represented the best of Americans, yet few could take advantage of the fundamental constitutional rights guaranteed to Whites of much lesser fortune, education, and prestige. To add insult to these injuries, the lives of these prominent and upstanding Blacks became even more compromised with the continual arrival of Irish and German immigrants. Competition for labor positions dovetailed with the economic downturn and these developments affected Blacks more than any other group. To Forten and others, these persistent and ever-increasing challenges made emigration appear to be a promising alternative, to second-class citizenship engulfing their very existence and way of life. Still, if Forten and others were to work with the ACS on any emigration plan, it would have to be on self-directed and under the leadership of the Black community. Despite the best efforts of the ACS, they were never able to encourage and persuade and gain the trust of Forten or other prominent Blacks of his era.\(^{186}\)

In fact, the opposite seemed to happen. The independent Black church in Philadelphia became the training ground for Black leaders to engage and test racial equality issues. As the founder and leader of the AME Church, Allen used his pulpit to argue against the ACS’ movement to return Blacks to Africa, and took every opportunity to speak out against it when given an audience. Like Forten, Allen used his influence among the Black community to challenge the ACS. Allen wrote:

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\text{I have no doubt that there are many good men who do not see as I do, and who are sending us to Liberia; but they have not duly considered the subject—they are not men of colour—This land which we have watered with our tears and our blood, is now our mother country, and we are well satisfied to stay where wisdom abounds and the gospel is free.}\(^{187}\)
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\(^{186}\) Beverly C. Tomek, “They will never become a people,”133.

Black protesters used churches and written publications as an outlet to inform the public against colonization efforts. Martin Delany was a highly vocal protester who used *The North Star*, a publication he coedited with Frederick Douglass, to inform the public of his discontent with the ACS. Delany was born to a free mother and an enslaved father in western Virginia in 1812. His mother moved their family to Pittsburgh, where he furthered his education and worked as an assistant to a doctor. Although Delany did not complete his medical degree, he was admitted to Harvard Medical School, where he studied until his suspension. Delany did not hide his dislike for the colony of Liberia and those who chose to follow as colonists. In one of his many articles about the hypocrisy of Liberia, he writes:

> Liberia in its present state as having thwarted the design of the original schemers, the slave holding founders, which evidently was intended, as they frequently proclaimed it, as a receptacle of freed colored people and superannuated slaves of America; but we view it in the light of a source of subsequent enterprise, which no colored American should permit himself to lose sight of.

Delany, like many educated Blacks, used their voices to stifle efforts to sway or recruit free Blacks to leave the United States. Subsequently, the ACS’ plan for recruiting free Blacks was upended when everyday Black citizens began to mistrust and lose interests in the Colonization Society. Delany’s outspokenness played a part in shaping the minds and actions of Blacks regarding the colonization movement and even Liberia.

Notwithstanding, Delany’s dislike for Liberia would change upon his first visit in 1859.

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188 In 1850, the Massachusetts Colonization Society offered Delany and two other Black students an opportunity to attend Harvard Medical School with the hopes of them relocating to Liberia after their training. Once the three of them enrolled at Harvard, they were expelled following complains from white students who protested the presence of Black students in their classes. Campbell, *Middle Passage*, 72.

Educated free Blacks were not the only opponents of the ACS. William Lloyd Garrison, initially a champion of the ACS, quickly became a staunch critic. By 1830, he avowed to discredit the Society through his multiple media outlets and his influence in the abolitionist movement. Garrison used his antislavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, and even published a book on the subject, *Thoughts on African Colonization*, to shed light on an organization and movement he deemed to be unchristian, racist, and undemocratic. Garrison argued that instead of being a philanthropic and Christian institution, the American Colonization Society exhibited anti-Christian tendencies and anti-republican tendencies.\(^{190}\) He questioned the benefits the ACS articulated related to Black advancement and uplift. He asked, “Why not use the funds of the Society to instruct and elevate our Colored population at home?”\(^{191}\) In essence, Garrison pondered the need for emigration if the goal was Black uplift. Uplift could happen in America as much as Liberia if this was the true intent of the organization and movement.

Garrison’s critiques continued. In another article, Garrison wrote:

I am prepared to show, that those who have entered into this CONSPIRACY AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS are unanimous in abusing their victims; unanimous in their mode of attack; unanimous in proclaiming the absurdity, that our free blacks are natives of Africa; unanimous in propagating the libel, that they cannot be elevated and improved in this country; unanimous in opposing their instruction; unanimous in exciting the prejudices of the people against them; unanimous in apologising for the crime of slavery; unanimous in conceding the right of the planters to hold their slaves in a limited bondage; unanimous in their hollow pretence for colonizing, namely, to evangelize Africa; unanimous in their _true motive_ for the measure—a terror lest the blacks should rise to avenge their accumulated wrongs. It is a conspiracy to send the free people of color to Africa under a benevolent pretence, but really that the slaves may be held more securely in bondage.


\(^{191}\) Ibid..
It is a conspiracy based upon fear, oppression and falsehood, which draws its aliment from the prejudices of the people, which is sustained by duplicity, which really upholds the slave system, which fascinates while it destroys, which endangers the safety and happiness of the country, which no precept of the Bible can justify, which is implacable in its spirit, which should be annihilated at a blow.\textsuperscript{192}

Another unexpected challenge to the ACS occurred after Nat Turner led a deadly revolt that resulted in the death of almost 65 White people in Southampton County, Virginia in mid-August 1831.\textsuperscript{193} The increase in the numbers of southern free Blacks fleeing fearful Whites created a financial challenge for the ACS. Within three months after the Turner revolt, 326 free Blacks from Southampton County emigrated to Liberia. In addition, manumission was on the rise, which led to an increase in the population of Liberia to over 1,300 Black southerners between late 1831 to 1833.\textsuperscript{194} The drastic increase in population and the loss of funding due to the lack of interest created by the opposition, the ACS found themselves unable to adequately meet the needs of the settlers arriving in the colony. Although they choose to limit the diffusion of this information to the American public due to the fear of more Blacks losing interest, settlers found ways to express themselves in letters sent back to the U.S. The letter of Mars Lucas to his formal owner expresses this well. Lucas wrote:

I. may state to you. that I. am much deceiv’d, with, this Country the reports, is all a lie, nearly to Encourage people. to come to this Country. Times is very Hard. out here. every thing is very Dear. and not to be had. The scarcely will allow us as much provision. is a halfgrown Child can eat, a man can eat up all his meat. all in one day. We only draw 1 lb. of meat. per. week. 3 qurts meal 2 quarts of rice that is weeks allowance. I. really.


\textsuperscript{194}Burin, Slavery and the Peculiar Solution, 19.
think' that the Socity don't, know, about their, Usage here, we mights get. more allowance but. the. give and take themselves I have nothing very Interesting, worth relating.  

In his response, Lucas’ owner advice to him was to make the best of his Liberian experience and be as industrious as possible. However, what he and many of the emigrants from southern plantations failed to understand living the Liberian experience was not to come easy. The lack of resources, education, and opportunities for those manumitted slaves, who had little to no means of surviving past their allotted time of support by the ACS found it difficult to be industrious in Liberia.

**Educational Experience in Liberia, 1830-1850**

By 1830, the system of education in the colony showed no greater promise than in previous years. Sabbath and day schools existed throughout the colony, and even serviced the native children. However, the need for qualified teachers still represented a serious concern for the Society. The board had expressed excitement for the arrival of two prominent Black Americans in hopes of expanding the educational system. The first was John Brown Russwurm, a Jamaica-born mulatto and a graduate of Bowdoin College in Maine, who came specifically for the purpose of superintending and improving the system of education. The second prominent Black was Joseph Shipherd. Shipherd was a teacher who had conducted a successful school in Richmond. After his arrival, Shipherd became very despondent regarding the lack of support for schools and shared

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195 A letter from Liberia, Mars Lucas to his former owner Townsend Heaton, 19 June 1830. Letter can be retrieved at: [http://www.balchfriends.org/Glimpse/MarsLucas.htm](http://www.balchfriends.org/Glimpse/MarsLucas.htm)

his opinions with Russwurm. Upon visiting Shipherd’s school in Monrovia, Russwurm reported the need for more space to accommodate the thirty students already enrolled, and a school for infants. His passion for self-improvement encouraged him to accept the position of Superintendent of Schools.

Russwurm’s decision to journey to Liberia reflects the complexities of the Black American experience in the U.S. Russwurm, the cofounder and editor of Freedom’s Journal, the first known newspaper for Black Americans, used his platform to speak against the ACS and its efforts to relocate free Blacks to Liberia. Later, he wound up in the very place he opposed after giving up his livelihood to relocate to Liberia. Why the change of heart? Was he a hypocrite or a “traitor to his brethren” as some have proposed? Russwurm’s shift is complicated but explainable. Russwurm, like many others, felt growing frustration about the limited opportunities available to Blacks in America. He was passionate about the uplift of Blacks through education, and journeyed to Liberia to assist with the education of its youth. Historian Winston James contends:

Russwurm saw his arrival as much more than an individual migration; it was to him a fulfillment of prophecy, a part of the process leading toward the redemption of Africa. But accompanying the elation of arrival was the New World arrogance of “civilizing” Africa, which afflicted virtually all of the nineteenth-century black intellectuals who sought to make a home on the continent.

Educating Blacks in Liberia should have been a serious priority, considering the influx of uneducated emigrants. Russwurm understood the desperate need for educated citizens who could run their own government. In order for Liberia to operate as a


successful African nation of free people, education had to become a serious undertaking. Russwurm not only served as the Superintendent of Schools, he also held the elective position of colonial secretary while launching the *Liberia Herald*. There was an influx of additional emigrants with no education, and Russwurm saw the consequences of the lack of educated people in Liberia. This was made evident by the multiple positions held by those who did have some degree of education, including himself. He created and launched the *Liberia Herald*, the first newspaper in the colony, and later served as Governor of Maryland County, Liberia in 1842.\(^{199}\)

Just as with the *Freedom Journal*, Russwurm used the *Liberia Herald* to advocate in favor of additional schools, specifically public schools. He asked for help from the “friends of the colony” abroad. During his tenure as superintendent, free schools opened in all three settlements: Caldwell, Millsburg, and Monrovia. He also pushed for a school in New Georgia, a settlement for receptive or liberated Africans. Primary education became available to both boys and girls, although there was no high school for girls.\(^{200}\)

Russwurm and Shipherd strove to provide education for Liberia’s youth, and the ACS was delighted to be able to report on the successes in the form of more churches and Sunday schools. In addition, they tracked their success in reaching the native people through their Christian teachings, which influenced their adoption of the western mode of dress.\(^{201}\) However, upon hearing the report regarding the lack of support received from the ACS as regards education, this once again left all of the responsibility solely in the

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\(^{199}\) Ibid., 61.

\(^{200}\) Ibid., 62.

hands of settlers. The ACS’ managers resolved to advance one hundred dollars, provided that the colonists themselves could raise three hundred dollars. In addition, the proceeds from the sale of all public lands, licenses, and fines, together with five hundred dollars taken annually from the Society’s fund were to be applied to supporting the schools. Five trustees managed these funds, and the colonial agent provided semi-annual reports.\(^{202}\)

A year later, a report to the Board stated that the education system in the colony was well on its way to providing every child with knowledge.

The instructions of the Board, a summary of which was submitted to the last annual meeting, have been obeyed; schoolhouses erected at Monrovia, Caldwell and Millsburg (those at the two former, at an expense of $400 each, that at the latter, of $350); competent teachers appointed under the supervision of Trustees, and a new spirit of zeal in the cause of education awakened throughout the colony.\(^{203}\)

Native chiefs took an interest in western education for their children and expressed the desire to have their countrymen and young men educated and they saw girls as being domesticated and educated within their traditional schools. The desire came with the willingness to grant land for the purpose of constructing schools.\(^{204}\) Even as some native people began to receive western-style instruction in education in the form of letters, arts and Christianity, they held on to their traditional society schools.\(^{205}\) However, many of these traditional schools were threatened as the missionary establishments began constructing mission schools that isolated native children from their parents, their

\(^{202}\) Ibid., 9-10.


traditional values and beliefs. Many instances, native parents would often remove their children from these schools against the will of the missionaries. By 1834, nine churches or meeting halls, and six common schools (all elementary schools) were in operation. Three of these schools were sustained by a benevolent society of ladies in Philadelphia. This was the first such society to take over schooling activities in Liberia. As was the case in Philadelphia, many benevolent societies of women in the U.S. responded to the call to help support schools in Africa. A benevolent society of ladies in New York drawn from different dominations united to form a Society to promote education in Liberia. This group of women proposed to raise funds through their churches; the funds raised would support a teacher in Liberia. However, these religious affiliations had the desire to Christianize Africa above all else, and took up the call for schools in Liberia as a means of doing just that. In a letter from the New York ladies society to a recently-arrived teacher who had been sent for the purpose of opening a school, expressed their wish and emphasized:

> The greater the number of natives, young or old, who can be gathered into your schools, the more it will meet our views and wishes. Our only desire is for the general good of Africa; therefore natives and colonists would alike be objects of our care and attention.\(^{206}\)

These benevolent societies of ladies shifted their purpose from financially supporting the ACS to directing their funds and operations towards the purpose of providing education in Liberia for the next thirty years. Their schools were limited exclusively to those living in the areas settled by the ACS. The instructions were limited

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to reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar and Bible studies. Activities for boys and girls were often included, such as farming and sewing, respectively.  

Maintaining funding for the establishment and maintenance of schools was challenging, which was also the case for the ACS. The ACS at this time also had to deal with the lack of cohesiveness of their organization as other branches of the Society were independently funding their own territories in Liberia, such as the Bassa Cove settlement (later known as Buchanan, named after the Governor of Liberia, Thomas Buchanan, cousin of the U.S President James Buchanan). The Quakers in the Young Men’s Colonization Society of Pennsylvania founded it. The Mississippi Colonization Society founded the settlement, Mississippi in Africa, for the specific purpose of relocating Blacks out of Mississippi. Finally, the Maryland State Colonization Society founded a settlement in Liberia located in Cape Palmas, which remained as an independent colony until 1857, when it was unified with the Republic of Liberia.  

By the late 1830s, the schools run by the ladies’ benevolent societies, began to lose attendance to the missionary schools that came with the financial backing from their specific denominational groups. By the early 1840s, the association redirected its efforts to focus on establishing high schools. The influx of various missionary groups into Liberia changed the face of education for both settlers and native people by focusing their educational activities on religious teaching.

\[\text{Brown, “Education and National Development in Liberia,” 103.}\]

\[\text{Bassa Cove settlement joined the commonwealth in 1837 with the Mississippi Colony following in 1841. The Maryland Colony at Cape Palmas was well-funded and remained as a separate colony until it was almost destroyed by Grebo (natives) assault in 1856-57.}\]
Mission Education 1830-1840

U.S. missionaries dominated the Liberian educational landscape until the early twentieth century, at which point it was taken over by the American Advisory Committee on Education in Liberia, headed by James L. Sibley. The American Advisory Committee on Education in Liberia consisted of various missionary and philanthropic societies, including several colonization societies. However, between 1830 and 1860, the ACS relied heavily on foreign missions to provide for, and supplement, educational endeavors. Starting in the 1830s, both White and Black missionaries made their way to Liberia. They always remained true to one of their initial motives for supporting the ACS: bringing the Gospel to Africa. Historian Eunjin Park’s contends:

The primary means for evangelizing Africa was preaching, but the concern for African souls was not monopolized by preaching missionaries. Teaching missionaries also wanted to bring the Gospel to native children whom they would teach at schools….Even those missionaries whose primary work was of a “secular” nature—the doctor and the printer—saving souls of the African people stood forefront in their sense of purpose.

Black missionaries, their agendas and mindset were different due to their motivation for relocating to Liberia. Those who had been recruited by the missions in America and emigrated for the purpose of preaching came with the same missionary keenness and expectations as did the White missionaries. However, they expected that being in a free African country would give them opportunities to advance that were not available to them in America due to their race. The emigrating preachers, their goals and


expectations were no different among those who came to find freedom and opportunities as opposed to just risking their lives to bring African souls out of ‘darkness’.

Once the missionaries were in Liberia, they found that fully engaging the native people became challenging given that some resisted their religion and culture. For this reason, missionaries found themselves limited to reaching the small number of native people residing within the Liberian settlements. Not to mention the difficulties and disconnect due to the lack of understanding of the language or their culture. They were not deterred by this resistance, and were optimistic about the multitudes of native people who wanted to have schools and churches established for them. They increased their efforts to educate the native children even making this endeavor completely free of cost to them. However, their education did not prepare them to become leaders of the new Republic. The missionaries sought to convert them from their native culture and native religion and persuade them to accept western culture, social norms and religion. Even as these schools became available to the children of settlers, the curriculum was no different than that which was offered to Black Americans. The missionaries saw those manumitted slaves as being in need of a Christian foundation.

**Methodist Mission**

Melville B. Cox was the first Methodist minister to arrive in Liberia. He paved the way for several others to follow shortly afterward, including men and women, singles and married couples. Cox, like my many other White missionaries to Africa, felt himself to be superior to Blacks, and therefore he felt that he had the obligation to bring them out of darkness by delivering the gospel to him. For this reason, he expressed his desire to have White teachers and White missionaries to Liberia to Christianize and civilize its
students. While in Africa, Cox continued to operate under the same oppressive psychology as in the U.S. However, Cox was not unique in replicating the system of oppression. White Americans continued to rule Black American settlers in their institutions. Churches and mission schools were the two dominant institutions, and were under the control of White missionaries.

Upon arrival, Cox unified the extant Methodist settlers who were already residing in the colony. He then went on to organize a Sunday school in Monrovia for about seventy students. By 1835, there were common schools taught by a minister and an assistant in each of the four settlements (Millsburg, New Georgia, Edina and Monrovia) and Cape Palmas. The missions in the interior experienced no lasting successes. By the end of the 1839, the Methodists had established six of the ten schools in the colony. They provided a school in each American settlement and in New Georgia, the settlement for the recaptives.

**Presbyterian Mission**

The Presbyterian mission in Liberia began in 1833 under the leadership of John B. Pinney. Its contribution to the educational landscape of Liberia began in 1837 with the recruitment of well-trained White missionaries. When they entered Liberia, their goals encompassed three areas: Evangelizing the African people, supporting the Presbyterian ministry already in Liberia and advancing educational involvement. The Presbyterians, more than any other mission group, had very few Blacks to whom they could proselytize.

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211 Gershom F. Cox, *Remains of Melville B. Cox: Late Missionary to Liberia with a Memoir*, (Boston, Light & Horton, 1835), 111-112.


Historian Carter G. Woodson contends that unlike the Methodists and Baptists, who reached the Black population initially by actively going out to recruit them, the Presbyterians were more aristocratic churches with smaller numbers of Blacks as part of their congregations.\textsuperscript{214} White Presbyterians with missionary zeal regarded Blacks as inferior to themselves. Even the few Black missionaries who were trained for missions in Liberia were not given the autonomy to run and operate their own missions until 1859. Prior to that point in time, Black missionaries in Liberia served under White missionaries as assistants.

The Presbyterians in Liberia were passionate about reaching the native people and made several attempts to establish missions in the interior. Upon the arrival of four missionaries in 1833, talks about a high school being established in Monrovia were of specific interest to the settlers. Although the missionaries showed an interest in creating a high school, their missions were to be established in the interior where they could reach the native people. By the following year, the Presbyterians were operating a school in Millsburg and a village school for native children. Brown argued that the Presbyterians were never able to fully engage the native people because they were indifferent to the Gospel they had to offer. The native people were more interested in their scientific advances and technical skills and were less interested in their religion.\textsuperscript{215} As a result, by the end of the decade, the Presbyterians had successfully planted only one school. By 1849, Alexander High School was founded in Monrovia under the leadership of a Black missionary, Harrison W. Ellis, a man of great piety. His freedom and the freedom of his


\textsuperscript{215} Brown, “Education and National Development in Liberia,” 119-120.
wife and two children had been purchased by the kindness of churches in Mississippi and Alabama. The school was named to honor Archibald Alexander, an American educator and leading scholars in Liberian history. Edward Wilmot Blyden and Hillary Richard Wright Johnson, Secretary of State, and 11th President of Liberia were two leading graduates of the high school.

**Baptist Mission**

The Baptist faith was the first to establish a church and the foundation for educational work with the arrival of Lott Carey and Collin Teage. However, their mission work did not accelerate until after his death in 1828. Until the arrival of William Crocker and William Mylne and his wife, recruitment of missionaries to go to Liberia was inactive because the first couple of missionaries did not live long enough to fulfill their calling. Sadly, this was the case. Mrs. Mylne died from malaria within a year after arrival. When the newly arriving missionaries settled into their environment, their desire to reach the native people was vital to their success and weighed heavily on the hearts and minds. By 1835, Crocker and Mylne settled in Millsburg for a short transition with the settlers before moving on to Bassa Cove. Part of their acclimatization while in Millsburg involved learning the natives’ Bassa language. They took over the school started by the previous Presbyterian missionaries, both of whom returned to the U.S. Crocker was determined to succeed in learning the language. With the help of a native African he

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218 Bassa is the Kru language spoken by people in Liberia and Sierra Leone.
mentored who sought to become a school teacher, he created a written version of the Bassa language.\textsuperscript{219}

Even as the missionaries settled in the settlement of Bassa Cove where they had planned to reach the native people by establishing a school, the Black settlers were the ones who eagerly took advantage of the opportunity for schooling in comparison with the native people. When Crocker was among the Black settlers, he wrote in his journal during an evening in Millsburg,

About a dozen of the colonists came to our house to learn to read. Feel it a privilege to be permitted to instruct them. While we are doing this we communicate religious truth…How much have these persons suffered who have [been] kept as slaves and deprived of instruction.\textsuperscript{220}

The number of Black Americans in the schools exceeded the number of native children in the schools. By 1837, Crocker had become successful at establishing a school for native children who were primarily the children of native men of status. By the end of the decade, the Baptist was operating two schools, one with both Black Americans and native children and the other primarily for the native people.

\textit{Protestant Episcopal}

The Episcopal Church began its first mission in the Maryland colony in Liberia, which was also known as Cape Palmas, in 1834. John Latrobe, President of the Maryland State Colonization Society, chose the location after obtaining favorable word from James Hall, a White colonist who served as the ACS’ physician, and who had led an expedition


\textsuperscript{220} Medbery, \textit{Memoir of William G. Crocker}, 92.
there. Hall would later serve as governor of the Maryland colony from 1834-1836 before passing the office on to Russwurm. By 1828, the African Mission School at Washington College (now known as Trinity College) in Connecticut, had trained Black leaders for the Episcopalian church in Liberia, and had educated three men and two women for Liberia. Among those trained were Edward Jones, an Amherst graduate, Gustavus V. Caesar, William Johnson and his wife, Elizabeth “Betsy” Mars and Elizabeth Caesar, wife of Gustavus. The two women had been trained as teachers and were highly recommended to serve in this capacity in Liberia. Upon the completion of their training and recommendation to the board of directors for approval to leave for Liberia, Caesar and Johnson were rejected because the board felt their academic qualifications and preparedness for the ministry was inadequate. Although they had failed to obtain the approval of the board, the Johnsons and Caesars nevertheless sailed to Liberia within a year of each other.

Within two weeks of arrival, Betsy Mars Johnson lost her husband and infant son to malaria. Shortly afterward, she married James M. Thomson, who was serving as a teacher and minister for a small group in Monrovia that formed the St. James Church. Thomson had been born in British Guyana and educated in England. He lived in New

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York City before emigrating to Liberia. Betsy, on the other hand, had been born to slave parents in Connecticut in 1807, and had been raised in the home of a prominent Hartford Congregationalist. She had become extremely pious by age sixteen. She received her education from Friends in Philadelphia (Quakers in Philadelphia). Betsy learned about colonization activities through her interactions with a Quaker, Elliott Cresson. Cresson was a major advocate of the ACS.

Although they were not the first members of the Episcopal faith in Liberia, the Thomas served as the denomination’s first missionaries in Liberia. During their first three years in Monrovia, Betsy became active in the education of youths. In her letter to a friend, John Dillingham, dated February 18, 1834, she provided a picture of her activities and experiences while teaching the native people and settlers’ communities. She wrote about her experiences while becoming acclimatized to Liberia. She expressed:

> My health is quite good now. I am troubled with nothing but the agues and fevers, now and then, which are common to this country. I have never regretted one moment coming to this place; although it is astonishing mercy of God that my life is spared, when so many fell on my right and left, and God has made me, though unworthy to bear the name, an instrument in his hands of doing good….The climate is very pleasant—not so warm as we imagine in America. The sun is very powerful in the middle of the day, but we always have plenty of air, and sometimes it appears almost cold enough for a frost.

Betsy wrote about her teaching experiences with the native children. She resumed:

> I have quite a flourishing school of about seventy children—about forty five of them on the infant school system. I find some of them quite apt and others who are quite dull. I have some native girls who learn very fast. All of them are spelling—three of them are writing—and one of them is quite fond of composing letters. Some of them, I think, are more intelligent than

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224 Ibid., 25.
the Americans, I sometimes wish that my school consisted entirely of them—but you cannot get them from the country unless you pay something for them, and their parents will often come and take them away. I had two little girls, living with me, who I took much pride in, but as soon as they began to learn to talk English and sew, they took them away. I also had two Vie or Cape Mount boys. They are much more given to learning than any other tribe. The youngest is very smart. He has a taste for the book, and printing the alphabet and words of three and four letters. His father has sent for him, but I am loth to part with him.  

In her closing remarks, Betsy noted her progress with religious teaching. She continued:

We have not had a very flourishing Sunday School since I have been here, but I have tried to keep my scholars together on the Sabbath…The other schools continue, but I do not think they are making much progress, excepting the one taught by Mrs. Caesar, at Caldwell.  

Betsy was very actively involved in her teaching in Monrovia until their relocation to Cape Palmas, where they formally launched the Episcopal mission. While in Cape Palmas, Betsy continued to teach natives and settlers alike. James Thomas, her husband, after the starting a school and an early developmental Episcopal community, advocated in favor of the need for a boarding school to keep the native children away from their town and parents as the only way to civilize and Christianize the heathen children. He wrote:

Let there be a large native house built as a boarding school for the native children, some distance from any native town, and a decent dwelling house for the teacher or teachers….The children will then flock in multitudes, and stay at school both night and day, by which means they will soon forget their native habits, and imbibe ours.  

225 Ibid.  
226 Ibid.  
227 Dunn, A History of the Episcopal Church in Liberia, 45.
The mission school was founded on March 1, 1836. Nine months after the foundation of their mission school, the first white missionary from the Episcopal Church arrived in Cape Palmas, Dr. Thomas S. Savage. The mission was located in Mount Vaughan, three miles east of Harper in the vicinity of a group of 1500 native people known as Greboes. Within a year of Savage’s arrival, three other White missionaries, including Mr. and Mrs. John Payne, had joined him. By the end of the decade, the mission schools operated under the Episcopal Church served ninety-five percent of the native children of the Grebo tribesmen.  

As the missionaries entered Liberia during the first two decades, the death of many of them slowed their movements and discouraged the relocation of white missionaries over their Black counterparts. However, by the late 1840s, the white missionaries again made their way to Liberia. Within this time period, four denominations dominated the Liberian landscape. Despite their differences in the manners of worship, they all had the same agenda: To bring the Gospel to the dark continent of Africa. For this reason, teaching the native children was their preference over teaching settlers. Given the resistance from the native people, tribal wars and language barriers, most schools and mission schools operated within the confines and protection of the American settlements.

**Education in the Colony, 1840-1950**

In 1839, with the exception of Maryland in Liberia, all eight (Bexley, Buchanan, Caldwell, Edina, Marshall, Mesurado, Millsburg and New Georgia) of the American

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settlements that had been founded by different state auxiliaries from the U.S, became known as the Commonwealth of Liberia. Together the population was documented in 1839 census as having 2,281 settlers and 30,000 recaptives and native people within the Commonwealth.\(^{229}\) As a commonwealth, the executive power was in the hands of the appointed governor, Thomas Buchanan. The Governor and a council, who had been appointed by popular vote, held the political power in the commonwealth. However, the ACS still had the right and ability to revoke any laws by the council.\(^{230}\) During this time, a new legislature was enacted for the purpose of providing common schools to all of the children in the commonwealth. The Act required that the colonists establish primary schools in all of the settlements. A sum of about one hundred dollars was to be appropriated to each school and a portion of the salary for teachers would be paid.\(^{231}\) The law called for every township of the colony to establish a common school under the direction of an appointed school committee. All persons in the colony were expected to send their children to school or be fined three dollars to be paid to the School Committee for the benefit of the school. In addition, each student was required to make a payment of three dollars per year as part of their contribution to their education. The Act served two purposes: to place the responsibility of its citizens to obtain an education and to reinforce existing resources of school revenue.

Also, in addition to the common school requirement, another act was passed that influenced the informal education of native people: the Apprenticeship Act. This law


stipulated that a native child could be brought into a home or a mission of a colonist family, with the permission of the child or parent or guarding, under an arrangement. The purpose was to teach him or her lesson in the arts, trade, or business, reading, writing and common arithmetic.\textsuperscript{232} However, most native children who partook this arrangement received only limited facets of western culture, Christianity and learned the English language.

By 1843, the government had enacted a second educational law to supplement the 1839 Act. The Supplemental Act stated:

- A School Fund would be created from monies raised through licenses and unappropriated military and court fines.
- Several towns and villages would have an annual election for a school committee of five people.
- School Committee would impose a tax on males twenty-one and older that would be used to fund schools.
- School Committees in several towns and villages shall have the power to draw from the funds raised for building school houses, paying teachers, purchasing schools books and any necessary usage of school maintenance.\textsuperscript{233}

The purpose of this legislature was to ensure some form of permanent stability to securing public funding outside that which groups in the U.S had provided. Stabilizing public education funding in Liberia was challenging given that the majority of the general

\textsuperscript{232} For more on the Apprenticeship Act see, Charles Henry Huberich; \textit{The Political and Legislative History of Liberia} (New York: Central Book Company Inc., 1947), 527-529.

population entering Liberia found it difficult to contribute to financial welfare of the
Commonwealth.

**The Second Wave of Black Settlers in Liberia**

The influx of poor, illiterate ex-slaves from the southern states in the U.S changed
the demographics of Liberia and accentuated the need for education. In the 1843 census,
58 ships were sent to Liberia with 4,454 emigrants from 1820-1843. Of this number,
1,687 were freeborn, 97 had purchased their freedom and 2,290 had been emancipated.\(^{234}\) More than half of the population had been emancipated and entered Liberia during the
1830s. However, by the time of the 1844 census, 45% of the 4,454 that emigrated had
died from either malaria or smallpox, leaving the settlers population at 2,390. Out of
which, 587 people had been born in the colony.\(^{235}\) The majority of the settlers came as
family units or were accompanied by their kin.

Although some manumitted slaves had been taught the rudiments of reading and
writing for the purpose of communicating with their former slave masters, once they
arrived in Liberia, the majority of them were uneducated. They found themselves
unequipped and unprepared for the hardships they would experience. In letters written to
people in the States, many settlers expressed these hardships, fears, regrets and
appreciation for their newly found freedom. However, one theme that echoes in their
letters provides a glimpse into the hardship of emigrants. This was their ability to remain

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\(^{235}\) Ibid., 195
healthy. Many perished from malaria. George Crawford’s letter to John M. McCalla, his former owner, expressed the impact of malaria on the emigrants. He wrote:

I feel it my duty to write a few Lines to you on the sub Ject, hoping that I may find you and the family well. I am happy to inform you that god has favorered us in Land of sorrow. Out of a hundre[d] and fifty emigrants that came out with us there are but thirty remain. The fever has taking them way…

Although emigrants died in the colony from tribal wars and other illnesses, nothing had a more devastating effect on the new settlers than malaria. As the settlers experienced hardships, they wrote letters requesting assistance from their former slave masters in the States. Hardships aside, most settlers preferred to fend for themselves and not depend on others, as Lucy Clay alluded in her letter. She wrote:

One of the children died with the small pox on the voyage out, and two with the fever after their arrival here. The articles of domestic use you gave for our use here, I must thank you kindly for, though I am sorry that I have to say that we were compelled to barter them away during our sickness for such necessaries as we required, being not able to obtain them otherwise. I should be more than thankful if you would send me some domestic goods for my own purpose if you can do so. I am sorry that I am under the necessity of asking aid from so distant a quarter, but my circumstances obliges me to do.

Such correspondence between former slave owners and their manumitted slaves were not always based on dependency. Slave owners were eager to continue communication with their ex-slaves. They wanted to know how they were coping in their new surroundings. They reciprocated the communication giving advice and/or sending help as needed.

Some letters highlight the interracial relationships of respect, trust and friendship towards those emigrants communicated with. Their dire circumstances prompted the need

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for assistance from those they knew could help. In a letter dated September 21, 1850 to
Rev. William McClain of the ACS, Emily M Graham[?] wrote:

Rev My Dear Sir. I take this as a favorable opportunity of writing to you
hoping that the few lines may find you in the best enjoynment of health. I
received your most kind letter and was happy to hear of you being in good
health. I received the things you sent out by the packet this last time all
came to hand [illegible] I am more than thankful for you more than a
thousand time thankful for the trouble you took with us…Kind sir I can
not be able to compensate to you the same favor but you can have my
prays for that is all that I can do her on earth….238

For most settlers, particularly those women who had often been left as widows
after losing their husbands to malaria or smallpox, these relationships made a difference
to their survivors. Harriet Tompkins wrote a letter to Rev. John Finley Crowe, a
Presbyterian pastor and founder of Hanover College in Indiana. On January 26, 1852, she
gave a glimpse into the hardships that her family had faced during the first year after
arrival after losing her husbands and some of her children to malaria. She wrote:

With my hart full of sorrow I send you this fu lines I have lost Five out of
my Family since I have landed in Liberia on the 30th of May I lost my
daughter Selena Elisabeth and Martha McCorlaster Clay and on the 9 of
June I lost my Daughter Emily Jane Clay and on the 5 of August Edard
Thompkins Clay 1851 and on the 3 day of January 1852 my Husband
Peter Thompkins diad which leaves me a poor widow with two children
mong strangers and poor helth and without mony to subsit upon having s
much sickness in my family.239

Crowe, who had been active in the Black American church community, and was an anti-
slavery advocate, kept in touch with Harriet and offered assistance to her. In her later
communications, she expressed that life was better for her, and she hoped that more

238 The Library of Congress, manuscript division and the American Colonization Society Papers, Reel 155,
The Library, Washington, D.C.

239 Douglas F. Denne, “Letters from Liberia: The Story of the Tomkins Family,” Traces of Indiana and
Midwestern History 23, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 34.
Black Americans would join her in Liberia. Harriet’s last communication to Crowe was dated August 22, 1854. In that letter, she talked about the poverty among the settlers because many were unable to find work before and after they lost support from the ACS, which led to them losing their land because they were not able to afford it. Harriet argued, as had some settlers, that the ACS’ six-month benefits was not enough to overcome the necessary adjustments, particular when they faced sickness. However, not all Black settlers shared Harriet’s outlook. Some viewed the destitute as lazy and not deserving of being part of the Republic. Tension between the first cohort of settlers and the newly arriving settlers began to rise. For one thing, the newly arriving settlers were competing for the limited resources of the first cohort. The already established cohort in the first group felt the newly arrived emigrants, most of whom were uneducated and unskilled, were taking away from them as oppose to them coming to benefit the colony. The established settlers certainly saw those in the second cohort as not deserving of being in Liberia. This was expressed in Samson Ceasar’s letter to his former master, Henry F. Westfall. He wrote:

I must Say that I am afraid that our Country never will improve as it ort until the people in the United States keep their Slaves that the have raised like as dum as horses at home and Send those here who will be A help to improve the Country as for Virginia as far as my knowledge extends I think She has Sent out the most Stupid Set of people in the place while they have them their the cow hide is hardly ever off of their backs and when they come here they feal So free that they walk about from morning till evening with out doing one Stroke of work by those means they become to Sufer people in the United States ort to have more regard for Liberia than to Send Such people here Some think that every thing grows by in this Country with out labour.

240 Ibid., 35.

Although Ceasar’s letter reflected his limited education, he felt that his status was better than “those uneducated and lazy” ex-slaves who had been sent to Liberia.

Rev. Samuel Williams expressed similar sentiments during his years in Liberia.

He wrote of the emigrants he encountered in Monrovia:

They are principally emancipated slaves, who do not appreciate freedom in its proper light, but think that when once free they are at liberty to be industrious or other wise, and many choose to be lazy. Now, if, in my opinion, the Northerners could be induced to go to Liberia, we would soon find quite a different state of things.\(^{242}\)

Those who had been educated, as compared with those without any degree of formal education, began to become socially stratified. Despite the different levels of educational attainment among the emigrants, all were religious. As Wesley J. Horland expressed in his letter, “This pepel is a religis pepel; thare is no queston about that. They ar a Church going pepel. They go to meeting evry Sabbath.”\(^{243}\)

The Black settlers struggled to adjust to having limited resources, and still desired to educate their children. Many letters were written discussing their children’s attendance at Sabbath Schools, missions and the common schools. As schools became available to their children, the adult settlers looked to missionaries to teach them. Ceasar wrote, “I am studing grammer and the arithmetic I want to get all the Learning that I can for without it we can do but little both in temperl and spirituel.”\(^{244}\) Despite their strong desire


\(^{244}\) Liberian Letters: Samson Ceasar to Henry F. Westfall, 2 June 1834.
to learn, physical survival in Liberia took precedence. Nevertheless, emigrants felt that it was necessary to educate their children.

By the census of 1843, there were sixteen schools operating in the Commonwealth. Eleven were operated by the Methodist Missionary Society, one by the Presbyterian Church in Monrovia, two by the Baptist Church, one by the Ladies’ Liberia School Association of Philadelphia, and a small school of twelve students operated by W.W. Stewart.\(^\text{245}\) Given the limited funding and its reliance on missionaries these schools had, Christian religion was at the forefront of its curriculum. Although each school taught rudimentary English, reading, writing and arithmetic, emphasis on the Gospel was the key subject. After all, it was the mission of these religious groups to Christianize everyone with whom they came into contact with. Although they had envisioned teaching the native people, their lack of acknowledgement of, and inclusiveness of, the native peoples’ traditions and educational practices, and the fees they imposed, created a challenge. For this reason, the bush schools remained the primary agency for educating the native children. Those native children who did attend could afford to pay the taxes because they were the sons of native leaders. Indirectly, the creation of these common schools became exclusionary. They excluded those who could not afford them, meaning the majority of the native people, in favor of children of settlers, recaptives and the sons of native leaders.

Nevertheless, by the end of the decade, the ACS was pleased with the progress that had been made in Liberia. The settlement of Monrovia had been constructed and had about 400 houses; churches and schools were operating in all of the settlements; and the

\(^{245}\) Brown, “Education and National Development in Liberia,” 140.
native children were receiving religious education. However securing governmental funding for public education, including higher education, remained a work under construction.

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Chapter 5

Higher Education in the Era of Independence, 1848–1860

Who would have guessed that in 1850, United States President Millard Fillmore would sign into effect a law that would not only violate the true essence of American liberty but would fundamentally change the face of emigration to Liberia to include Northern Blacks? Certainly not Martin Delany, who had opposed colonization prior to the passing of this law, named the Fugitive Slave Act. This act expanded the power of slavery to reach into any state, even those that had abolished the practice, to retrieve those accused of fleeing from bondage. According to historian Eric Foner, the act made slavery a national institution, which even those Northern states that had abolished slavery could not avoid their constitutional responsibility to enforce this law, though it clearly benefitted the Southern slave masters.

As if the Fugitive Slave Act was not enough to nullify the rights of Black Americans, the passing of the Dred Scott decision in 1857 made it abundantly clear that they were not citizens of the United States. Following these changes, emigration became increasingly attractive, particularly for free Blacks.

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250 Blacks also emigrated in the thousands to Canada after the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act. For more information, see Mary A. Shadd, A Plea for Emigration, or, Notes of Canada West: In Its Moral, Social, and Political Aspect; With Suggestions Respecting Mexico, West Indies, and Vancouver's Island, for the Information of Colored Emigrants (Detroit: George W. Pattison, 1852); Fred Landon, “The Negro Migration to Canada after the Passing of the Fugitive Slave Act, The Journal of Negro History 5, no. 1 (January 1920): 22–36; Horton, “A Federal Assault,” 1187–1189.
Historian Ousmane K. Power-Greene argued that this act was a leading force in turning people (who had once argued against colonization and won the attention of abolitionists) like Martin Delany, Alexander Crummell, and Edward Blyden toward Liberian colonization.\textsuperscript{251} Prior to this period, Liberia’s population had increased primarily because of Southern Blacks (free and emancipated). In fact, Northern Blacks made up only 6\% of Liberia’s population between 1820 and 1842, while Black Americans from the slave states made up 87.5 percent of the population.\textsuperscript{252} However, between 1850 and 1855, the numbers increased until about 61 Northern Blacks were arriving yearly in Liberia. Between 1848 and 1860, the ACS relocated 649 Northern Blacks, two and half times as many as it had in the past thirty years.\textsuperscript{253}

The surge in emigration also prompted the ACS to concentrate on its financial commitment to relocation. As the ACS saw an influx of emigrants in the previous two decades, the funding sources from donations and/or the voluntary offerings of individuals decreased. Although some wills allotted financial resources for transporting manumitted slaves, the lengthy court battles brought on by relatives of the deceased who refused to relinquish such funding or slaves left the ACS in a challenging situation.\textsuperscript{254} This was the case with the Ross family, which saw the last 141 of its initial 300 slaves transported out

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\textsuperscript{253} Burin, Slavery and the Peculiar Solution, 30.

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of Mississippi at the end of 1840s. By the 1860s, the ACS was finally approved for federal funding to relocate recaptives to Liberia after President James Buchanan proposed an agreement with the ACS. This agreement was to furnish the ACS $150 per year for each recaptive to cover his/her shelter, clothing, and provisions once in Liberia. Accordingly, the ACS would also instruct them in the “arts of civilized life suitable to their condition.”

Even as more educated free Northern Blacks journeyed to Liberia, they were still outnumbered by those freed slaves from Southern states. Despite their small number, the elites dominated the social and political scene of Liberia, which fostered tension within Black communities, specifically among those who felt they pushed an agenda that benefitted their interests. Further heightening this division and tension within the Black settler group was the issue of skin color, according to which those with lighter skin (mulattoes) who dominated the political and economic landscape of Liberia in the early decades continued to do so. Skin color remained an issue in Liberia’s history as it was rooted in the American slave experience, where mulattoes were better situated than darker Blacks because of “their status as offspring of white fathers (and occasionally mothers). Their status provided an opportunity for whites to more likely do business with them than with darker skin Blacks, which provided an avenue for financial security. However,

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255 Isaac Ross owned hundreds of slaves on his plantation in Mississippi. After his death in 1836, his will provided freedom and money from the sale of his plantation to cover relocation for any of his slaves who agreed to move to Liberia under the ACS’s control. However, his grandson and heirs contested his will for many years through litigation until the Supreme Court of Mississippi upheld the ruling in 1848. Isaac Ross is known for sending the largest group of freed slaves to Liberia. The Ross Slaves were transported to a settlement called Mississippi in Africa. For more information on these emigrants, the legal challenges they faced, and their experiences in Liberia, see Alan Huffman, *Mississippi in Africa: The Saga of the Slaves of Prospect Hill Plantation and the Legacy in Liberia Today* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

educational attainment and whether an emigrant lived as a free person in the U. S prior to coming or as a slave determined his social and political mobility in Liberia.”

Notwithstanding skin color, by the time Blacks emigrants arrived in Liberia, those (Black or mulattoes) with higher educational attainment and skills became successful. However, those educated darker-skinned Blacks entering Liberia in the early decades were few in number compared to the educated mulattoes.

New settlers arriving in Liberia in the 1850s no longer entered a colony still finding its way in small western part of Africa, but rather found an independent republic with its first Black president, Joseph Jenkins Roberts. As Roberts struggled to find a place for Liberia on the world’s map, independent of America, Liberians (Black settlers and native Africans) struggled to establish a cultural identity in this new environment. Inasmuch as Roberts’s intentions were to uplift Liberians, as a mulatto, he was viewed as being chosen by the ACS because of their similar ideologies.

**Joseph Jenkins Roberts and the New Republic of Liberia**

After the 1842 death of Governor Buchanan, the colony wound up in the hands of his Lieutenant Governor, Joseph Jenkins Roberts. For the first time in the existence of Liberia, the country was under the rule of a Black settler. Although Roberts was considered Black by the standard of race politics in the United States, as an octoroon he was phenotypically a white man who, historian Beyan argues, had policies that were no different than from those of the white colonists.  

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257 For information on the division created by skin color in Liberia, see James Ciment, “A Matter of Color,” in *Another America*, 103.

Roberts was among the group of volunteered settlers who arrived during the first decade after the colony’s establishment. Like many of the Black settlers from the Virginia elite who arrived during that same decade, Roberts spent his early years in Liberia establishing himself through his trade and commerce. Roberts and his family launched a very successful company that provided the resources needed to purchase ships to trade with other ports of call. His success in both the United States and Liberia placed him, and other members of the Roberts family, at the top of Liberia’s social hierarchy. He became involved in Liberian politics and became high sheriff at age of 24. His duties included collecting taxes and eliminating tribal uprisings in towns around Monrovia. In 1839, he found himself in an area of unrest with the Bopolo tribes. Under his leadership, their town was forced to concede. His display of military genius brought him closer to Governor Buchanan, and he became the governor’s unofficial aide before serving as Liberia’s first Black governor.

During his tenure in this position, Roberts pushed for the country’s independence; he negotiated tribal disputes and expanded the commonwealth. He negotiated international treaties with Great Britain and France, which occupied the surrounding Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast and saw Liberia as a private venture that lacked the support of any government. However, on June 27, 1847, elected delegates met to declare Liberia an independent nation, and they drafted a new constitution. Among those delegates was Hilary Teage, one of the driving forces behind Liberia’s independence, the author of


Liberia’s Declaration of Independence and editor of the *Liberia Herald*.\(^{261}\) Having shown himself capable of leading a nation, Roberts was voted into the position of the republic’s first president.\(^{262}\)

Roberts was devoted to making Liberia a great Christian nation for generations to come, and he wanted the world to see that the Black race was capable of turning its promised land into a respectable nation. In his inaugural speech, he contended:

> The time has been, I admit, when men—without being chargeable with timidity, or with a disposition to undervalue the capacities of the African race, might have doubted the success of the Colonization enterprise, and the feasibility of establishing an independent Christian state on this coast, composed of and conducted wholly by colored men…after having separated us from the house of bondage, and led us safely through so many dangers, towards the land of liberty and promise, will leave the work of our political redemption, and consequent happiness, unfinished; and either permit us to perish in a wilderness of difficulties, or suffer us to be carried back in chains to that country of prejudices, from whose oppression he has mercifully delivered us with his outstretched arm.\(^{263}\)

To him, the republic represented the greatest opportunity to save the dark continent of Africa by spreading the Gospel. Being a man of strong faith, he indirectly urged his fellow settlers to promote Christian values and principles using an ideology similar to that of the missionaries:

> The Gospel is yet to be preached to vast numbers of [native people] inhabiting this dark continent, and I have the highest reason to believe, that it was one of the great objects of the Almighty, in establishing this colonies, that they might be the means of introducing civilization and religion among the barbarous nations of this country; and to work more noble could our powers be applied, than that of

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\(^{262}\) According to the Constitution of Liberia, 1847, the president and vice president served two-year terms. Representatives also served two-year terms, while Senators served four-year terms. The Constitution of Liberia allowed these terms to continue without amendment for sixty years. Only males aged twenty-one and over who owned property were allowed to vote.

Roberts, as a Black president, shared the same Eurocentric view of the native people as the white colonists. In fact, neither the Constitution nor the Liberian legislature considered the native people to be citizens of the Republic until 1907, when the 15th president, Arthur Barclay, was forced to include them to eliminate threats to the Republic. It was easy to disconnect themselves from the native people because their identity, culture, and values had been shaped by their experiences in America. Historian M. B. Akpan argues that Black settlers considered themselves Americans and distanced themselves from Africans. Their attitudes and policies reflected those of European colonists. They lacked all attachment to Africa and its people, and for that reason they fostered an attitude that they were superior to the native people. He concludes that Black settlers were no different than the White colonists. Roberts’s goal for the native people was, at best, to civilize and Christianize them. The mission schools and apprenticeships for the native children were to do just that. He and many Black settlers saw the native people as outsiders. Ironically, Black settlers understood all too well the role of living as outsiders in the United States; yet, it seemed natural to replicate this same oppressive behavior and attitude towards the African natives. As a result, Black settlers borrowing from their experiences in America created their own norms for Liberia, which was to be

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Black, Christian, and Westernized. Historian Tyler-McGraw says it best when she summarizes this process as such:

Black Americans struggled to define themselves as a nation and a race without excluding themselves from the evolving American nation from which they drew much of their construction of “nation.” Similarly, their vision of themselves as a “race” was to a great extent formed in reaction to their collective experience of systematic oppression in the United States.

Although most native people disliked the intrusion of the American colonists with their Western traditions and religion, a handful welcomed them and their faith. Religion became the fundamental aspect of the Black settlers’ culture, which made it easier to see how assimilation for native children would occur in churches or mission schools. According to Joanna T. Hoff, 393 native Africans were reported as being converted through different churches (60 to the Baptist denomination, 293 to the Methodist, and 40 to the Episcopal). It was through these different church denominations that many native boys were educated so they could achieve higher status in Liberian society. Charles Pitman was one of those boys. With his newly acquired Westernized name, he was educated in the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church schools with other settlers’ children. He learned the importance of art and painting, and because of his faithfulness in the church, he was sent to the United States for training as printer. Similarly, Martin Park Kedah Valentine (1819–1863) was born in the Maryland County settlement to Grebo

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parents and taught at the Episcopal Church mission school to become an Episcopal Priest and teacher. Most were taught to be teachers and carriers of the Gospel for the purpose of instructing their fellow natives. This distinction between the teachers and their students was clear when Samuel P. Day, a native African, wrote a letter to Rev J. B. Taylor of the ACS. He asserted:

While I am teaching my own race, as they [missionaries] usually say, and making a distinction, he is teaching American children according to their saying; now it seems very delightful and somewhat like contending, and also we are of the same color.

Even as Christianity was taught to the natives, the missionaries fostered separation between the groups. This separation was very apparent to the native people, showing that though they had the same skin color, Black Americans were treated differently.

Notwithstanding being Westernized and educated, these native men remained connected to their native roots. For example, Samuel W. Tobe Kade Seton (1830–1908) was educated in the Protestant Episcopal mission schools in Maryland County. He was ordained a deacon by 1865 and a priest of the Episcopal Church in 1868. Considering to be a man of strong faith and education, he was appointed a voting member of the House of Representatives. He could have easily blended into the lifestyle of the Black settlers for he had achieved high status in the community; however, Tobe Kade Seton became active in his native Grebo Confederacy, which strongly opposed the central government authority.

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He used his influence and Western education to serve in the political arena, which allowed him to advocate for the full inclusion of native Liberians as citizens.\textsuperscript{274}

Because native girls were often taken out of the schoolhouses and mission schools operated by the American settlers when they reached the age for marriage, it was mostly native boys who received education—many of whom were sons of the town chiefs. However, native women also played a major role in gaining benefits from the Americans’ religion and teachings. Those who became Christians organized their own missionary societies within their native churches. These societies were founded on their traditional values and culture, which focused on meeting the needs of their communities.\textsuperscript{275} Although native women may not have had the same opportunities as native men to become ministers or hold positions of power, they were stronger bearers of their culture and values. Even as they (those who converted) became Christians, they never moved away from their homes and communities. As they majority of the native people continued to honor their traditional schools and societies, they also had to come to terms with how the new independent republic would include them, their traditions, and their cultures. However, including native culture and traditions was not on Roberts’s agenda. Educating the native people to accept the Christian religion and culture was his idea of inclusion. He stated that the “\textit{[g]eneral education, and the civilization and Christianization of Africa, are subjects to which my thoughts are constantly directed}.”\textsuperscript{276}

\textsuperscript{274} Ibid., 296.

\textsuperscript{275} Hoff, “Higher Education,” 78.

Notwithstanding the exclusion of African natives from citizenship in the colony, Roberts was a pioneer for education in Liberia. He believed that a great nation had to school its youth beyond the secondary level. While he recognized the important role missionaries played in the creation of schools for settlers and native children, he feared that without the government being permanently involved in providing funding there could be no stability for public education. As it stood, schools in the settlements were dependent on private funding and missionary funding. Even though the government mandated taxes to support the funding of schools, as governor, he saw the financial burden it placed on families to fund their children’s education when monies were required of them. Many who felt the strong desire to make education a priority among youth supported Roberts. Teage, in his anniversary speech delivered in Monrovia, on December 1, 1846, affirmed that “an ignorant, vicious, idle community, has the elements of destruction already in its bosom…. A virtuous, orderly educated person has all the elements of national greatness and nation in perpetuity.”

While the Republic adjusted to independence, Roberts also set his goals on diplomacy and recognition from international communities. As the first Black president of a Republic set up for and governed by Blacks in Africa, Roberts’s expectations—from education to economic prosperity to political stability—were based upon his high standards for creating a successful independent nation for the Black race of America. However, as the leader of a republic in Africa that existed before the settlers' arrival, Roberts neglected to create a society that included the native people. Given their exclusion, Liberian historian Karnga’s description of Roberts is questionable. According to Karnga,

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“If the worth of a great man could be measured by his deeds, very few characters indeed in Liberia would equal J. J. Roberts. He governed it with that dignity and unselfishness which befits only a constitutional ruler.”  

There is no doubt that under Roberts’s leadership Liberia expanded its territory, obtained recognition from international governments (even though the United States did not recognize Liberia as an independent nation until 1862), and made higher education a priority. However, he also perpetuated the separation of Black settlers and the native people, which bred the same oppression he knew all too well from his experiences as a Black man in the United States. Inasmuch as Roberts was respected by “friends of Liberia” (mostly white men of the ACS) in the United States, his fellow Black Americans felt otherwise. During the Colored National Convention held in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1848, Frederick Douglass’s remarks about Roberts showed his discontent with the ACS and his lack of respect for Roberts as Liberia’s leader. In his report of the convention, he declared:

That among the many oppressive schemes against the colored people in the United States, we view the American Colonization Society as the most deceptive and hypocritical—“clothed with the livery of heaven to serve the devil” and President Roberts, of Liberia, a colored man, for its leader.

While most Black abolitionists saw Roberts as the ACS’s pawn in its colonization scheme to rid the country of Black Americans, many put their differences aside and considered emigration after the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850) and the *Dred Scott* (1857) ruling. For a man like Martin R. Delany—a physician, activist, politician, journalist, and public intellectual who had opposed African Colonization for 25 years until his arrival in

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Liberia in 1859—his emigration and that of many intellectuals during this decade marked an era of Black nationalism in Liberia. In his address to the citizens of Liberia, he attributed his change of heart not only to the plight of the Black race in America but also to the experiences of the Irish, Dutch, and others who have turned their backs on their native land because they have been oppressed, seeking shelter whenever liberty was to be found for them. He felt that the same urgency to leave their native land that moved the white man could also move a colored man like him. For his predecessor Edward Blyden—a native of St. Thomas who after being refused admission to colleges in America was given the opportunity to relocate to Liberia by the New York Colonization Society—Liberia represented a haven for the Black race, a place for Black nationalism. Blyden asserted:

> My heart is in Liberia, and longs for the welfare of Africa. An African nationality is the great desire of my soul. I believe nationality to be an ordinance of nature; and no people can rise to an influential position among the nations without a distinct and efficient nationality.

As men like Blyden, Delany, and Crummell entered Liberia, they brought a strong sense of African pride, a Black nationalist movement that would influence the educational and political scene. Although this chapter does not provide sufficient acknowledgement and historic context, it will give a glimpse of the foundational years, specifically, during Blyden’s tenure as president of Liberia’s higher institutions.

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Education in Liberia 1850–1860

The era of independence and the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation changed the face of emigration, causing colonization societies to reevaluate their function as only focused on relocation of Blacks. Various societies began to expand the scope of their operation to now include education. One of the first efforts came from the New York State Colonization Society, which provided grants to support students in mission schools since there were no publicly supported schools in Liberia. Other scholarships were provided for students to continue their education in the United States. Other support came from the Board of Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia, an organization founded by the Massachusetts Colonization Society to support the establishment of a college in Liberia.

High Schools

During his tenure as president, serving two terms from 1848 to 1855, Roberts emphasized the need for a post-secondary education. High schools had been in operation since the Commonwealth period. Missionaries realized the need to train ministers and leaders of their respective churches, and they redirected some of their focus to the establishment of high schools. However, these schools were restricted to Monrovia and Cape Palmas, in Maryland County. Religious instruction was a major emphasis of the curriculum, with other subjects including Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and mathematics. In the high schools operated in Cape Palmas, Grebo, the native language; music; and Theory and Practice of Teaching were included in the curriculum.282

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From 1840 to 1860, three of the four religious groups in Liberia (Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Baptist) operated high schools in Monrovia and Cape Palmas. The Methodists opened a seminary high school in Monrovia. Because of the limited quality teaching staff (usually one teacher to a school), school admission was restricted, and the class size was small. Alexander High School (AHS) in Monrovia was established in 1849 as the first high school, supported by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions in New York. The Board also supported the relocation of its principal, Rev. Mr. Wilson, to Liberia, in 1851. AHS was a highly selective high school for boys. Entrance through examination was mandatory, and it tested the proficiency of the student in the areas of geography and arithmetic. Enrollment remained restricted, and many of its students matriculated from the English School in Monrovia. AHS graduates became ministers, teachers, government officials, and some continued their education in the United States to pursue medicine. In 1862, AHS lost its principal Edward Blyden, who left to work at Liberia College. With his departure, the school declined, and by 1866, it was relocated outside Monrovia.

The Episcopal high school opened its doors in Mount Vaughan, Maryland County, in the early 1850s. The purpose was to prepare Black settlers for teaching or a mission. As a boys’ school, enrollment was always small. Similarly, a girls’ school was opened to train teachers. The natives had an institution established for them called the Hoffman Institute. Its purpose was to train the native Greboes to be teachers and preachers for the mission.

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Its curriculum consisted of English grammar, geography, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.\textsuperscript{285} Mount Vaughan and the Hoffman Institute combined to become Cuttington College in 1889.\textsuperscript{286}

Education in Liberia was making strides. Before independence, there were more than 600 students attending schools and 16 schools operating.\textsuperscript{287} In the information distributed in America by the ACS for those interested in going to Liberia, “Children [born] there [Liberia] are far advanced in education as children of the same age in most communities in this country.”\textsuperscript{288} It further stated that one of the privileges and most important consideration for free Blacks was having their children “properly educated, and thus prepared for future usefulness and happiness.”\textsuperscript{289} However, Advertus Arthur Hoff argues that this classical education of the nineteenth century, so wildly praised by the colonists, did not produce results in harmony with Liberia’s surroundings or succeed in preparing the youth of the country to develop their natural talents. In fact, having an education that did not meet the needs of the country failed to help students develop any appreciation for their African heritage.\textsuperscript{290} Notwithstanding the need for an inclusive cultural education, the classical education had no intention of creating harmony but rather was only to civilize and Christianize the native Africans.

\textsuperscript{285} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{286} Ibid., 155.
\textsuperscript{287} Hoff, “Higher Education,” 97.
\textsuperscript{289} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{290} Hoff, “Higher Education,” 52.
**Liberia College**

Intrigued by the schools on his visit to New York in 1848, Roberts became increasingly motivated to push for a system of higher education in Liberia. After pleading with Americans during his visit, the Massachusetts Colonization Society (MCS) decided to act upon his request. After complete analysis of the West African region and Liberia, the MCS reported seven reasons to support a college in Liberia. They were:

1. Liberia was the mostly highly civilized and best educated part of the coast.
2. Liberia was the independent nation that had the greatest need of a college.
3. Liberia offered the greatest inducements to obtain a liberal education
4. Liberia, of all the communities, was the most rapidly advancing in numbers, wealth, influence, and all the elements of power and progress. It also had the best prospect of continuing to advance.
5. In Liberia, college would present the greatest attraction to students from other parts of Africa and the world.
6. Liberia was the only place on the coast with any prospect that a college could be established.
7. It was not a safe decision to leave the work of educating its citizens, especially in the areas of higher education, to missionaries’ societies.²⁹¹

The MCS in its reporting contended that the missionaries’ societies were already too far extended in their resources and could not prepare youth for every public area of their lives. It was recommended that a distinct organization, perhaps the colonization society,

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undertake this endeavor. However, the necessary funds were to be raised, invested, and managed in the United States.  

In 1850, an act of the Legislature of Massachusetts approved the founding of Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia (TDEL) to oversee the establishment of a college in Liberia. An architect was secured and materials shipped from Massachusetts to began construction of the college; however, the plan was delayed when the question of where to situate the college could not be agreed upon. The Board of Trustees was not only working on funds to support the infancy stage of the college but also considering the curriculum, faculty, and location.

Finding the right person in the United States to oversee all of their concerns was on the forefront of their agenda. Every legislator in Liberia wanted the college located within their home area. Nevertheless, the college did not open its doors to students and faculty for the next ten years. Hoff affirms that the delay was for three reasons: Liberia’s isolation from the rest of the world made it difficult to procure books and other means of culture; sympathy from communities for the need for a college was lacking; and only a handful of men were devoted to giving thoughtful consideration to educational development, believing higher education to be essential.

By 1856, nearing the end of Roberts’ presidency, the approval for construction to begin was given. Even with a date set for the laying of the cornerstone, the construction

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292 “College in Liberia,” The African Repository 27, no. 6 (June 1851): 161–76.


295 Hoff, “Higher Education,” 100.
was again delayed. The controversy surrounding building the college kept the progress at a standstill for another four years. In 1860, the charter of the college was amended by the legislature to locate the college buildings at Cape Messurado (Monrovia) instead of Clay-Ashland. At that point construction of the college officially began. By 1862, after the completion of the library, the Board of Trustees met to set a date for the inauguration of Liberia’s first college. The opening ceremony took place on January 23, 1862, with people such as Roberts, Blyden, Chief Justice Drayton, and other citizens present.296

As the leaders of Liberia celebrated this occasion, they each shared their hopes and desires for the future of the college. The purposes for the college resonated in their speeches. Chief Justice Drayton contended that Liberia College must serve as a place to train “ministers, rulers, merchants, teachers, mechanics and agriculturists.”297 Professor Blyden added that “The College would send down through all the ramification of Liberia society the streams of wholesome and elevating influences; to train the mind to work out its own calling, solve its own problems and achieve its own destiny.”298

As the first president of the College, Roberts shared Blyden’s sentiments, adding that the college was a “Precursor of incalculable blessings to this benighted land; as a harbinger of a bright and happy future for science, literature and art, and for all the noblest interests of the African race.”299 Because of the limited enrollment, the college did not begin operating until 1864, with twelve students. The students came from secondary schools in Messurado County, the Protestant Episcopal High School at Cape Palmas, and

296 Ibid., 105.
297 Ibid., 106.
298 Ibid.
the High School on Factory Island in Grand Bassa, and they were all mulattoes. Admission was based on good moral character, an entrance exam, completion of at least his fourteenth year, and no attachment to a spouse.

During President Roberts’s tenure at the college, a library of 40,000 volumes and several buildings (value $18,000) were added. Faculty members included Dr. Bylden, professor of Greek, Latin, and Mathematics who had been educated in Liberia, Egypt, and Syria; Rev. Alexander Crummell, professor of English and Literature who received his education at Cambridge University in England; and, Martin H. Freeman, professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, educated at Middlebury College in Vermont. Dr. Roberts served as president until he resigned in 1877, passing his position to Dr. John B. Pinney, a white American who served as an agent for the ACS in 1834. Pinney’s tenure ended after two years, along with the support from abroad.

Up until this point, the College was supported exclusively by the Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia and the Board of Control of the New York Colonization Society. Having this arrangement made it difficult to be inclusive of Liberia’s cultural and indigenous society. Hoff argues that the educational work of a country should never depend almost entirely on the management and support from friends thousands miles away, without any understanding of local circumstances and habits of the people they are assisting. After Pinney’s presidency, the government took over the financial dealings of the college with Professor Blyden as president (1881–85). As president, Blyden revamped the curriculum to be relevant to Liberia, diversified the

\[300\] Ibid, 37.

enrollment to include native Liberians, increased enrollment, and added a female
department in the preparatory level of the college. When Blyden tried to diversify the
enrollment and change the curriculum to be inclusive of the native culture, it created
tension among the staff. As in the United States, the college was also marked during its
development by racial conflict among its staff, with the Black staff (Blyden and
Crummell) on one side and the mulatto (represented by Roberts) on the other. According
to Y. G-M. Lulat, the mulattoes (together with other Black Americans, as well as the
missionaries) did not want to upset the status quo.\footnote{302} Without the unconditional support of
the ruling mulatto elites, the college did not become as successful as it could have been.
From 1864 until 1903, the college only graduated eleven students with degrees.\footnote{303}

Controversy was never absent in the foundational years of the college. From
selecting its location to the racial tension among the staff, the college never fulfilled the
hopes and expectations of its founders and supporters. When the college began, two of the
most important preparatory schools in the country closed when its teachers left to teach at
the college. The closing of the two high schools limited the ability for students to meet the
qualifications for higher education. Although the college had set up a preparatory school,
it operated more like a private preparatory school, privileging those with financial
resources. The college, like the common schools, mission schools and high schools,
created a curriculum and an environment devoid of the native Liberians. When an
inclusive curriculum was introduced in the later part of the century, it was met with


\footnote{303} Ibid., 278.
resistance from the elite class. With its shortcomings, the college laid the foundation for higher education in Liberia, one that was based on racial hierarchy.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

On April 22, 1980 Liberia made international news headlines when it broadcast the brutal execution of its political leaders, who were shirtless with their hands tied behind their backs. The execution was public and was witnessed by Liberian women, men and children. The thirteen political leaders were members of the Americo-Liberian class, an elite group whose members were descendants of the Black American emigrants who founded Liberia in the early nineteenth century. However barbaric the execution may have appeared, it was the result of the American-Liberian hegemony. Their 150 year rule in Liberia dominated the educational, political and social scene until April 1980.

As power was forcibly transferred to an African-Liberian president for the first time since its founding in 1822, the country began the process of operating as a new nation under new rules. As expected, many Americo-Liberians left the country to seek refuge abroad. The aftermath of the execution of its political leaders divided the nation. It was at this juncture that historians began to interrogate the underlying causes that began with political unrest and culminated in the transfer of power from the Americo-Liberians. At the heart of this narrative was an attempt to understand how a fourteen-year civil war (1989-2003) ensued that killed over 250,000 people, turned children into child soldiers and displaced 1.5 million citizens.304 These questions are inextricably linked to the evolution of Liberian education, which is the focus of this dissertation.

However, the idea of public executing someone because of his or her differences goes deeper than 1980’s coup. Context for this brutal historic event must be provided. In

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as much as the new regime ended the ruling class, it did not end the ideologies developed and implemented from the earliest development of the American settlement in Liberia. Exploring the earliest institutional developments in Liberia, particularly in education, is examined in my dissertation. Even though my dissertation ends in 1860, the impact of the early educational development in Liberia manifests itself from one generation to another.

Although scholars are beginning to document the historiography of Liberia and its emigrants with an emphasis on the twentieth century, there is a huge gap in the research. Historians have yet to tackle Liberia’s educational history and examine how crucial it was in creating the elite Americo-Liberian class. To secure, maintain and preserve Americo-Liberian hegemony, these new emigrants refused to acknowledge native Liberian heritage and culture. Curriculums were structured and developed in a manner that underscored Americo-Liberian Christianity, traditions, and culture at the expense of native traditions and culture. Indeed, the education system in Liberia was developed to maintain the status quo, reinforce social inequality, and ignore the realities of the native peoples. President Johnson Sirleaf recalled her educational experience as follows:

My high school, the College of West Africa was an excellent school but certainly an elite one; in truth, all formal education in Liberia at the time was based upon the elitist settlers’ version of culture and history. The subjects we studied, the lessons we took, the books we read were either American…or Americo-Liberia…The other side—the fears, frustrations, and resentments of the local people, their history and culture—was not taught.\(^{305}\)

Keeping in mind Johnson Sirleaf’s quote about her education, how does a historian provide a corrective to the Americo-Liberian hegemony in all aspects of educational, political and social life? This question is all the more pertinent given the almost complete

\(^{305}\) Johnson Sirleaf, *This Child*, 58-59.
absence of historical records? Is it possible to reconstruct Liberian’s educational history given the aforementioned conditions?

Attempt to write Liberia’s educational history has been daunting and frustrating. Archival documents in Liberia were not preserved or organized for accessibility. Despite these insurmountable challenges, I relied on the sources that were available to reconstruct a partial history of education in Liberia. This dissertation makes both a much-needed intervention in the current scholarship and provides a few directions for further research.

There were three successive cohorts of emigrants into Liberia from 1820-1860, a timeframe that coincided with the broader social political issues in the United States, such as the second Great Awakening, which led to an increase in manumission, the Nat Turner Revolt of 1830, the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act and the Dred Scott decision. Within a forty-year period, each cohort brought their own history, ideologies, expectations, and contributions to the developing nation. Despite some inherent differences between the three cohorts, they shared the same quest for freedom. Black Americans understood that freedom and liberty were intrinsically tied to education. Thus, it makes sense that their desire to educate themselves and their children remained central to the nation-building project. Schools and educational development do not exist in a vacuum. They operate in tandem with other institutions, such as the church. Each cohort shared a strong sense of Christian faith, which was visible in the overall education system.

The first group of settlers (the first wave) entered Liberia during the first decade after its founding, 1820-1830. This first cohort laid the foundation for education and other political and social institutions in Liberia. This cohort represented the elite and free Blacks from southern states. Some of their known occupations included educated
businessmen, lawyers, ministers, and educators. Emigration provided them with the opportunity to excel without the constraints of racial oppression. Despite their success in the United States, their status as citizens was in flux. In contrast, Liberia offered remarkable opportunities and guaranteed these emigrants all of the social entitlements of citizenship.

When the first group arrived in a strange land on the western shores of Africa, they were unprepared for the challenges they would encounter. Tension ensued between the new emigrants and the native Liberians over the land. The first cohort was unaccustomed to the climate, and struggled to stay alive, and half of their cohort succumbed to malaria. They had to the ration the limited resources they had in order to survive. Despite these challenges, the first group built schools. They operated schoolhouses for themselves and the native children, funding the endeavor with money earned through trades. During this time, the foundation for mission education (religious education) took form. Unfortunately, as the first group laid the foundation to educate themselves, they created a template for an educational system that would Christianize and “civilize” the natives.

As schoolhouses were being constructed, the need to support public education became apparent. In response, Jehudi Ashmun, the ACS agent who was the head of the colony, passed an Act that provided revenue from taxes derived in the colony for the development of schools. However, the money provided was insufficient to meet the demand as the colony continued to grow in population. Undeterred by said action, Black emigrants continued their educational initiatives. This Act is significant because it was
the first action taken by the government to support education. It paved the way for other educational initiatives to take form during the next decades to come.

The second wave or cohort came to Liberia between 1830 and 1850. In contrast to the first group, the second group of settlers primarily consisted of emancipated slaves from southern plantations who had for the most part gained their freedom through manumissions. Although a handful of them could read and write, their educational experiences were limited. In addition, most of them were unskilled laborers who had never experienced the freedom of self-directed decision-making. In fact, manumission for emigration to Liberia created an available option for experiencing freedom. However, this was a choice they were unable to freely make in the United State. Once they arrived in Liberia, they too faced their own challenges, which included the death of family members and loved ones within the first year after arrival, tension and hostility from native tribes, and a lack of financial resources to sustain their existence. Furthermore, the first cohort found themselves in competition with the newly arrived emigrants for resources. As competition increased, so too did the tension between the groups.

Resources became scarce, and both cohorts of Black emigrants used their voices to advocate in favor of educational advancement and involvement from the United States. Due to the spike in emigration numbers, neither the ACS nor the first group of settlers could financially support the school initiatives they had initiated. It was during this period that the missionary movement to Liberia became very active and visible. The Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists and Presbyterians were the groups involved in setting up schoolhouses and mission schools with a religion-based agenda. Although white missionaries were part of the movement, training Black missionaries to serve in Liberia
was given preference. After the foundation was laid by the earliest settlers to arrive, the schools provided a westernized agenda that neglected the natives.

As the country moved towards self-rule, emigrants initiated the movement to create a government that would publically support educational endeavors. Notwithstanding the need for stability and independence from religious organizations, Education Acts were implemented to push towards funding public schools. Although mandatory common school attendance was already in effect, proper funding to sustain schools from the government did not materialize due to the failure to develop adequate governmental resources to combat pauperism in the Commonwealth of Liberia.

Pauperism in the commonwealth affected the second cohort to a serious degree. They pleaded in their letters to their families and former slave owners for help. This led many, including other emigrants, to see them as dependent and lazy, without taking into account their histories and/or their understanding of freedom. Despite the tensions from within, the second cohort believed education would liberate them. For this reason, they sent their children to schools and found ways to educate themselves. A number of members of the second group visited the homes of missionaries at night to learn to read and write.

The final wave of settlers came to Liberia after the passing of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and Dred Scott ruling of 1857, two significant forces that took away the protection that existed for free Blacks in America. The third and final group continued into Liberia through 1860, the time period with which I conclude this study. Emigration dwindled significantly after the Civil War. Unlike the first and second cohort, the number of emigrants entering Liberia at this time was larger than any period. This was a
momentous event in that more Northern educated free Blacks, including some who had initially opposed African colonization, made Liberia their home.

As this cohort settled into Liberia, they became actively involved in the social and political scenes. They also arrived in a Republic that was governed by a Black emigrant. It was within this group of settlers that leaders would emerge who would question the status quo of Liberia’s elite class. Two of those leaders who questioned Liberia’s elite class included Edward W. Blyden and Alexander Crummell. Future research would shed light more explicitly on the role these two leaders played in the development of Liberian institutions.

Schools and missions were established and educational Acts and governmental initiatives were put in place to secure funding for public schools. Liberia’s leaders pushed for the establishment of higher education in the Republic. After consideration by the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Liberia College was approved for operation in 1851. The MCS appointed a Board to oversee the funding of the college. However, controversies surrounding the location of the college led to the college’s opening being delayed for another decade. In 1862, Liberia College opened its doors to twelve students. Joseph Jenkins Roberts was the first president. The college operated using the same ideology and practices of other schools in Liberia: it was devoid of native influences and teachings. In fact, the students admitted were all members of the elite class. Higher education, like the common schools and mission schools, served to elevate the Black American settlers to serve as leaders in the Christianizing and “civilizing” process of the native people. The three cohorts of emigrants who developed the educational system eventually contributed to the execution of the elite Americo-Liberians in 1980 and
subsequently led to a fourteen-year civil war. The Americo-Liberians hegemony expanded into every aspect of Liberian institutions at the expense of the natives. Inequalities were visible in terms of schools, housing, hospitals, access to higher education, and job opportunities. These inequalities became the impetus for the 1980 coup.

In light of my findings, what are the future implications of this work? For one, the absence of primary sources has complicated the approach to providing a historical narrative. My research investigated the 1820-1860 period, which leaves room for future work that will address education after 1860. Some of the areas remaining for future explorations are:

• How did the Pan-Africanism movement, which was influenced by Blyden and Delany, affect the educational and social institutions in Liberia?
• How do we contextualize the history of education in Liberia with other West African countries or the rest of Africa?
• How did education change after 1869 (when the government took control of public education)?
• How do we compare educational development after the 1980 conflict to that of the nineteenth century?
• How does the history of Liberia College contribute to understanding of the Americo-Liberian hegemony?

There is a question that has troubled me since undertaking this research: How do we prepare historians to address the methodological challenges they will encounter when documenting histories in post-conflict societies? How do we encourage post-conflict
societies to contribute to the development and preservation of their historical records? Of course, these questions are applicable to both Liberia and other post-conflict societies such as Rwanda. My study is the beginning of an effort to contribute to, and close the gap in, Liberia’s educational history. There is a great deal of room for further research. It is my hope that scholars will be inspired to continue this journey as well further engagement in dialoguing these methodological challenges.
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