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Univerisity of Louisville

The Negro Colonization Movement in Kentucky

A Dessertation

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Graduate School of the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of Master of Arts

Department of History

by

Mary Kaltenbrun

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The Negro Colonization Movement in Kentucky

I

Introduction

The Negro Colonization Movement was an attempt to solve both the race and the slavery problems in the United States. Had it succeeded there probably would have been no Civil War; there certainly would be no Negro race problem in the United States today. The Northerner of the pre-Civil War era made the fatal mistake of over-simplifying the issue. To him it was a question of slavery only. To the Southerner, however, there was the added increment of a race problem. Thomas Jefferson noted the connection between the question of slavery and race in the early days of the Republic:

Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state...? Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites, ten thousand recollections by the blacks of the injuries they have sustained, new provocations, the real distinctions which nature has made, and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race..... This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people. Many of their advocates while they wish to vindicate the liberty of human nature are anxious also to preserve its dignity and beauty. Some of these, embarrassed by the question "What further is to be done with them?" join themselves in opposition with those who are actuated by sordid avarice only. Among the Romans, emancipation required but one effort. The slave when made free might mix without staining the blood of his master. But with us a second is necessary unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture.¹

It is not necessary to defend such a statement; it is sufficient to note

1. Notes on Virginia, query 18. cited in Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, American Negro Slavery. (New York, 1918) 123.

that it could have been held by so liberal and outstanding a democrat as Jefferson. On a conviction that the White and the Negro races could not live peacefully together on a basis of equality the Colonization Society was founded.

Stated in its baldest terms the colonization movement was a plan to colonize free Negroes with their consent, and such slaves as would be freed for the purpose of colonization, in Africa. This was an incipient plan of emancipation along the lines that could have been accepted not only by the conscientious Northern theorists, but also by high-minded Southerners who were conscious, as the average Northerner was not, of the racial implications of freeing a class which would not be easily assimilated, and which would wear the badge of its slavery in its color and perpetuate the prejudices and antagonisms engendered by its unfortunate subjugation for generations to come. To the first group it offered a workable plan by which the Negro could be freed for the purpose of colonization. To the second it offered a solution of the Negro race problem. In the face of such confusion of purpose it is not surprising that the movement failed. While these two motives are not diametrically opposed in theory, they tended to shift the emphasis first one way and then another and so to weaken the colonization movement which, by the immensity of its undertaking required the whole-hearted support of both the North and the South united in a single, clear-cut, logical plan of action.

By the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution the practice of hereditary slavery was abolished. But no mere declaration of emancipation could wipe out the prejudices

and antipathies rooted in a color line. The difficult problem of an adequate adjustment between the two races was left unsolved. In the inevitable conflict which ensued, it can hardly be doubted that the weaker race was the one which suffered most. Not only was this group left without adequate provision for its economic absorption, but social equality was a sheer impossibility. As Beard puts it, they remained "a mass of emancipated slaves long destined to wander in a hazy realm between bondage and freedom."¹

If almost eighty years after general emancipation there is still a Negro problem in the United States, it is not surprising that in anticipation the question seemed formidable to the South. When Mr. Early, of Georgia, said in the Congress of the United States, "We must either get rid of them [the Negroes], or they of us; there is no alternative,"² he was expressing the Southern consciousness of a race conflict which had nothing to do with slavery as such. That the impending conflict was magnified out of all proportions by the slave-holding South cannot be questioned. Such a statement as that of Early's was palpably false. This unreasonable fear of the Negro, however, which could be aggravated at times, even in the more or less benevolent slave counties of Kentucky, to the point of mass hysteria,³ had a basis in fact in the revolution staged by the Negroes on the French island of Haiti between 1798 and 1803.

1. Beard, Charles A. and Mary R., The Rise of American Civilization. (New York, 1927) II, 115.

2. Annals of Congress. 1806-1807. p. 174.

3. Coleman, J. Winston, Jr., Slavery Times in Kentucky. (North Carolina, 1940) 93ff.

Had the dispossessed white population of the island of Haiti remained in the West Indies or returned to the Continent of Europe, the South would probably not have been too greatly disturbed. But many of these white political exiles came to the United States.¹ Here they spread countless atrocity stories, vividly illustrating to the precariously situated Southern Planter to what depths of barbarity the Negro could revert once the bonds which held him in subjection were removed. Doubtless many of these stories were exaggerated. Even the most reserved accounts such as that left by the British Historian, Bryan Edwards, an eyewitness to the Negro Revolt, is highly emotional:

To detail the various conflicts, skirmishes, massacres, and slaughter which this exterminating war produced, were to offer a disgusting and frightful picture. A combination of horrors wherein we should behold cruelties unexampled in the annals of mankind: human blood poured forth in torrents, the earth blackened with ashes, the air tainted with pestilence...²

Such tales were not only to color the foreign policy of the United States with reference to Haiti³, they also projected into the foreground the race implications of the institution of slavery.

In view of the foregoing, it is evident that any solution of the slave question which would meet with the full approval of even the most liberal minded Southerner must also provide a solution of the equally

1. Truedley, Mary, The United States and Santo Domingo, 1789-1866. (Clark University Press, 1916) lllff.

2. An Historical Survey of the Island of Saint Domingo, cit. in H.P. Davis, Black Democracy, (New York, 1936) pp.36-37.

3. Benton's Abridgement of the Debates in Congress. (New York, 1857-1863) VIII, p. 469, pp.641-642. Adams, Charles Francis, The Works of John Adams. (Boston, 1856) VIII, p. 634.

serious race question. To many leaders in the South, Henry Clay among them, the plan of colonizing the free Negro in Africa seemed to offer such a solution. The purpose of this paper is to trace the course of the Negro Colonization Movement in Kentucky and to determine the cause of its failure. As the movement in Kentucky was never completely autonomous, though it fought at the last to become so, it will be necessary to sketch briefly the steps which led to the formation of the parent society and to consider something of the nature and purpose of the organization known as the American Colonization Society, of which the Kentucky Colonization Society was an auxiliary.

II

Early History of the American Colonization Society.

The first concerted attempt to colonize negroes outside the United States was not due to interest in emancipation, but to the Gabriel Conspiracy of 1800. A slave named Gabriel had planned a revolt in Richmond which, though it never actually materialized, left the state clamouring for retaliatory measures.¹ The Virginia Legislature was pressed by an aroused populace to take action against seditious Negroes. A plan to exile offending Negroes seems to have been offered to the people of the State in lieu of wholesale executions. A resolution was passed directing James Monroe, who was then governor, to enter into correspondence with the President of the United States for the purpose of discussing the feasibility of this country's obtaining a territory to which "persons obnoxious to the laws, or dangerous to the peace of society may be removed."²

This early resolution had nothing to do with the free Negroes of the State. No free Negro was implicated in the Gabriel Conspiracy.³ During these years, however, the free negro population in Virginia was increasing very rapidly. Between 1790-1800 it almost trebled.⁴ Virginia, having opened the question of colonizing the criminal Negro

1. Monroe to Jefferson. June 15, 1801. Cited in Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, The Writings of James Monroe. (New York, 1900) III, 292.

2. Ibid., III, 292.

3. Russell, John H., The Free Negro in Virginia 1619-1865. (Baltimore, 1913) pp. 167-168.

4. Ibid., p. 12.

slave, gradually progressed to the idea of colonizing the free Negro. When, in 1801, the Resolution of 1800 was reaffirmed, a provision was added suggesting that an additional place be set aside in which the free Negro might be colonized.¹ The idea of a penal colony seems gradually to have been abandoned, for when the Virginia Legislature again took up the project of colonization in 1816, it was only to obtain "a Territory ... to serve as an asylum for such persons of color as are now free ... and for those who may hereafter be emancipated."²

While the Virginia Resolutions seem not to have directly fostered the founding of the American Colonization Society, that society was willing enough to trade on the prejudices of the leaders from that state in favor of colonization. The most powerful friend and supporter of the colonization movement in its early years was President Monroe, who brought with him the heritage of the much abused Virginia Resolutions. By what seems to have been a pure coincidence, the society was founded in the same year that Monroe was elected president, and seemingly by accident the Virginia Legislature took that same year to renew its petitions to Congress in favor of colonization, after a lapse of eleven years.

The actual establishment of the American Colonization Society was casual enough to appear almost an after thought. On December 16, 1816, a small group of men met in Washington to discuss colonization, There is no record of the proceedings of this first meeting, but at a second

1. Monroe to Jefferson. Feb.13, 1802. Cited in Hamilton, Op.Cit., III, 337.

2. Virginia Resolution. Dec.23, 1816. Cited in Address of the Managers of the American Colonization Society, to the People of the United States. (Washington, 1832) p. 9.

meeting called five days later, at which Henry Clay presided, the resolution which created the new society was approved:

The situation of the free people of colour in the United States has been the subject of anxious solicitude, with many of our most distinguished citizens, from the first existence of our country as an independent nation; but the great difficulty and embarrassment attending the establishment of an infant nation when first struggling into existence, and the subsequent great effort to provide a remedy for the evils existing or apprehended. The present period seems peculiarly suspicious to invite attention to the important subject, and gives a well grounded hope of success ... Desirous of aiding in the great cause of philanthropy, and of promoting the prosperity and happiness of our country, it is recommended, by this meeting, to form an association or Society for the purpose of giving aid and assistance in the colonization of free people of color in the United States.¹

The Constitution of the Society as finally adopted restated the above purpose of the organization without the implied suggestion that the presence of the free Negro tended to destroy the peace and prosperity of the country.

The object to which its attention is to be exclusively directed, is to promote and execute a plan for colonizing (with their consent) the free people of colour, residing in our country, in Africa, or such other place as Congress shall deem most expedient. And the Society shall act, to effect this object in co-operation with the general government, and such of the states as may adopt regulations upon the subject.²

Having won the support of the slave-holders by a resolution which pointed to the colonization of the free Negro as a means "of promoting the prosperity and happiness of our country," the society

1. Fox, Early Lee, The American Colonization Society 1817-1840. (John Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science. XXXVII, #3, 1919) p. 46.

2. Address of the Board of Managers of the American Colonization Society to the Auxiliary Societies and the People of the United States. (Washington, 1820) pp. 31-32.

attempted to develop a liaison between colonization and emancipation.

The constitution of the American Colonization Society says nothing about slavery. It speaks only of "free people of colour." In fact, the official title as given in Article I, of the Constitution was:

"The American Society, for colonizing the free people of colour of the United States."¹ However, the First Annual Report of the Society shows a sympathetic preoccupation with the question of emancipation:

The effect of this institution, if its prosperity shall equal our wishes, will be alike propitious to every interest of our domestic society; and should it lead, as we may fairly hope it will, to slow but gradual abolition of slavery, it will wipe from our political institutions the only blot which stains them; and, in palliation of which, we shall not be at liberty to plead the excuse of moral necessity, until we shall have honestly exerted all the means which we possess for its extinction.²

Thus the American Colonization Society in the first year of its existence had gone on record as deprecating the presence of the free Negro in the United States; as deploring the condition of the free Negro and offering to alleviate it; and as hoping to make all Negroes free.

While the constitution left open the place of colonization, there was never any serious question, as far as the society was concerned, of colonizing in any place other than Africa. The early correspondence of Monroe and Jefferson on the question of colonization had turned the exponents of the scheme away from the unoccupied lands of North or South America and definitely towards Africa. "I have ever thought that [Colonization in Africa]," Jefferson wrote several years later, "the

1. Ibid., p. 31.

2. American Colonization Society Annual Report. (1818) p. 2.

most desirable measure which could be adopted for gradually drawing off this part of our population."¹ Then too there was already a Negro Colony on the East Coast of Africa. The British Colony of Sierra Leone had been founded in 1787, by a company of British philanthropist as a place or refuge for the American Negroes who had fought with the British forces during the Revolution, and following the revolution had fled to Nova Scotia.² Had the American exponents of colonization looked a little more closely at this noble British experiment they would have found that the Negro Colony had already reverted back to the crown after a series of revolts.³

In anticipation of a colony in Africa the society sponsored⁴ the Act of 1819 which was worded:

The President, by this act, is authorized to make such regulations and arrangements as he may deem expedient for the safe keeping, support, and removal beyond the limits of the United States of all such negroes, mulattoes, or persons of color as may have been brought within its jurisdiction, and to appoint a proper person or persons residing on the coast of Africa as agent or agents for receiving the negroes, mulattoes, or persons of color delivered from on board of vessels seized in the prosecution of the slave trade.⁵

Under the liberal interpretation of President Monroe, this gave the society, in a semi-official sort of way, what it could not get officially: the aid of the United States Government in planting its colony in Africa.

1. Jefferson to Lynd. Jan. 21, 1811. Niles Register. Nov. 28, 1831, p. 247.

2. Wyndham, H. A., The Atlantic and Emancipation. (Oxford University Press, 1937) p. 9.

3. Ibid., p. 13

4. Fox, Early Lee, Op. Cit, p. 18.

5. American State Papers, V, 91.

At the beginning of the following year, 1820, two government chartered ships proceeded to the west coast of Africa "for the purpose of negotiating with the local authorities of the country for permission to land and provide for recaptured or liberated Africans..."¹ An agent of the American Colonization Society and the first group of emigrants, eighty-six in number, went to Africa with this expedition.²

Not only did Monroe aid in establishing the colony in Africa, but he helped it over the first difficult years of its existence by giving it subjects in the form of recaptured native slaves, and subsidies by way or providing for the slaves so committed to the colony. He also appointed an agent for the colony to see to the enforcement of the provisions of the act.³ In acknowledgement of Monroe's services to the society the capital of Liberia was called Monrovia.⁴

As the subject of this paper is neither Liberia nor the American Colonization Society, but the colonization movement in Kentucky it will not be profitable to follow the little African community further. In view of the fact that Kentucky was later to pay to the American Colonization Society \$5000. for a tract of land forty miles square, it is interesting to note the payment made by the parent society for the whole colony of Liberia.

Know all men, That this contract, made on the fifteenth day of December, in the year of our Lord one thousand

11 Niles Weekly Register. Feb. 19, 1820, p. 440.

2. Fox, Early Lee, Op.cit., p. 55. American Colonization Society Annual Report. (1867) p. 56.

3. American State Papers. V, 140.

4. Ibid., VII (1824) p. 6.

eight hundred twenty-one, between king Peter, king George, king Zada and king Long Peter, their princes and head men, of the one part; and captain Robert F. Stockton and Eli Ayres, of the other part, witnesseth, That whereas certain persons, citizens of the United States of America are desirous to establish themselves on the Western Coast of Africa; and have invested Captain Robert F. Stockton and Eli Ayres with full powers to treat with and purchase from us the said kings, princes, and head men, certain lands, viz: Dozos Island, and also all that portion of land between north and west by the Atlantic ocean, on the south and east by a line drawn in a south east direction, from the mouth of Mosurado river, We, the said kings, princes and head men, being fully convinced of the pacific and just views of the said citizens of America, and being desirous to reciprocate the friendship and affection expressed for us and our people, Do Hereby, in consideration of so much paid in hand, viz: six muskets, one box beads, two hogsheads tobacco, one cast gunpowder, six bars iron, ten iron posts, one dozen knives and forks, one dozen spoons, six pipes, one keg nails, twenty looking glasses, three pieces handkerchiefs, three pieces calico, three canes, four umbrellas, one box soap, one barrel rum; and to be paid, the following: three casks of tobacco, one box pipes, three barrels rum, twelve pieces cloth, six bars iron, one box beads, fifty knives and forks, twenty hats, five casks beef, five barrels pork, ten shoes, forever cede and relinquish the above described lands.¹

This treaty was signed on December 15, 1821, five years after the foundation of the American Colonization Society, and one year after the first attempt at colonization from the United States.

1. Niles Weekly Register, Oct. 19, 1822. p. 109.

III

Emancipation Sentiment in Kentucky.

By the terms of the Constitution of the American Colonization Society, due provision was made for the affiliation of State organizations with the parent society.¹ It was not long, therefore, before the central organization at Washington reached out into the various states. In due time it came to Kentucky.

In probably no other State in the Union was the ground more fertile for the plant of Negro colonization than in Kentucky. Kentucky had the slaves and Kentucky was none too prosperous by reason of these slaves.² Kentucky had a long heritage of loosely knit, but none the less virile anti-slavery organizations.³ Kentucky had a free Negro population which was increasing out of all proportion to her ability to absorb it.⁴ And finally, Kentucky had a benevolent slave-holding class, sincerely attached to its slaves, and willing, in many cases, to free them could their future be assured.⁵

That slave labor was not entirely profitable in Kentucky was impressed on the State by the rapid growth of the free States of Indiana, Ohio and Illinois.⁶ To add insult to injury, these new

1. See below, p. 9.

2. Hendrick, Charles Henry, Social and Economic Aspects of Slavery in the Transmontrane Prior to 1850. (George Peabody Publication. 1927) p. 134; African Repository, VI (1831), p. 81.

3. Coleman, Op. cit., pp. 290-294.

4. Ibid., pp. 271-272.

5. Breckinridge, "Address to the Kentucky Colonization Society." The Commentator. Sept. 29, 1829.

6. Hendrick, Op. cit., p. 134.

free States were not only advancing under their own momentum, but they were drawing off a considerable part of the population of Kentucky.

Of all the portions of our country, Kentucky has the most reason to deplore the effects of a slave population. Once, Sir, the negro ran away from the white man, now the white man runs away from the negro, and the best of our hardy citizens are removing rapidly to Illinois, on account of slavery, so evidently injurious to an agricultural country.¹

The system of slavery was likewise assailed by the middle class of manufacturers and traders. Such groups pointed out the injustice of a system fastened on the State for the benefit of a small privileged class, as well as the wastefulness of the effort expended in preserving it.² If such rumblings of discontent had little effect on the slaveholder, he was not unimpressed by the large numbers of his own class who were forced to sell their slaves out of the State, to say nothing of those who farmed out their slaves to planters in the Far South.³

A great campaign of education was still needed, however, to convince the average slave-holder in Kentucky that he would profit financially in the long run by freeing his slaves, even without compensation. Such a campaign was never successfully staged. Anti-slavery agitation, such as it was, took the high moral ground.

Anti-slavery agitation in Kentucky reaches as far back as the first Constitutional Convention held in Danville in 1792. So strong was the opposition to slavery at this time, or perhaps, so poorly

1. Smith, Right Rev. B.B., Bishop of Kentucky, to the Young Men's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania. 1835. African Repository. XI, 93.

2. African Repository. XI (1836), pp.16-17.

3. Breckinridge, Robert Joseph, Hints on Slavery. (Lexington, 1843) p. 25.

organized was the pro-slavery party, that a change of only six votes on the measure to restrict slavery would have brought success.¹ Kentucky never again came so close to the abolition of slavery by State action.

The activities of the anti-slavery leaders continued, however, and won some success. It was, no doubt, due to their exertions that the first Constitution of the State contained provisions for the voluntary emancipation of slaves, as well as the stipulation which enjoined slave-holders "to treat [their slaves] with humanity, to provide for the necessary clothing and provisions, and to abstain from all injuries to the extending to life or limb."² Two years later the General Assembly of Kentucky passed a law to permit the emancipation of slaves, stipulating only that adequate provision be made for "any slave or slaves that may be aged or infirm, either of body or mind, to prevent their becoming chargeable to the county."³ Slaves so emancipated were to "enjoy as full freedom as if they had been born free."⁴

At the elections held in 1799 for the selection of candidates to the Second Constitutional Convention, there were close contests in many sections of the State between the pro-slavery and the anti-

1. Coleman, Op. cit., ff 291.

2. Constitution of 1792. Art. IX. Cited in Coleman, Op. cit., p. 291.

3. Littell, William, The Statute Law of Kentucky. (Frankfort, 1809) pp. 246-247.

4. Ibid., p. 247.

slavery groups.¹ While the pro-slavery element was on the whole successful, the Constitution of 1799 preserved the more humane elements of the Constitution of 1792 respecting slavery, as well as provisions for the voluntary emancipation of slaves.²

Having failed in their excursion into politics, the anti-slavery group turned to a campaign of educating public opinion. Here they had less success than the presence of other factors pointing to general emancipation in Kentucky seems to warrant. The various sects in Kentucky were early enlisted in the cause of Abolition.

The Baptists were so disturbed by conflicting views on the subject of slavery that the Baptist Association of Ministers passed a resolution in 1804, advising their ministers to have nothing to do with the question "in their religious capacity." This led to a split in the Baptist Church. "Six Baptist ministers of some note," says Collins, "and others less prominent, with many of their members," withdrew from the general organization and established the Baptist Licking Locust Association.³ This Association was largely responsible for the foundation, in 1808, of the Kentucky Abolition Society.⁴ This Society has the distinction of having published (1822-1823) one of the three abolitionist papers then being published in the United States: The Abolition Intelligencer and Missionary Messenger.⁵

1. Purviance, Levi, Biography of David Purviance. (Dayton, 1848) p. 39.

2. Constitution of 1799. Art. VII.

3. Collins, Richard H., History of Kentucky. (Covington, 1882) I, 25.

4. Coleman, Op. cit., p. 293.

5. Ibid., p. 293.

With the demise of this paper, the activities of the society practically came to an end. Although an attempt was made to revive interest in a forthright abolition society by James G. Birney in 1835, most abolitionists were satisfied to submerge their energies in a less suspect colonization society.¹

Any plan which had as its objective the abolition of slavery without providing for the care of the Negro was foredoomed in Kentucky, as in any other State having a large Negro population. That the abolitionist could not appreciate this says little for his intelligence. Had he but looked about him he would have seen a Negro problem in miniature in any State in the North. The adjustment between the free Negro population and the White population was no nearer a solution in the North than in the South. In fact, Phillips has demonstrated that the antipathy of the whites towards the free Negro was greater in the North than in the South.²

In the face of the inability of the North to settle its own race problem, unencumbered by an added slave problem, the South must have considered it sheer insolence for the North to presume to send emissaries to her in the person of abolition agitators. To the presence of these irresponsible agitators Clay attributed the harshness of the Slave Code in the South:

What has Abolition not done? Has it lightened the chains of slavery?... No! But it has lighted the torch to inflame and to agitate the country... It has done more and worse.

1. African Repository. XI, (1836) p. 285.

2. Phillips, Ulrich Bonnell, American Negro Slavery. (New York, 1918) pp. 439-441.

It has rendered necessary the increased severity of Southern legislation... As to the great body of Abolitionists, I believe, myself, their intentions to be good... but in so far as they live, as most of them do, beyond the limits of the slave-holding States, they are interfering with a subject with which they have no concern...¹

In a sense it is much easier to understand the antipathy of the Northerner to the Negro, a class with which he was ill acquainted, than it is to reconcile the violent statements of some Kentuckians relative to the free Negro with the evident affectionate treatment of slaves in the State. That the vast majority of slave-holders in Kentucky were kindly disposed towards their slaves is a fact proclaimed again and again in the writings of disinterested visitors to the State during slavery days.

So far as I had opportunity to judge, the slaves were treated kindly, not over worked or often punished, and seemed to have a genuine affection for their white masters, bit and little taking great pride in their masters wealth and high birth, boasting that their owners belonged to some of the first families of old Virginia...²

Over against this picture of reciprocal affection, we have such a statement as the following by Clay, which is typical:

Of all classes of our population, the most vicious is that of the free coloured. Contaminated themselves, they extend their vices to all around them, to the slaves and to the whites. If the principle of colonization should be confined to them; if a colony can be firmly established and successfully continued in Africa which should draw off annually an amount of that portion of our population equal to its annual increase, much good will be done.³

1. Clay, Henry, Speech before the Nineteenth Annual Meeting of the American Colonization Society. Dec. 15, 1835. African Repository, XII (1837) pp. 10-11.

2. Grary, Christopher G., Pioneer and Personal Reminiscence. (Marshalltown, 1893), p. 76.

3. The Life and Speeches of Henry Clay. (Philadelphia, 1859) I, 282.

Such a statement can hardly be explained away on the ground that Kentucky was feeling the weight of carrying an economically non-productive class. Even if it could, it is not clear that the free Negro as a class was entirely non-productive. Phillips, who has made a thorough study of Negro labor, comes to the conclusion that an inclination to idleness was the Negroes' great fault, but that most of them found economic security in the few lines open to them.¹

The conflict in the South had an added increment from which the North was free. The difficult problem of absorbing the free Negro into the economic life of the South was only a slightly more compelling obstacle to general emancipation than a fear of the free Negro. If it is impossible to understand the contempt of the Kentuckian for the free Negro, it is still more difficult to explain the basis of his fear. That this fear was entirely irrational is demonstrated by Russell in his study of the Free Negro in Virginia,² and is proven, at least in a negative way, by Coleman in his study of slavery in Kentucky.³ But if this fear was irrational, it was none the less real:

Our slaves increase in an alarming ratio; and of course free blacks will increase; and they may not only corrupt but stimulate our slaves to deeds of atrocity... The evil arising from the mingling of this race with the free white citizens, is one of a national character, and ought to be removed at the national expense.⁴

1. Phillips, Ulrich Bonnell, Life and Labor in the Old South. (Boston, 1931) pp. 171-172.

2. Russell, John H., The Free Negro in Virginia, 1619-1865. (John Hopkins University Studies. Series XXI, No. 3, Baltimore, 1913) pp. 167-168.

3. Coleman, J. Winston, Jr., Op. cit., pp. 85-114.

4. Mayes, Daniel, The Proceedings of the Colonization Society of Kentucky. Frankfort, 1831) pp. 4-5.

In view of the above statement which is only one of many similar, and of what has gone before, it is evident that whatever an outside agitator might preach, a patriot of Kentucky was in no position to add to the difficulties of his State, and apprehension of its people, by increasing this unwanted class of citizens. "I prefer the liberty of my own country," said Henry Clay in the Senate, "to that of any other people; and the liberty of my own race to that of any other race. The liberty of the descendants of Africa in the United States is incompatible with the safety and liberty of the European descendants."¹

Even from the standpoint of the slaves themselves, many slaveholders thought that it was an ill requital for faithful service, to force them into the unhappy position of the free Negro. Mayes was expressing the view of a large part of the more conscientious slave group when he said:

In fine, cast our eyes around us, and in every direction we find the avenues that lead to honorable distinction, and the motives that prompt to high and virtuous resolves, closed upon him, by the impossible barrier of public opinion... Execute deeds of manumission as you may, pass statutes for emancipation if you can, he is still a slave. Circumstances that neither black nor white can control have ordained a code of laws paramount to wills and to deeds, to statutes and to constitutions, a code as fixed as unalterable as the nature of man -- the code of public opinion. By its resistless energy, it binds him yet in slavery, and that of the most hopeless kind. Once he was a slave with a master to protect him, now he is a slave deprived of that protection.²

To such men the plan of colonizing the free Negro in Africa offered not only an immediate solution of the free Negro problem, but it also provided an asylum to which those who so desired might send faithful servants with the assurance that there they would enjoy, not only economic and political freedom, but also social equality.

1. Life and Speeches of Henry Clay. Op. cit., II, 418.

2. Mayes, Daniel, Op. cit., pp. 18-19.

IV

Organization of the Kentucky Colonization Society

It can hardly be questioned that Kentucky was ripe for the Negro Colonization Movement. That a State Colonization Society was not formed earlier in Kentucky seems to have been due to the failure of the American Colonization Society to push the project, rather than to any opposition to the movement in Kentucky. There was opposition at first, the result no doubt of a misunderstanding of the aims of the Society, but it was short lived.¹

The first auxiliary society of the American Colonization Society in Kentucky was founded at Maysville in 1822.² By 1821⁷ there were additional organizations in Lexington and Russellville.³ That interest in the colonization movement was not confined to these three centers is shown by a resolution adopted by the Kentucky General Assembly endorsing the aims of the American Colonization Society as early as 1821:

Resolved by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, That they view with deep and friendly interest, the exertions of the American Colonization Society, in establishing an Asylum on the coast of Africa, for the freepeople of colour of the United States, and that the Senators and Representatives in Congress from this state, be, and they are hereby requested, to use their efforts to facilitate the removal of such free persons of colour as may desire to emigrate from the United States to the Colony of Africa, and to insure to them the protection and patronage of the General Government, so far as shall be deemed consistent with the safety and interest of the United States.⁴

1. The Commentator, Frankfort, Ky. April 28, 1829.

2. Kentucky Colonization Society Sixth Annual Report, (1823), p. 10.

3. Ibid., p. 10.

4. African Repository, II (1827) p. 352.

Throughout the year 1828 the average citizen of Kentucky must have spent a great deal of time discussing this new scheme for colonizing the Negro in Liberia in Africa. Certainly his newspaper carried many items on the subject. Most of these items were reprinted from the official organ of the American Colonization Society, the African Repository, which began to circulate freely in the State. On the whole the Kentucky editors were ardent apologists of the movement. They rarely allowed a disparaging statement, relative to the movement, to appear in their papers. They sometimes even took issue with the mild criticism of it which appeared in the African Repository. One letter from Liberia which spoke of the difficulties met with in the new Colony was answered by the editor as follows:

Generally, however, the industrious and active have reasons to be contented soon after their arrival -- All emigrants should bear in mind, that there is no country in the world where, without wealth is previously acquired, man is exempt from laboring to support himself. Africa is no exception. But there, as here, labour and industry obtain their just reward.¹

When, therefore, a meeting was called in the Senate Chamber at Frankfort on December 30, 1828, for the purpose of organizing a State Colonization Society the ground work had been well laid. At this meeting it was resolved:

That in the opinion of this meeting, the objects of the American Colonization Society are such, as must be approved by humanity and enlightened patriotism, that its scheme is one calculated to relieve the citizens of this Commonwealth, from the serious inconveniences resulting from the existence among them of a rapidly increasing number of free persons of colour, who are not subject to the restraints of

1. The Commentator. Frankfort, Ky. May 24, 1828.

of slavery; and that for these reasons it is desirable that an auxiliary State Society be formed in Kentucky, to cooperate with the Parent Society at Washington.¹

Even now, however, the connection of the State with the National Organization was more verbal than factual. Fully another decade passed before the initiative in Colonization matters was taken from the State by the central society. But the formation of a state society to which all local branches would be subsidiary, as the Kentucky Colonization Society was, at least in theory, subject to the American Colonization Society gave the movement an impetus which, had it been carefully directed, might have resulted in formidable action. As it happened much of the enthusiastic energy of the early period was dissipated.

Following the organization of the Kentucky Colonization Society, the State was subjected to a mad orgy of organization. Wherever, and sometimes whenever (for two or three colonization societies in one place was not rare), two or more could be gathered together in the name of colonization, a new society was formed. Societies at Versailles, Elkton, New Castle, Nicholasville and Louisville were founded in 1829.² But that was only a beginning, and a rather mild one for the avalanche that followed. In 1830, one man alone, an agent named Bascone, founded twenty-one such organizations.³ It is not surprising that in the face of such activity, the parent society held Kentucky up as a model:

Probably in no State of the Union has the scheme of African Colonization found more decided Friends or met with more general approbation. The happiest results may be expected from the operations of the State Society.⁴

1. African Repository, IV (1829), p. 351.

2. Ibid., V (1830), p. 21.

3. Ibid., V (1830), pp. 310-311.

4. Ibid., VI (1831) p. 80.

This diffusion of colonization energy continued throughout 1831 and 1832. As late as 1833, the Rev. G. C. Light, who seems to have replaced Bascone, boasted that he had added seventeen new societies to the already over-crowded list.¹ With no unified direction, these numerous societies became nothing more than social gatherings. They offered just one more excuse for joining a club.

In the face of such widespread and ill-directed agitation there was much room for abuse of power on the part of lesser representatives. As the first duty of an agent was the collection of funds for the society, the most likely abuse would be the misappropriation of such money. Suspicion of the misuse of funds was rife. H. B. Bascone, the first agent of the Kentucky Colonization Society, found it necessary to protest to Gurley, the Secretary of the American Colonization Society, his innocence of accusations brought against him. Bascone admitted, however, that he had a little explaining to do relative to his accounting of funds. Times were hard. He had had sickness in his family. Given an opportunity, however, he was confident that he could fully satisfy Gurley as to just how the society happened to be, as he put it, in "advance" to him. The Rev. G. C. Light was also suspect, but for an entirely different reason. There could be no question of Light's being in "advance" to the Society for the simple reason that the money Light actually handled for the society was only a fraction of what the society paid him. The Kentucky Gazette, in analyzing Mr. Light's report for

1. The Kentucky Gazette, Lexington, Ky., Feb. 23, 1833.

2. Bascone to Gurley. Apr. 3, 1830; May 4, 1830; May 15, 1830.
American Colonization Society Papers. MS. Div. Library of Congress.

1832, points out that while the agent, from his own account, was directly responsible for obtaining only \$123.75 for the society, he was paid \$740 by the society.¹ Even supposing that most of the donations for that year were due to the efforts of Mr. Light (his seventeen new societies probably contributed something) the expense of collections was out of all proportion to the amount collected. The total amount collected in Kentucky in 1832 from all sources was only \$1137.67.²

Knowledge of this rather careless accounting of the funds of the society was as wide-spread as the circulation of the Kentucky Gazette. The Danville Colonization Society in appealing for funds in 1830 took cognizance of these reports to the extent of assuring prospective contributors that an equitable use would be made of their donations:

Let the friends of Colonization come forward and show their zeal in the good cause. The money thus raised will be appropriated in transporting free men, or women of colour, from our own town or vicinity to Liberia. There can be no imposition practised here; everyone may see the effects of his charity in his own neighborhood.³

It is not hard to determine the fault here. There was no responsible agent with sufficient ability to knit the loose associations into a centralized group, and with enough authority to put in force a unified plan of action. There is no evidence that Kentucky would have resented an outside agent. In fact, when Mr. Gurley, the secretary of the American Colonization Society visited Kentucky in 1839 he was met with numerous requests for such a man.⁴

1. The Kentucky Gazette., Lexington, Ky. Feb. 23, 1833.

2. African Repository, IX (1834) p. 58.

3. Ibid., VI (1831), p. 187.

4. Ibid., XV (1840), p. 154.

By 1844 Colonization activities in Kentucky had so bogged down that the American Colonization Society sent J. B. Pinney, one of its most successful agents, to Kentucky to investigate conditions. Pinney found, on consultation "with clergymen and others of the place friendly to our object and also with the members of the Assembly... that the interest in this cause is small or has chiefly to be created or excited."¹ Pinney convinced the American Colonization Society that if Kentucky was to be preserved within colonization ranks, it would have to be given a fully accredited agent, one directly responsible to the parent society. Such an agent, the Reverend Alexander M. Cowan, was appointed in 1844, the same year in which Henry Clay became president of the American Colonization Society. Cowan found little to encourage him on reaching Kentucky:

I have found the Kentucky State Colonization Society defunct-- No meetings for three years. The Auxiliary County, or town Societies in like state. Mr. Pinney's visit to Kentucky embraced most to the well informed communities on colonization. It is hard operating in such fields so soon after him. I have tried to get up a meeting of the friends here but so far without any promising. This week's paper admitted an article by myself. I have proposed the plan today to raise \$2000 to purchase territory in the territorial limits of Liberia. I find I have this objection to meet -- the purchase of territory is the cry, but no purchase is made, though we have contributed to do so.²

Cowan succeeded, with the expenditure of \$10.00 "out of my own pocket,"³ in getting a meeting of the Kentucky State Colonization Society. But it was to the people, rather than the organization that Cowan appealed. Finding that enthusiasm for the cause of colonization had worn a bit

1. Pinney to McLain. May 28, 1844. American Colonization Society Papers. MS. Div. Library of Congress.

2. Cowan to McLain. Dec. 23, 1844. American Colonization Society Papers. Op. cit.

3. Ibid., Feb. 20, 1845.

thin, he espoused the cause of a "Kentucky" in Liberia. Thanks to a ready wit and a congenial background he was able to appreciate the highly provisional outlook of the people of Kentucky. He made capital of their pride in, and jealousy of, all that touched the honor of their State.

To McLain, the Corresponding Secretary of the American Colonization Society, he once wrote:

The mass of persons to whom I have applied to for donations give because of the action of the Ky. Col. soc. in the cause. Some give for the cause in general, but they are few. The friends of the Cause, are acting in general because they want Ken to be enlisted in the work, and to see that no other state is dictating or controlling.¹

Cowan's work in the State was crowned with considerable immediate success. He kept faith with the people on his promise to plant a "Kentucky" in Liberia. Though it cost him considerable effort, he succeeded in convincing the Parent Society that failure to put through the project would make further colonization activity in Kentucky futile.² The plan, as he saw it, was no more complicated than designating a section "Kentucky." "They do not wish a distinct colony," he informed McLain, "as that of the Maryland Colony -- it is simply to have a tract in Liberia called Kentucky..."³ Thanks to his persistence, such a tract was so named in 1845.⁴ The transaction was entirely verbal.⁵ The Kentucky Colonization Society never received a deed to the property, but for the moment the people were satisfied.

1. Ibid., Nov. 24, 1847.

2. Ibid., May 2, 1845.

3. Ibid., Feb. 20, 1845.

4. African Repository, XXI (1846), p. 283.

5. Cowan, Alexander M., Liberia As I Found It In 1858. (Frankfort, 1858) p. 61.

An appreciation of Cowan's work in behalf of colonization can be gleaned from the spread of his undertakings. He was not only responsible for organizing plans of attack, but he was obliged to put all such plans in force. He was, in effect, the whole Kentucky Colonization Society in so far as that society was an active body. Had he been responsible only for the soliciting of funds his work would have been enormous. In the name of an organization which was unable to collect, at the time that he came to Kentucky, even the necessary ten dollars needed to meet the expenses of calling a meeting, Cowan had collected \$5288.57 by the beginning of 1846.¹ But Cowan had not only to collect the money, he had to collect colonists.

Contrary to the expectations of the American Colonization Society, Colonists were not to be had for the asking. Collecting an expedition for Liberia was a tedious and discouraging undertaking. Advertisements of the time of sailing were usually posted in the newspapers, and emigrants were directed to be in Louisville on a certain day. From Louisville they were taken by the colonization agent to New Orleans, where they were placed on board a ship for Africa. A mere notice in a newspaper was no more than a reminder. Each emigrant had to be contacted personally, and as most of them were slaves, their owners had first to be won over. As the society was adverse to accepting emancipated slaves unless provided for, the master had to be persuaded to furnish the emancipated slaves with the means of transportation and provisions. This ground work was done by Cowan, who travelled over much of the state on horseback.

1. Cowan to McLain, Feb. 14, 1846. Loc. cit.

Cowan would reach a distant mission, arouse the interest of a few slaves, obtain a promise of emancipation from the owner, and leave with all too vague directions as to the time of departure. Approximately one fourth of the negroes pledged to go to Liberia would turn up in Louisville at the destined time. In view of the poor methods of communication and the hazards of transportation, the vacillation of slave-owner and slave, the juvenile mentality of the slave, which made it impossible for him to travel alone, not to mention the restrictions placed by law on his travel, this loss is not surprising.¹

Even after the Negroes had gathered in Louisville, the trials of the colonization agent were not over. Cowan never failed to meet an expedition and rarely disappointed the Negroes by not taking them to New Orleans at the appointed time. Often, however, on reaching New Orleans there was no ship scheduled for Liberia, and long and costly delays followed. Once Cowan was forced to bring the emigrants back to Louisville. Here, for three months, the Kentucky Colonization Society supported them amid general dissatisfaction. Only a remnant of the original group finally sailed in the spring of the following year.²

To the already insupportable duties taken on by Cowan was added a continued contest with the Parent Society. The American Colonization Society of necessity took a long range view of the matter of colonization, and in its scheme of things Kentucky was but one spoke in a great wheel. To the Kentuckian, his organization was at least the hub. As colonization

1. Cowan to McLain, 1844-1850. Loc. cit.

2. Ibid., Apr. 4, 1849.

was a tremendously expensive undertaking, and as money was scarce, the plans of the central organization were circumscribed by the laws of strict economy. That it was not economical to send out a ship with some thirty odd emigrants is obvious, and as the collecting of a respectable expedition depended on the accidental success of its various agents throughout the United States, it was never able to institute a regular service line between the United States and Liberia. As a result, Kentucky sometimes had emigrants which the parent society was unable to transport, at least at the moment. The Kentucky Colonization Society considered this a breach of faith and threatened to secede.¹

As early as 1846 there was talk of the Kentucky Colonization Society withdrawing from the central organization. Cowan seems to have averted the breach for the moment by persuading the American Colonization Society to give the Kentucky branch an assurance that all money collected in the State would be used for the transportation of Kentucky Negroes to Liberia. That the assurance was not viewed too optimistically by the officers of the Kentucky Colonization Society is shown by a warning given McLain by Cowan that Kentucky would remain an auxiliary only so long as "emigrants go from this state no matter what the number."²

An added cause of disaffection developed in 1849 when the Kentucky Colonization Society learned that the American Colonization Society had

1. Proceedings of the Board of Managers of the Kentucky Colonization Society, Aug. 26, 1846. Cited in African Repository, XXII, p. 304.

2. Cowan to McLain, Sept. 3, 1846. Loc. cit.

given a tract of land, within the limits of its grant, to a church. Cowan's demand for an explanation of this incident, as well as his request for a clear definition of Kentucky's right to the land for which they had paid \$5000, were never answered. This request was evidently made under pressure, for Cowan seems to have perfectly understood the nature of the transaction at the time it took place.¹

This new incident, coupled with the continued dissatisfaction with the parent society's handling of emigrants, led, in October 1849, to a complete break between the two organizations. Cowan continued as agent of the Kentucky Colonization Society. All funds collected by Cowan, except subscriptions to the African Repository, were to be turned over to the treasurer of the Kentucky Society. The Kentucky Colonization Society was to charter its own vessels and in all ways supervise the transportation of emigrants. The American Colonization Society was asked to continue the publication of the names of the contributors to the colonization fund in Kentucky, in the columns of the African Repository. Should they feel inclined to refuse, it was suggested that the Liberia Advocate, of St. Louis, would be willing to publish the list for them. And, Cowan shrewdly added, "That paper has in this state a more general circulation than the Af.Rep."²

Actually a scheme of autonomous colonization was never effective in Kentucky. The break with the central organization meant no more than that the funds collected in Kentucky were held in Kentucky until an

1. See p. 30.

2. Cowan to McLain. Oct. 30, 1849. Loc. Cit.

expedition was ready to leave. The American Colonization Society showed a stubborn unwillingness to underwrite the efforts of the Kentucky Colonization Society to charter its own vessel (Cowan had suggested in 1849, that the central organization charter a vessel for the Kentucky Society, for which it would be paid off in monthly installments.¹), but continued to accept Kentucky Negroes at only a slightly increased cost to the State.

As long as the Kentucky Colonization Society was a member of the American Colonization Society, that organization received all funds collected in the State and accepted all emigrants that Kentucky wished to send to Liberia. There seems to have been no attempt to balance the two accounts. The American Colonization Society now informed the Kentucky Colonization Society that in the future they would carry emigrants from Kentucky to Liberia only on the payment of \$60 each.² This infuriated the Kentucky Colonization Society, who already felt that it was paying too much, and Cowan's letters during this period give the impression that had the State Society not already broken with the parent Society, it would have done so then and there:

In my official capacity, I would ask of you an answer to this question. Will the American Colonization Society refuse to send any emigrants from (Kentucky) to Liberia without the Ken. State Col. Society will pay 60.00 each one, old and young?³

However, after a futile attempt to charter a ship and take full charge of their own expeditions,⁴ the Kentucky Society agreed to pay the American Colonization Society the amount demanded.⁵

1. Ibid., Dec. 25, 1849.

2. Ibid., Feb. 8, 1854.

3. Ibid., Feb. 8, 1854.

4. Ibid., May 15, 1854.

5. Ibid., Feb. 3, 1854.

Colonization was an expensive undertaking. There was never any intention on the part of the promoters of colonization to place the emigrants on a strange and undeveloped land and to leave them stranded there to shift for themselves. Each emigrant was not only provided with the necessary clothing and a fair assortment of tools, but each one was guaranteed supplies for a period of six months, as well as medical care during that period at the expense of the Society, to say nothing of an adequate plot of ground.¹ The Kentucky Colonization Society, fully acquiesced in this plan, in fact, Kentucky Colonizationists were most insistent that their Negroes be given the best of care, but they did not see eye to eye with the American Colonization Society on just what appropriation was necessary to assure these provisions. Kentuckians were simply unable to appreciate the vast amount of money necessary to put into effect any such scheme as that envisioned by the Colonization Movement.²

Kentucky was not altogether to blame for this misconception. The American Colonization Society continually talked down the cost of colonization, while permitting that cost to mount rapidly. Clay had said in 1827, that "the entire average expense of each colonist, young and old, including passage money and sustenance, may be stated at twenty dollars per head."³ This and similar reports promulgated by the central organization built up a myth which the parent society later could not dispel. One convert to the cause of colonization in Kentucky wrote:

1. American Colonization Society Annual Report. (1860), p. 71; Cowan, Op. cit., p. 178.

2. The Commentator, Frankfort, Ky., Feb. 12, 1829.

3. The Life and Speeches of Henry Clay, Op. cit., I, 277.

I had greatly overrated the expense of the transportation of the Colonists, and of their support for some time in Liberia, supposing it would be from one hundred to one hundred and fifty dollars each... It appears by the report, that the conveyance of Colonists to Liberia, and their support their (sic) for one year, can be accomplished for twenty dollars, perhaps less.¹

This correspondent came very near to the truth in his original estimate. During the years 1835-1866, the American Colonization Society expended approximately \$50,000. a year on colonization.² During this same period it carried to Africa on an average of 300 Negroes a year.³ That is, each Negro so colonized in Africa cost the Society a little over \$160. When we consider that this cost included purchase of land, erection of buildings, transportation and occasionally the purchase of Negroes, equipping and supporting the emigrants for at least six months, maintaining agents in Africa for the distribution of provisions, supplying the colony with medical care, and even at times financing its wars, as well as gaining certain subsidies and immunities for it through the instrumentality of the United States Government, this does not seem an exorbitant sum. But it was a long way from the twenty dollar estimate which the parent Society continued to exploit long after it had been shown by experience to be fallacious.

In comparing the cost of colonization in Kentucky to the average cost in the nation at large, it is evident that Kentucky came off lightly. For the first 102 emigrants that she sent to Liberia, Kentucky paid the American Colonization Society \$2,300. The Society itself had to add an

1. The Commentator, Frankfort, Ky., Jan. 29, 1829.

2. American Colonization Society Annual Report. (1835-1860)

3. Ibid., (1835-1860)

additional \$1000. to finance the expedition.¹ Although this low rate of about \$25. per head was not maintained, the average cost of colonization over a long period in Kentucky was not over \$50. per emigrant. From 1853-1858, the most active years of colonization in Kentucky, the state paid into the treasury of the American Colonization Society \$16,645.00 . During this same period, 347 Negroes were sent to Africa from Kentucky.² This would put the cost of colonization in the State during this period at about \$40. per head. This was hardly one-third of the cost to the parent society.

With money always scarce, the exponents of colonization sought an appropriation from the State. A sustained campaign in behalf of State aid began in 1845.³ In spite of the fact, however, that every effort was exerted by the friends of colonization "to urge the passage of an act among the members to give a certain sum for each free Negro who will leave the State for Liberia,"⁴ the scheme was not immediately successful. In proportion as the abolition agitation grew in the State, the prospects of success decreased. All attempt to interest the members of the Constitutional Convention of 1850 in colonization failed. The Constitution of 1850 dealt realistically with the problem of the free Negro by directing the Legislature to pass laws to prevent slaves thereafter emancipated from remaining in the State.⁵

1. The Colonizationists and Journal of Freedom. (1833-1834) pp. 368-369.

2. American Colonization Society Annual Report. (1835-1860).

3. Cowan to McLain, Dec. 13, 1845. Loc. cit.

4. Ibid., Dec. 13, 1845.

5. The Constitution of 1850, Art. X.

In 1851 a bill was introduced in the Legislature which would have appropriated \$5000. annually for a period of five years, to be used by the Kentucky Colonization Society for the purpose of removing free people of color to Liberia.¹ The bill was defeated. Not until 1856, when pressure was brought to bear on the General Assembly in the form of petitions from various counties within the state favoring State aid to colonization,² was such a bill passed. This bill entitled, "An Act to aid in removing free Negroes from this State to Liberia," read in part:

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky: That the sum of five thousand dollars be and the same is hereby appropriated, annually, to be paid out of the public treasury, under the restrictions hereinafter prescribed, to the Kentucky State Colonization Society, to be applied to the removal out of this State of negroes resident therein who are now free, and of such as may be born of them and be free.³

This bill was passed by a vote of six to one in the House and two to one in the Senate.⁴ Strangely enough the passage of this Act in no way affected the fortunes of the Colonization Movement in Kentucky. In fact, colonization efforts seem to have completely ended with the passage of this Act.

In 1858, the utility of the Act was questioned in the Legislature at Frankfort, and a bill was introduced during the regular session of that year to repeal it. The act of repeal passed the House by a vote of

1. American Colonization Society Annual Report. (1858), p. 16.

2. Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. (Frankfort, Ky. 1855-56), p. 166; p. 209, p. 261. p. 337.

3. Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Frankfort, Ky. 1853-55). p. 50.

4. The Tri-Weekly Commonwealth, Frankfort, Ky., March 21, 1858.

57 to 28,¹ but was defeated in the Senate, 15 to 19.² The Act was to remain on the statute books until after the Civil War and to pass with the annulment of slavery legislature in general.

Cowan's faith in the future of colonization in Kentucky seems to have been badly shaken by the withdrawal of that Society from the parent organization. As early as 1851 he asked to be relieved of the Agency,³ but as a satisfactory substitute could not be found he retained his position until 1857. In that year, however, he succeeded in getting out by proposing to make an inspection tour of Liberia.⁴ His final service to the now defunct organization consisted in the publication, on his return, of his observations in Liberia in a book called, Liberia As I Found It In 1858.

1. Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Op. cit. (Gen. Sess. 1857-58), p. 481.

2. Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Op. cit. (Reg. Sess. 1857-58) pp. 533-34.

3. Cowan to McLain, Nov. 28, 1851. Loc. cit.

4. Ibid., Oct. 2, 1857.

Results of the Negro Colonization Movement in Kentucky

The general organization of colonization in Kentucky was at best inadequate: poorly manned and inefficiently supervised. Had this organization possessed a trained personnel, held together by a forceful, directive personality, final success would still have had to depend on its ability to win and to hold a precariously variable factor: the Kentucky Negro; for, in the last analysis, the movement was to stand or to fall on its ability to transplant Negroes with their consent from Kentucky to Liberia. From the time of the first expedition to Liberia from Kentucky, in 1833, to 1866, a period of thirty-three years, Kentucky sent to Africa a total of 675 Negroes.¹ This averages about 20 emigrants per year. During this same period, the average yearly increase of the total Negro population within the State was 2500, while the free Negro population alone increased on an average of 200 per year.² In affecting any kind of an adjustment in the race problem, therefore, the Colonization Society of Kentucky was a completely negligible factor.

In view of this evident failure, several questions naturally arise. To what extent did the Negroes themselves contribute to the failure of colonization efforts in Kentucky? Why were the Negroes not forced by economic or legal measures to leave? In view of the decline of slavery in Kentucky, why were so few Negroes emancipated and sent to Liberia?

From the official statements of the American Colonization

1. American Colonization Society Annual Report. (1867) pp. 56-64.

2. Department of Commerce Bureau of Census, Negro Population, 1790-1915. (Washington Government Printing Office, 1918) p. 44.

Society, as well as from the speeches and letters of the Kentucky Colonizationists, it appears that the primary object of colonization should have been the removal of the free people of color. The Colonization Movement was popularized in Kentucky on the ground that it would drive "almost from their own door, some, at least, of the worse than useless population of free blacks, to the land of their fathers."¹

If we are to accept their oft repeated statements that the removal of the free Negro was the colonizationists first objective, we are forced to admit that his efforts were indeed futile, or that this much abused creature on whom he lavished so much attention was a singularly stubborn individual, sincerely attached to his native soil. For the free Negroes of Kentucky steadfastly refused to be colonized.

The colonizationists assumed, entirely without any grounds, that the free Negro was a pawn to be moved about by the white man for his own benefit, and the success of his plane. If it ever occurred to him that a class which he dubbed "vicious" might be disinclined to trust him, he quickly brushed this consideration aside with the remark, "What else can he do?" As one speaker expressed it in an address delivered before the Kentucky Colonization Society at Frankfort, in 1831:

Is he not already driven, by law from some of the states? Are we ignorant of the fact that his presence is looked upon in others, as so great an evil, that it is now in contemplation to banish him from them? Is it not obvious to every intelligent reflecting mind, that this disposition will shortly become general, and no state will afford him a habitation within its borders? What can he do but go? He has no alternative. Go he will, through choice, but if otherwise, go he must of necessity.²

1. Mayes, Daniel, Op. cit. p. 4.

2. Ibid., pp. 11-12.

Some attention was given, it is true, by the more foresighted men in the movement to an attempt to neutralize such impolite speeches. The favorite expedient was to shift emphasis from the advantages to be derived by the white population in the United States by the removal from their midst of the unwanted Negro, to an emphasis on the advantages to be derived by the black races in Africa by the implanting among them of that same Negro. Breckinridge piously predicted that all of Africa would, in time, become Christian by reason of the efforts of the emigrants:

The little band at Liberia, who are spreading over the wilderness around them, a strange aspect of life and beauty, are in every sense a missionary station. Every ship freighted from our shores with their suffering kindred, will be freighted also with the heralds of the cross. You will see light breaking in upon one and another dark habitation of cruelty. The night of heathenism will depart.¹

These "heralds of the cross," as a matter of fact, were at this very time discussing whether or not it would be possible to make the natives their slaves.²

The contingency that such an approach would succeed was not great, except in so far as it pacified the religiously minded among their own class. It was obviously absurd to suppose that the Negro race could be turned en masse into apostles of Christianity, simply by being turned out of a Christian country. This attempt to sublimate the rather dubious scheme of colonization, however, shows that many people in Kentucky were finding it increasingly difficult to reconcile the precepts of brotherly

1. Breckinridge, Robert J., An Address Delivered Before the Colonization Society of Kentucky, At Frankfort, On the 6th Day of January, 1831. (Frankfort, 1831), p. 16.

2. Birney to Mills, July 15, 1834. Cited in, James E. Birney, Letters on Colonization. (New York, 1834), pp. 37-38.

love and political democracy with the institution of slavery. They clutched at any straw which offered an opportunity of extracting something as noble as the Christianization of Africa from anything as degrading as hereditary slavery.

To induce the free Negro to migrate, the Colonization Society offered to transport him to Africa at their expense and to support him for a period of six months after his arrival. They guaranteed him medical attention during the period of acclimation, and a comfortable place to stay until he had obtained a permanent house.¹ Each colonist was given a parcel of ground ranging from five acres near the planned settlements to one hundred acres further inland.² The need for skilled and unskilled laborers in the colony was emphasized. Clay accepted as authentic, and used extensively, a report made before a group of free Negroes in Baltimore in which it was stated that skilled laborers were demanding two dollars a day, while unskilled laborers were making from seventy-five cents to a dollar and a quarter a day.³ The same report draws attention to the comfortable position to which the American Negroes quickly attained, being in a position in a short time to employ "from one to four native laborers at an expense of from four to six dollars the month..."⁴ The cultural advantages offered the Negro in Liberia were also painted in glowing colors. Churches and schools were being erected as needed, it was claimed, and as early as 1829 Liberia was said to have a public Library containing 1200 volumes, and a printing press.⁵

1. American Colonization Society Annual Report. (1860), p. 71.

2. African Repository, XXI (1863), p. 283. The Commonwealth, Frankfort, Ky. March 5, 1856.

3. Life and Speeches of Henry Clay, Op. cit. I, p. 212.

4. Ibid., I, pp. 272-273.

5. African Repository, VI (1848), p. 15

Conscious efforts were made to bring these purported advantages to the notice of the free Negroes. For instance, in Mason County in 1852 a mass meeting was held in which it was proposed that the individuals there represented should personally undertake to contact the free Negroes in their vicinity "for the purpose of laying before them the facts and inducements inviting their migration to Liberia..."¹

To convince the free Negroes that Liberia was all that the White man held it to be, members of his own race were occasionally sent to Africa on tours of inspection. This plan had the appearance of complete frankness, and it does not seem that any great effort was made to prejudice the observer. One free Negro, a Baptist minister named Jones was taken to the Colony of Liberia in 1833 for the purpose of studying and reporting on conditions. On his return he published a Journal, in which he wrote:

Sooner than carry my wife and two sons there to settle, with only what property I now possess, I would go back into slavery as a far better lot.²

Another Jones, however, a barber of Winchester, Kentucky, was taken over by the Society in 1834.³ He was well received by the Governor of the Colony and was favorably impressed.⁴

Cowan did not favor this plan, he doubted its efficacy, and with justice. In 1847, however, he was sufficiently converted to the scheme to propose a modified form of visitation.⁵ This plan was to send a

1. American Colonization Society Annual Report. (1853), p. 13.

2. Cited in Birney, Op. cit., pp. 37-38.

3. African Repository, X (1852), p. 211.

4. Ibid., X (1835), p. 209.

5. Cowan to McLain, Oct. 9, 1847. Loc. cit.

number of free Negroes to Liberia, with permission to return to Kentucky only after a year. This would guarantee against a hasty judgment, which in the confusion and hustle of the landing of a new expedition was not likely to be favorable. Furthermore, Cowan believed that the sight of the Negroes **conducting** their own government (Liberia had become a sovereign state in 1846¹) would, over a long period make a good impression on the scouts. The inconveniences suffered by the usual colonists would, he pointed out, be reduced to a minimum, for "the Liberians will have every inducement to entertain the "spies" and give them every facility to be contented and make a good report in the U. S. They go out different from those who go to stay.² Three Negroes were selected by the free colored people of Kentucky and sent to Liberia in the expedition of 1847.³ Two of them returned in 1851 with a more or less neutral report which seems to have had no effect on the movement.⁴

Not only was the Kentucky Colonization Society unable to get the free Negro to go to Liberia to settle, but it was even unable to get him to go as a special representative. In 1846 this organization wanted to send two Negroes to Liberia to open a school for the colonists. In spite of the fact that such men would be paid \$10. a month, Cowan had to go to Ohio to get them. Even the Ohio Negroes do not seem to have been too anxious to go. "I had the most laborous work to get these two," he wrote

1. Table Showing the Number of Emigrants and Recaptured Africans Sent to the Colony of Liberia. (Washington, 1845) p. 35.

2. Cowan to McLain, Oct. 9, 1847. Loc.cit.

3. American Colonization Society Annual Report (1848) p. 17.

4. Cowan to McLain, Nov. 28, 1851. Loc. cit.

to McLain, "their own color seemed to let loose to prevent them from going."¹

After the passage of the Act appropriating \$5000. annually to be used by the Kentucky Colonization Society in removing free Negroes to Liberia, a further effort was made to overcome the antipathy of the free Negro. Cowan ran an advertisement in the State papers informing them of the provisions of the act, and calling upon them to take advantage of it. He also took this occasion to explain anew to them just what they could expect on reaching Liberia:

The Colonization Society gives to each adult emigrant five acres of land, or a town lot, if he, or she, prefers it. The emigrants settle in what part of Liberia they prefer. They have houses of worship to attend, and schools to send their children to. Any lawful business can be followed. The government is like that which the white people enjoy in this land. Be ye therefore men, and care for your children. Try that land, and if it does not suit you, you can leave when you please. The passage from Baltimore is from 25 to 35 days. No lives have been lost on any passage heretofore by storm or shipwreck.²

The result of this appeal, and any other effort that was made in behalf of the free Negro after the passage of the act were entirely ineffectual. Only one free Negro seems to have left Kentucky after the passage of the Act of 1856, and as he had purchased his freedom after the enactment of the act,³ he was barred from participating in its benefits.

If any group in Kentucky should have welcomed the efforts of the Kentucky Colonization Society it should have been the slaves. Colonization

1. Ibid., Jan. 6, 1844.

2. The Tri-Weekly Commonwealth, Frankfort, Ky., March 5, 1856.

3. American Colonization Society Annual Report (1858), p. 14.

for them meant not only an opportunity to start life anew in a country that they could call their own, but, if the movement proved successful, it actually meant freedom for many of them. Strangely enough, this was not the case. Not only is there no indication of any real enthusiasm on the part of the slaves for the movement, but there is actual evidence of considerable opposition on their part.

Many slaves manumitted by the will of a late master refused to be transported, in some cases sacrificing a considerable bequest left on condition that they go to Liberia. Many others, offered freedom by their owners, chose slavery in Kentucky to freedom in Liberia. A particularly interesting case of the former occurred in Woodford County, Kentucky, in 1856. Nelson Graves, on his death, left his twenty-five slaves free on condition that they migrate to Liberia. By complying with the terms of the will, the Negroes were to divide among them a bequest of \$10,000.¹ The Negroes refused to accept their freedom under a condition of exile. They threatened, should an attempt be made to colonize them, to make their escape from the colonization agent on the way to the coast.² So convinced was Cowan of the sincerity of the Negroes that he refused to accept them, fearing that should they make good their escape from him the cause of colonization would be discredited.³

Much of the opposition of the Negro to colonization may have been due to his ignorance of the aims of the movement. If this be the case the blame would seem to rest with the colonization societies themselves.

1. The Tri-Weekly Commonwealth, Frankfort, Ky. June 9, 1856.

2. Cowan to McLain, April 17, 1856. Loc. cit.

3. Ibid., April 17, 1856.

On the other hand, the Negroes had ample cause for their opposition in the reports that came back to them from Liberia. Large numbers of the early emigrants died, either en route, or within a year of reaching Liberia. In the expedition with which the first Kentucky emigrants went out, 66 out of a total of 270 died within a year. Of the remaining 204, only half that number were still living ten years later.¹ Although such statistics were not available to the Negro, it is hardly likely that he did not learn, in one way or another of the fate of the first expedition. Cowan, himself, was forced in 1847 to throw the whole tragic incident into bold relief. A Mr. William Dudley, who had sent fourteen slaves to Liberia in 1833, wished to send an additional fifteen. The slaves, however, refused to go until they had had some word from those who went in the first group. Cowan undertook an investigation only to find that all but two of the fifteen were dead.²

A less valid, though none the less forceful element in shaping the Negroes opinions relative to Liberia, was a small, but very vocal, group of returned emigrants. Such a return to Kentucky was always a sign for wholesale desertion of prospective emigrants. Of twenty such emigrants gathered in one place, thirteen abandoned the plan of going on the return of three free Negroes from Liberia in 1846.³ To the tales of these discontented emigrants was added a series of spurious emigrant-letters distributed throughout the State by the anti-colonizationists. The following is given by Cowan, in a letter to McLain,

1. Table Showing the Number of Emigrants and Recaptured Africans Sent to the Colony of Liberia. Op.cit., pp. 304-305.

2. Cowan to McLain. Nov. 1, 1847. Loc. cit.

3. Ibid., Sept. 3, 1846.

as typical of such letters:

We are not entirely over the fever yet but getting able to work. My wife and child Litchey are dead, also a daughter born to us after we arrived here... Tell all the friends for the last 11 months I have not drawn a well breath... I do not, nor cannot now advise him to come here. If he comes he may live but I think the chance is two to one that he will die...¹

To give the Negro the credit, or to hold him alone responsible for the failure of the colonization movement in Kentucky would be to give a very one-sided view of the situation. While it is true that the success of the colonization movement as it was understood by its founders presupposed the consent of all Negroes colonized, the Negro might have been coerced into giving his consent had there been the necessary determination on the part of the White race. But Kentucky was singularly unwilling to resort to forceful measures. The whole problem of colonization in Kentucky cannot be understood unless much of the violent anti-racial proclamations made during this period be counterbalanced by the evident affection of many of the slave-holders in the state for individual slaves, as well as the real sense of justice shown by most responsible citizens in Kentucky in their dealings with the Negro class. When in 1829 the rigid Ohio law against free Negroes was enacted, a law which expelled all Negroes unable to post a \$500. bond, the editor of the Frankfort Commentator expressed his reaction to the act in an editorial:

We consider this class of people as a serious evil among us, but this evil has been brought upon us by the whites, with great injustice to them; the only remedy afforded is to colonize them in their mother country.²

1. Ibid., Oct. 9, 1847.

2. July 21, 1829.

There were, of course, laws passed in Kentucky which attempted to curtail the alleged menace of the free Negroes. As early as 1808, an act prohibited the emigration of emancipated slaves to Kentucky from other states in the Union. The violation of this law carried the penalty of being sold into servitude for a period of one year.¹ An act of 1834 seriously threatened the civil rights of the free Negroes. As the free Negro class was supposed to have a pernicious influence on the slaves, this act attempted to keep the two classes apart. Under a broad interpretation it designated meeting places of free and slave Negroes "disorderly houses" and made those operating them liable "to be taken into immediate custody, and to be hired out at public auction, to the highest bidder, for any term not exceeding three months."² In 1840, the Kentucky Legislature passed a particularly severe law dealing with Negroes accused of aiding runaways. Such offenders were "liable to be indicted and punished not exceeding thirty-nine lashes on his or her bare back..."³

The slavery agitation heightened by the calling of the Constitutional Convention in 1849 tended to intensify the feeling against the free Negro and various proposals were introduced in the Convention looking to the stabilization of that element. Although the delegates differed as to just how this was to be accomplished, the gist of all such resolutions were to the effect that emancipation without the removal of the manumitted

1. Littell, William, The Statute Law of Kentucky. (Frankfort, 1809) III, pp. 449-501.

2. Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. 1833-34. (Frankfort, Ky.) pp. 790-792.

3. Ibid., 1839, p. 123.

slaves should be prohibited.¹ There were, of course, more radical provisions, such as the proposal to banish criminal Negroes to Liberia,² as well as the removal of all free Negroes from the state.³ The first proposal was defeated on the ground that such an enactment would tend to further prejudice the free Negro against Liberia,⁴ while the second suggestion was turned down because of its doubtful constitutionality:

Now I do not understand that under the constitution of the United States we have any power over the negroes already free. They are quasi citizens of this commonwealth, of this country... and we have no power to compel them, after they have obtained their freedom, to leave the commonwealth.⁵

The Constitution of 1850 left the free Negro problem just where it had found it, but restricted future emancipation:

The General Assembly shall pass laws providing that any free negro of mulatto hereafter immigrating to, and any slave hereafter emancipated in, and refusing to leave this State, or having left, shall return and settle within this State, shall be deemed guilty of felony, and punished by confinement in the Penitentiary thereof.⁶

The General Assembly accordingly passed a law that same year in accordance with this article of the Constitution. By this act:

No slave shall be emancipated who is over sixty five years of age, or who is, by disease or infirmity, incapable of labor for a support, unless the owner provides the means

1. Journal and Proceedings of the Convention of the State of Kentucky. (Frankfort, 1849), p. 306; Report of the Debates and Proceedings of the Convention for the Revision of the Constitution of the State of Kentucky, 1849. (Frankfort, 1849, pp. 24; 30; 41; 42; 57; 95.

2. Ibid., p. 931.

3. Ibid., p. 57.

4. Ibid., p. 931.

5. Ibid., p. 99.

6. Constitution of 1850. Art. X.

of his transportation out of this state, and one year's support. When the person emancipating a slave, by deed or will, shall fail to provide for his removal out of the state, the county court shall, by order, direct the slave to be hired out from year to year, until a sufficient fund shall be created thereby to defray the expenses of moving said slave to some place out of this state, and to maintain him for twelve months.

* * * * *

All slaves emancipated, who shall refuse to give their consent to be removed out of the state, as required, shall be hired out thereafter under the provisions of this article, for the benefit of the county, in such mode as the county court may direct, until such time as they shall give their assent, and actually remove out of the state.¹

That this act was not successful is evident by a further and more stringent one relative to emancipation passed in 1860:

That hereafter no slave shall be deemed to be emancipated by the laws of this State, until the person emancipating such slave... shall give a covenant to the Commonwealth, covenanting that such person shall remove such slave ... beyond the limits of the State within ninety days after the approval of such covenant by said county court; nor until such slave shall subscribe a written statement, to be endorsed on such covenant, that he or she does then forever abandon his or her residence in, and will, within the time named, remove from this State...²

Whether by reason of non-application, or because of the general conditions of the country following 1860, this law had no effect on colonization. After 1860, and until the end of the Civil War, only seventeen Negroes left Kentucky for Liberia.³

Actually the lot of the Negro in Kentucky was not as desperate as these laws might make it appear. The law of 1860 was never adequately

1. Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. (1850) I, pp. 307-308.

2. Ibid., 1859-60. I, p. 128.

3. American Colonization Society Annual Report. (1867), p. 64.

tested. The earlier laws dealing specifically with the free Negroes were directed against the vicious, rather than the peaceful Negro. The majority of the free Negroes in Kentucky, however, by the testimony of their contemporaries, belonged to the latter class. Birney claims to have found only one pauper in 5000 free Negroes, and rarely to have found a criminal among them.¹ The Danville Quarterly, Past and Present, noted in 1864, that:

... many free men are good workers, and almost all the free women. The latter are notable for their industry and good management, and often, nay, generally, with the assistance of their husbands, purchase, by their industry, a lot in the towns where they live, and erect comfortable dwellings, and live in them with their families in comfort -- often in neatness and more elegance than was customary among laboring whites when the writer was a child.²

Cowan attributed the failure of colonization in Kentucky in part to the contentment of this group. They are, said Cowan "in a better condition in this State perhaps than in any Slave State as to amount of labour, food -- raiment, privilege -- government and the like."³

While the responsibility for the failure of the Colonization Movement in Kentucky rests on various groups, a great share of the blame must fall to the slave-owning class. The free Negro population was but a meager portion of the entire Negro population. He might well have been disregarded by the slave-owners, and the success of the movement attained through the liberation and colonization of the slave population. There was, as we have seen above,⁴ a large class of slave-holders in Kentucky

1. Birney, James E., Correspondence Between James E. Birney of Kentucky And Several Individuals of The Society of Friends. (Haverhill, 1835) p. 6.

2. (1864) V, p. 434.

3. Cowan to McLain, Oct. 9, 1847. Loc. Cit.

4. Chap. III.

already half convinced that from every point of view; moral, political, economical, slavery was undesirable. To many, if not most of these men, emancipation without colonization was inconceivable. As clay declared:

If the question were submitted, whether there should be either immediate or gradual emancipation of all the slaves in the United States, without their removal or colonization, painful as it is to express the opinion, I have no doubt that it would be unwise to emancipate them. For I believe, that the aggregate of the evils which would be engendered in society, upon the supposition of such general emancipation, and of the liberated slave remaining promiscuously among us, would be greater than all the evils of slavery, great as they unquestionably are.¹

Saddled with unprofitable and expensive slave property, many slave-owners in the early days of colonization, agreed with Breckinridge that colonization "has shown us how we may be relieved of the curse of slavery, in a manner cheap, certain, and advantageous to both parties."² If this early enthusiasm was not long sustained, many individual slave-owners did actually support the movement by freeing their slaves and providing them with transportation to Liberia.³ The following citation from a Kentucky newspaper will indicate that even as late as 1856, colonization interest in the state was not entirely dead:

Nelson Graves, of Woodford County, Kentucky, left by will twenty-five servants to be freed, and sent by the Kentucky State Colonization Society to Liberia. He gave also to them, by will, one half of his estate, probably, \$10,000.

John Gass, of Bourbon County, Kentucky, left by will, seventeen servants to be sent to Liberia by the same society, and gave to them \$2000.

E. R. Elliott, now of Jacksonville, Illinois, formerly of Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, emancipated six servants

1. "Address to the Kentucky Colonization Society, Dec. 17, 1829." African Repository. VI (1831), p. 5.

2. Breckinridge, Robert J., Op. cit., p. 19.

3. African Repository. VI (1831), p. 19.

living in Muhlenberg County, and sent them to Liberia. He gave them \$650. Two years ago he did likewise.¹

Some masters who found themselves unable to provide the necessary funds to transport their slaves to Africa resorted to the expediency of delaying emancipation until the slaves themselves could be hired out, and a sufficient reserve accumulated. The Louisville Journal, for January 1, 1841, carries a New Year's plea for such prospective emigrants:

We bespeak for our carriers a warm and liberal reception on this New Year's day. They are destined by their owners for Liberia; and what they receive on this and similar occasions will contribute to swell the fund necessary to give them an outfit. In view of their removal, they have been educated, and taught the art of printing. More faithful carriers never walked a pavement.

The inability or the unwillingness of the slave-owner to bear both the expense of emancipation and colonization was an early source of contention within the movement. "Is it not enough that they manumit their slaves," asks one of their defenders. "Has the black man no other friend to help him? There are now, and always have been, masters who are ready to give up their slaves, if others will transport them. They can do no more."² The records of the disputes over this question are interesting. There was the Rev. A. H. Triplet who owned two slaves, a woman of 38 and a boy of 7. Anxious to get rid of them, seemingly for reasons of conscience, Triplet wrote to the American Colonization Society:

I know nothing of your regulations for emigrants. However, if I may presume to dictate, I wish them to have a quantity of land reserved to them, the necessary implements of husbandry, a year's provisions, if they should be taken by the Society for the purpose of Colonization.³

1. The Commonwealth, Frankfort, Ky., June 9, 1856.

2. Bailey, Rufus Wm., The Issue Presented in a Series of Letters on Slavery. (New York, 1837), p. 8.

3. Triplett to McLain. May 30, 1844. American Colonization Society Papers. Op. cit.

As to financial arrangements, Triplet promised to pay \$250. in three years. \$250. for two slaves, one a child, was not bad; but the implications of that delayed payment plan took on added significance when, in the next letter to the society, Triplet said that he hoped to make an initial payment of ten or fifteen dollars the next year.¹ His offer was declined.² This did not end the correspondence, and after considerable discussion back and forth, during which Triplet agreed to pay, then changed his mind,³ Triplet finally wrote:

I must get rid of my slaves in some way. To set them free in Ky. I cannot, and will not. I fear I shall have to adopt the revolting expedient of selling. I dread this; but I must do something.⁴

Whether Mr. Triplett's perseverance, or the Society's need of emigrants finally carried the day, it is impossible to say. At all events, the Colonization Society ended by taking Triplett's slaves without even a definite pledge as to future payment.

There was another man in Shelby County who wanted the Northern colonizationists to prove their good faith by partially compensating him for the loss of his slaves. He proposed to sell the colonization society thirty-seven slaves, valued at between twelve and fifteen thousand dollars, for five thousand. When Cowan offered to take the slaves and hire them out until they had earned the required money, as well as their transportation to Liberia, the owner refused. "He thought," said Cowan, "some benevolent persons at the north would contribute the \$5,000."⁵

1. Ibid., May 30, 1844; July 29, 1844.

2. Ibid., Mar. 8, 1845.

3. Ibid., Mar. 8, 1845; July 5, 1845.

4. Ibid., Jan. 8, 1845.

5. Cowan to McLain. Oct. 21, 1845. Loc. cit.

Colonization was sometimes confused in the public's mind with abolition, and to that extent generally condemned. Cowan found most Kentuckians hyper-sensitive on the subject, and whenever the least breath of abolition scandal touched the colonization movement, financial support was immediately withdrawn. Even the visit of a northern colonizationist to the State was likely to arouse antagonism. In 1844, Mr. Pinney, an agent of the American Colonization Society visited Kentucky in the interest of colonization. His visit left the state resentful and suspicious.¹ Even Cowan, whose "Virginia birth and education," made him generally acceptable, was not above suspicion, for as Cowan said, they "fear abolitionism in disguise."²

This aversion to all forms of abolitionism was in no sense peculiar to the slave-holding class of Kentucky. That it was equally shared by the non-slave-holding class is demonstrated in the following description of a political meeting held in Kentucky during the course of the debate over the act to repeal the act of 1833 prohibiting the importation of slaves as merchandise. After listening for some time to a defense of the act, one of the onlookers, Ned Powell,

... Who never owned a negro in his life, and who was not even distinctly related to any human being who ever owned one, and who was never able to hire a negro, became suffused with tears, leaped on the other end of the log whereon the Major was standing, and gave vent to his imprisoned feelings in this wise, "Thank God, the Major is able to tell us how these blue -bellied Yankees are running off our negroes; and for one I am willing to take my gun on my back at any time, and just strut over the Ohio River, and kill, slay, and eat every dog of that white-livered tribe who have so long been disturbing our negro property."³

1. Ibid., Dec. 23, 1844.

2. Ibid., Feb. 20, 1845.

3. Bradley, Robert M., A Sketch of Granny Short's Barbecue. (Louisville, 1879), p. 84.

The colonizationist took every opportunity to dissociate himself for the scheme of abolitionism. Breckinridge, who favored a plan of gradual emancipation, inveighed against the abolitionists in no uncertain terms.¹ Mayes found it necessary to recall to the slave-holders of the state their protection under the Constitution of 1850:

If there yet be any amongst us, who withhold their assistance because of the apprehension that its success may endanger their rights let them reflect, that at least in Kentucky, we have a full assurance against the possibility of such an event. By the state constitution, the right of the master to his slave is protected, even against legislative power.²

At the bottom of the slave-holders coolness to the scheme of colonization was undoubtedly his vested interest in slave property. There was much talk about the unprofitableness of slave labor, emanating from the colonizationists.³ But during a single year, 1846-47, however, the General Assembly passed 24 different acts permitting individuals to bring slaves into the state in spite of the act of 1833 prohibiting such importation.⁴ By the Constitution of 1850, the question of importation returned to the status of 1798 which prohibited the importation of slaves as merchandise only.⁵ Such actions on the part of the Kentucky Legislatures do not indicate an anxiety on the part of the majority of their constituents to be rid of the institution of slavery. The value of

1. Speech of Robert J. Breckinridge, Delivered in the Court House Yard at Lexington, Kentucky, on the 12th Day of October, 1840., p. 23.

2. Mayes, Daniel. Op. cit., p. 9.

3. Chap. III.

4. Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. 1847.

5. The Constitution of 1850. Art. X.

slave property in Kentucky in 1849 was estimated at \$61,000,000.¹ Such an investment is rarely sacrificed for altruistic motives. That was not to be in Kentucky. Colonization barely scratched the surface of this vast holdings. 678 emigrants during the entire period of colonization² does not indicate wide spread enthusiasm in the movement on the part of the slave-owners.

To recapitulate, the free Negro would not go to Liberia of his own accord; the slave evinced little interest in this particular plan of emancipation; the State refused to enact the necessary legislature for his forceful evacuation; and the slave-owner did not support the movement except in a very limited degree, and to the extent that it served his interest, which was the preservation of the institution of slavery. Of the three groups which conspired to defeat the colonization movement in Kentucky, the Negro, the slave-owner, and the State politicians, the latter group was perhaps the most innocent. The Negroes knew that they did not want, the slave-owners knew what they did want, the legislators were caught between the two.

Undoubtedly, the slave-holding class, had it possessed sufficient energy and generosity, could have turned the movement from failure into success. Had they believed in the plan of gradual emancipation intrinsically bound up with the scheme of colonization, they could have greatly altered the outlook of the slaves on the potentialities of life in Liberia. The

1. Report of the Debates and Proceedings of the Convention for the Revision of the Constitution of the State of Kentucky. Op. cit., p. 71.

2. American Colonization Society Annual Report (1878, p. 22.

slave-holding group could probably not have born the expense of both emancipation and colonization, but had they devoted the same efforts to obtaining legislature favorable to colonization that they did to preserving and safeguarding the institution of slavery, a great part of the expense might have been born by the state.

VI

Conclusion

The study of the Negro Colonization Movement in Kentucky shows that there was considerable racial antagonism in the state prior to the Civil War. This antagonism seems to have been directed more against the Negro race in the abstract, than against individual Negroes. There is little evidence of actual conflicts between the two races; indeed, even the discussions of possible conflict sound a bit stilted. The attitude of the White men towards the free Negro (this attitude did not extend to the slave) was one of supreme contempt. The colonization movement in Kentucky was an effort, not only to colonize the free Negro and emancipated slave, but also to remove the slave so manumitted from the despised free Negro class.

There was much intellectual dishonesty in the approach of the colonizationists to the slavery question. The slave-owner welcomed colonization, but only as an added insurance against the further disintegration of the institution of slavery. That he was not interested in emancipation is evident from the few slaves emancipated under the plan of colonization. The non-slave-holding colonizationists promoted the movement as an emancipation plan, but he was unwilling to admit that the slave-owner deserved any special consideration by reason of the loss incurred in the emancipation of his slaves. The slave-owner was expected to bear not only the initial loss of his slaves, but the added expense of colonization.

In their approach to the race problem, colonizationists were equally vulnerable. While the average Kentuckian was not open minded

enough to admit that the White and the Negro races might live together on a plane of equality, he was not brutal enough to admit that the simplest solution of such a problem is the elminiation of one of the races. He sought rather to soften the harshness of the theory of race superiority by holding out to the Negro the prospect of winning the Continent of Africa to Christianity and democracy. The same free Negro, who was believed to be beyond the enlightening influence of education or the civilizing force of religion was to plant democracy in the wilds of Africa and to carry the blessings of Christianity to its barbarous tribes.

In all of this confusion, the Kentucky Negroes alone seem to have been realistic. Throughout the whole period of colonization they remained an inert, inarticulate mass, obstructing the plans of their superiors and proving themselves to have been historically right. A New York Negro, more violent than the Kentucky type, gave one of the best Negro answers to the whole plan of colonization as a solution of the American race problem. In an appeal to his fellow American Negroes to hold fast to their heritage, he says:

Do the colonizationists think to send us off without first being reconciled to us? Do they think to bundle us up like brutes and send us off, as they did our brethern of the State of Ohio... Remember Americans, that we must and shall be free and enlightened as you are, will you wait until we shall, under God, obtain our liberty by the crushing arm of power? Will it not be dreadful for you? I speak, Americans, for your good... And wo, wo, will be to you if we have to obtain our freedom by fighting. Throw away your fears and prejudices then... And tell us no more about colonization, for America is as much our country as it is yours.¹

1. Walker, David, Walker's Appeal in Four Articles With a Preamble. (Boston, 1830) pp. 70-72. (Italics mine.)

That the Colonization Movement, which aroused considerable popular interest in Kentucky, was able to accomplish so little was due, perhaps in part, to the fact that the crest of the wave of enthusiasm that swept the state on the introduction of colonization in 1830 was allowed to subside before adequate leadership was provided. Had the need for some form of racial adjustment been as imperative as some of the colonization leaders would have us believe, however, it is probable that the state itself would have provided this leadership. It seems rather that the agitation against the free Negro was to a great extent manufactured, and when the craze of hysteria had subsided the average Kentuckian viewed quite indifferently the harmless free Negroes about him.

The failure of the Colonization Movement in Kentucky was merely the natural concomitant of its failure throughout the United States. Colonization never advanced beyond the experimental stage. Reviewing colonization history from the vantage point of thirty years experience, Clay, in 1848, emphasized this aspect of the case, saying that in planting and sustaining a colony in Africa the Society had reached its objective. The future success of the movement depended on government cooperation.¹ The plan of colonization, if not the actual colony at Liberia, came very near obtaining such government aid in 1863. In that year an appropriation of \$600,000. was voted by congress, to be used for the colonization of free people of color in central America, and on the Island of A'Vache, in Haiti. It was proposed to send out 5000 settlers as an experiment, and should the initial attempt prove successful, to augment the number from

1. American Colonization Society Annual Report. (1848) p. 21.

year to year. The project had the personal direction and promotion of President Lincoln, but both men and the elements seem to have conspired against its success. There was political intrigue, suspicion of treason, a plague on board ship, and seemingly criminal negligence, due perhaps to the inexperience of the promoters, in the direction of the undertaking. A mere handful of the original expedition was brought back to the United States eight months after being landed in Haiti.¹

The fallacy behind a movement such as the colonization of a disturbing racial element lies in the assumption that because there is a race conflict, there is a superior and an inferior race. There was in the period under discussion only a stronger and weaker race. Colonization may not have been the best solution of the problem. We know that it is not the only one. It is, at any rate, to the credit of the colonizationists that as far back as the beginning of the Nineteenth Century they made an attempt to solve the Negro race problem, a problem that we have not completely solved even today.

1. Tuckerman, "President Lincoln and Colonization." Magazine of American History (October, 1887), pp. 329-331.

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