

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Abraham Lincoln and Colonization

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In 1836 a young Illinois state legislator named Abraham Lincoln campaigned for reelection as a supporter of a bill then pending in Congress under the sponsorship of Henry Clay. Some weeks before, the famed U.S. Senator from Kentucky had reintroduced a bill to finance the “American System” economic program by distributing the proceeds of federal land sales to the states and prescribing their use on a variety of public projects.¹ As a follower of Clay and adherent of the “American System” himself, Lincoln recognized that the measure would “enable our state, in common with others, to dig canals and construct rail roads, without borrowing money and paying interest on it.”² The scant surviving material from Lincoln’s reelection campaign indicates the land bill was his recurring theme, though without any further specificity than this brief endorsement. Curiously, it may mark Lincoln’s earliest encounter with another hallmark of Clay’s lengthy political career. The same 1836 land distribution proposal contained an additional provision for expenditures abroad. If adopted, a portion of the land proceeds would be set aside for the states to establish the state-level agencies tasked with the colonization of free and manumitted African-Americans in Liberia.

It is unknown when Lincoln himself adopted the cause of colonization, though he likely followed Clay’s early lead on the issue and was almost certainly a supporter by the mid-1840s.³ Clay himself was a co-founder and longtime president of the American Colonization Society (ACS), the controversial progenitor of Liberia. Colonization itself was an oddity of antebellum politics, occupying a moderate and somewhat precarious antislavery position that often appealed to moralizing slaveholders of the upper south—such as Clay—as well as conservative antislavery northerners who saw immediatist abolition as an unduly risky source of social unrest.

Loosely speaking, the premise of Clay’s brand of colonization was to facilitate a slow weaning of the nation from slavery by encouraging the gradual emancipation of slaves—often with compensation to their owners—in exchange for their transport back to Africa. The motives

¹ The “American System” espoused an economic program of protective tariffs, “internal improvements” expenditures on transportation, and public education funding. It was incorporated into the platform of the Whig Party under the leadership of Henry Clay and later shaped the economic tenets of the newly formed Republican Party. Many American System adherents also incorporated colonization into their ideology as a way to reduce economic dependency on slavery with a program of gradual emancipation.

² To the Editor of the *Sangamo Journal*, June 13, 1836 in Roy P. Basler, ed. *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 10 vols. (Norwalk, CT: Easton Press, 1993), 1:48 (hereafter referred to as *CW*).

³ Lincoln likely traveled to Lexington, Kentucky to hear Clay speak at least twice in the 1840s. The first occasion—dated to around 1846 by journalist Noah Brooks—was to attend a colonization speech. Lincoln was again in the audience on November 13, 1847 when Clay delivered an influential speech criticizing the Mexican War, which also prominently enlisted colonization as a solution to the problem of slavery.

of the colonization movement were often mixed and prone to internal conflict, even to the extent that the ACS downplayed its antislavery elements so as not to alienate southerners. Some colonizationists viewed its endeavors as a necessary step to prevent racial conflict should emancipation ever come. Others saw missionary objectives wherein American ex-slaves would serve a purpose of “civilizing” Africa with a Christian, not to mention American, imprint. Some slave-owning colonizationists even turned to the movement as a means of reducing the free black population, thought to be a hotbed of abolitionist sentiments that could fuel and harbor a slave revolt. The ACS also had an existing, if persistently uneasy relationship with African-Americans themselves, and particularly early backers of emigration who saw an exodus abroad as a more promising route to political and social equality than anything offered by remaining in the United States.⁴

Like Clay, Lincoln’s brand of colonization carried an antislavery flavor that became increasingly pronounced with the rise of slavery as a sectional issue. Lincoln always insisted that the enterprise should remain strictly voluntary, but he also considered it a necessary component of the eventual pathway to emancipation and genuinely believed that African-Americans would come to discover that relocation was in their own best interest as well, once the project was underway. Elements of racial prejudice and, perhaps more pronounced with Lincoln, racial paternalism shaped this belief, although it also encompassed an honest concern for the wellbeing of blacks in a post-slavery society where other and more malicious forms of racial oppression would likely persist in no shortage. Thus Lincoln came to embrace Clay’s colonization program and incorporate it into his own emerging gradual emancipationist platform from the late 1840s through the duration of his presidency.

When Clay died in 1852, Lincoln used the occasion of a widely celebrated eulogy address to affirm and explain his colonizationist position at length. After identifying colonization as a means of “freeing our land from the dangerous presence of slavery” while also “restoring a captive people to their long-lost father-land, with bright prospects for the future,” Lincoln concluded with an endorsement that was both strong and unequivocal. A gradual emancipation, effected by colonization, “will indeed be a glorious consummation.”⁵

Adopting Clay’s old Whig formula of pairing gradual compensated emancipation with the voluntary resettlement of the slaves abroad, Lincoln made colonization a recurring and distinctive feature of his own tempered yet consistent antislavery politics. His association with the policy was sufficiently established by 1853 that he was specifically sought out by Reverend James Mitchell, the Midwestern agent of the ACS, during the latter’s visit to Springfield to organize a formal state-level colonization society in Illinois. This acquaintance would prove to be of lasting significance, as Lincoln later brought Mitchell to Washington to administer his own colonization programs. Lincoln quickly became active in the nascent Illinois Colonization Society after Mitchell’s visit, serving as a manager of the organization and speaking before it at least twice. He supported colonization efforts financially on more than one occasion, and formally joined the national ACS in 1856 when another of its recruiters visited Springfield.⁶ Colonization also played a role in Lincoln’s lesser known 1854 bid for the United States Senate. He addressed

⁴ Beverly C. Tomek, *Colonization and its Discontents* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Phillip W. Magness, “The American System and the Political Economy of Black Colonization.” *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 37, no. 2 (June 2015): 187-202.

⁵ Eulogy on Henry Clay, July 6, 1852, *CW*, 2:132.

⁶ James Finley to Ralph R. Gurley, August 14, 1856, Letters Received, American Colonization Society Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

a colonizationist meeting in the Illinois State House a few days before the Senate selection proceedings began in the legislature, the contents of which only survive through a short scrap of paper and accompanying news reports.⁷ In all likelihood his remarks attempted to shore up a then-pending bill to establish a state colonization agency in Illinois, a project of Mitchell's design that enjoyed the support of Stephen Trigg Logan, a state legislator and former Lincoln law partner. The speech reaffirmed Lincoln's antislavery gradualism, though it also reportedly cost him support in the Senate race among immediatist abolitionists in the legislature.

Colonization became a staple of Lincoln's speeches and public comments on the emerging slavery debate after the Kansas-Nebraska Act controversy foisted it onto the national stage in 1854. Though he tempered the suggestion with a concern for the enormous practical challenges of a transatlantic relocation, Lincoln raised the colonization solution in his famous Peoria address of 1854: "My first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia—to their own native land."⁸ Cost-consciousness loomed large in Lincoln's approach to colonization. From the founding of the ACS in 1816 to the 1850s, the proposal was almost universally associated with Liberia or another locale on the African coast. The ACS itself purchased a passenger ship to make the Liberia transit and lobbied at times for federal support to make routine voyages viable. At a month's travel time and passenger lists in the dozens as opposed to the tens of thousands envisioned in any large-scale colonization program, the African venture was logistically prohibitive—a realization that Lincoln came to note in his own advocacy. "All the rest of your property would not pay for sending [the freed slaves] to Liberia," he told an audience at Leavenworth, Kansas in 1859.⁹ Yet he was by no means ready to abandon Henry Clay's project to its expenses. As Lincoln argued in a much-publicized rebuttal of the *Dred Scott* decision:

The enterprise is a difficult one; but "when there is a will there is a way;" and what colonization needs most is a hearty will. Will springs from the two elements of moral sense and self-interest. Let us be brought to believe it is morally right, and, at the same time, favorable to, or, at least, not against, our interest, to transfer the African to his native clime, and we shall find a way to do it, however great the task may be. The children of Israel, to such numbers as to include four hundred thousand fighting men, went out of Egyptian bondage in a body.¹⁰

Lincoln, like many moderate antislavery colonizationists of the time, was coming to realize that the venture's only chance at fiscal and logistic viability lay not on the African continent but in the tropics of Central America and the Caribbean—then only a week's journey by ship, and on regular trade routes from the major North American ports. It is not entirely clear exactly when Lincoln shifted his direction from Liberia to a closer locale, and even into his presidency he still entertained a number of smaller colonization requests from Liberia and the ACS. Yet Central America emerged as a new and favored locale for colonization in the late 1850s, particularly within the moderate wing of the Republican Party. Colonizationist converts to the American tropics included Senator James Rood Doolittle of Wisconsin and the political dynasty of Francis

⁷ Outline for a Speech to the Colonization Society, *CW*, 2:299.

⁸ Speech at Peoria, Illinois. October 16, 1854. *CW*, 2:255.

⁹ Speech at Leavenworth, Kansas, December 3, 1859 *CW*, 3:499.

¹⁰ Speech at Springfield, June 26, 1857, *CW*, 2: 409.

Preston Blair, Sr. and his two sons Frank, Jr. and Montgomery.¹¹ By the time of his election in 1860, it is probably fair to place Lincoln within this camp as well.

Colonization and the Presidency

Lincoln entered office as a relatively well-known supporter of colonization, owing to numerous speeches he had given on the subject over the previous decade including a self-asserted claim on the mantle of Clay's old program. Though he became a member of the national ACS in 1856, he remained at arm's length from their often-guarded political forays and shifted his attention toward the American tropics by the outset of his presidency. Montgomery Blair obtained a cabinet appointment as Postmaster General, and James Doolittle became a frequent White House conferee on colonization policy. Lincoln also put out his first colonization feelers in the opening weeks of his presidency. At various points in 1861 the State Department instructed diplomats Elisha Oscar Crosby, the new U.S. minister to Guatemala, and Charles A. Leas, a consular official who rotated through several Caribbean posts, to investigate what would almost certainly prove a politically delicate venture.¹² The filibustering episodes of William Walker were still fresh in Central American memory, even as Lincoln's designs for the region diverged sharply from them in motive and purpose—a point he likely intended to signal with these early overtures. Chatter of a pathway to colonization also lurked in the background of pending diplomatic negotiations with the Danish government, initiated during the Buchanan presidency, in which the U.S. Navy sought to settle the intercepted recaptives of the international slave trade on the Caribbean island of St. Croix.¹³

By late 1861, the White House was taking its first steps to initiate a formal colonization program. Around this time Lincoln recruited Reverend James Mitchell, his old Midwestern colonization movement acquaintance, to join his administration. "James Mitchell," the president told Secretary of State William Henry Seward, "I know, and like. He was, for years, colonization agent, for Indiana."¹⁴ Lincoln next used the occasion of his First Annual Message to Congress in December 1861 to raise the issue of colonization publicly, and propose federal support in conjunction with his own emerging efforts to tackle the problem of slavery amidst the raging Civil War. He pressed for funding to accompany the Union's newly codified confiscation policy wherein escaped slaves from the insurrectionary states were deemed contrabands of war in the possession of the Union army as a means of granting their freedom. To address this growing population, as well as slaves freed through a number of state level gradual emancipation proposals he was pressing at the time, Lincoln asked Congress that "steps be taken for colonizing both classes...at some place or places in a climate congenial to them."¹⁵ The locale was left intentionally vague, and the president suggested this venture may also justify future territorial

¹¹ Frank P. Blair, Jr., "On the Acquisition of Territory in Central and South America, to be Colonized with Free Blacks, and Held as a Dependency by the United States," *Cong. Globe*, 35th Cong., 1st Sess. 293 (1858).

¹² Elisha O. Crosby and Charles A. Barker. *Memoirs of Elisha O. Crosby*, (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1945), 87; "Negro Emigration: An Experiment by the Government During the War," *Baltimore Sun*, February 26, 1890.

¹³ Michael J. Douma and Anders Bo Rasmussen, "The Danish St. Croix Project: Revisiting the Lincoln Colonization Program with Foreign-Language Sources," *American Nineteenth Century History* 15, no. 3 (2014): 311-42.

¹⁴ Lincoln to Seward, October 3, 1861, *CW*, 4:547.

¹⁵ Annual Message to Congress, December 3, 1861, *CW*, 4:48.

acquisition by the United States. Yet he also opened another avenue by simultaneously urging the extension of diplomatic recognition to the black republics of Haiti and Liberia—a move that Montgomery Blair in particular had urged for the purpose of facilitating colonization arrangements with those nations.

Congressional action on colonization came from a succession of somewhat disjointed authorizations in the spring and summer of 1862. In early April, the Senate advanced a bill to emancipate the slaves of the District of Columbia, where legislative jurisdiction permitted such a move without a constitutional amendment. Though supportive in principle, Lincoln viewed this law as premature and politically problematic as it signaled an antislavery action at a time when the ability of the Union to hold the slaveholding Border States was still uncertain. Led by abolitionist Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, congressional Republicans pressed the matter nonetheless—in part as an intended rebuke to the White House’s policy of enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act at the Washington D.C. jail. A colonization appropriation of \$100,000 was attached to the bill by James Doolittle, who would later write of its critical significance in obtaining a reluctant president’s acquiescence. After a day’s wait of genuine uncertainty about his intentions, Lincoln signed the bill on April 16, issuing a statement that reiterated Clay’s old Whig formula: “I am gratified that the two principles of compensation, and colonization, are both recognized, and practically applied in the act.”¹⁶

This comment and a lengthy report on prospective colonization locales penned a few weeks later by Mitchell placed the administration’s colonization policy on record before the public, though the scheme already had its skeptics inside the administration and beyond. On the cabinet, Lincoln counted Blair, Interior Secretary Caleb Blood Smith (whose department housed the colonization functions of the government), and Attorney General Edward Bates as supporters. Others were critical for specific reasons, such as Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton who viewed colonization as a competitor to his own department’s use of the contrabands as laborers and, later, soldiers, or the fiscally cautious and abolition-inclined Salmon Portland Chase at the Treasury. Most significantly though, Seward personally soured on the concept as it developed and, while never directly insubordinate, adopted the practice of dragging his feet—and with them, diplomatic progress—where most matters of colonization were concerned.¹⁷

Lincoln moved quickly though and, while it remains little known in the historical literature, hosted a meeting on colonization with two appointed representatives of the government of Liberia on the day after he signed the D.C. Emancipation Act. The delegates, which included the noted black abolitionist and African missionary Alexander Crummell, apparently discussed the newly available funding as a means of supporting transit across the Atlantic for ex-slave applicants from the District.¹⁸ Negotiations over Liberia persisted off and on for the next year, though they only yielded a handful of emigrants setting sail for Monrovia on May 25, 1863.¹⁹

¹⁶ Message to Congress, April 16, 1862, *CW*, 5:192.

¹⁷ A possible exception to this pattern of behavior by Seward may be found in his approach to Danish St. Croix, which he desired to acquire for strategic geopolitical regions. See Douma and Rasmussen.

¹⁸ Abraham Lincoln to Alexander Crummell, May 5, 1862, republished in the *Boston Herald*, May 15, 1862; Johnson to Lincoln, March 3, 1863, Miscellaneous Letters, Slave Trade and Negro Colonization Records, reel 8, M160, RG 48.4.9., National Archives.

¹⁹ Phillip W. Magness, “Wither Liberia? Civil War Emancipation and Freedmen Resettlement in West Africa,” *The Civil War Monitor* <http://www.civilwarmonitor.com/commentary/wither-liberia-civil-war-emancipation-and-freedmen-resettlement-in-east-africa>, accessed August 27, 2015.

In the subsequent months Congress expanded colonization funding in two areas. The first, attached to an insurrectionary land confiscation law, dedicated one fourth of the sales proceeds of seized rebel lands to colonization through a fund to be allocated by the U.S. Treasury Department on a state-by-state basis.²⁰ The second law dedicated an additional \$500,000 to the colonization of contrabands outside of the District of Columbia, adopted in conjunction with the Second Confiscation Act of that summer. Both laws were passed under the White House's direct guidance. In the latter case, Mitchell and Interior Secretary Caleb Smith directly drafted the text of the bill's enacting clause to a surprising, albeit lukewarm, supporter of colonization, House Ways and Means Committee chairman Thaddeus Stevens.²¹

Despite his early meeting with Crummell about Liberia, Lincoln's geographic interests had already shifted elsewhere and by the summer of 1862 he was actively developing a larger scale colonization scheme on the Isthmus of Panama. The site was strategic for the obvious reason of a transit link to the Pacific and thus California, yet it also offered a possible pathway around an American agreement with Great Britain to abstain from unilateral territorial expansion in Central America under the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850. As Panama belonged to Colombia, Seward advanced an argument that its contiguity with the South American continent fell beyond the purview of the treaty, and with it any requirement to obtain British consent for the eventual construction of a canal.

The Panamanian venture took shape under a proposition from American shipbuilder Ambrose W. Thompson, who claimed a title to a large tract of land starting at the Chiriqui lagoon near the disputed Panama-Costa Rica border. Thompson had approached the U.S. government some years earlier with claims of coal deposits on his land to sustain a steamship fueling station, reports of a gold vein, and the long-term promise of surveying a route for an isthmian crossing. With colonization now funded and soon to be underway, he approached Lincoln with a proposal to colonize some 50,000 freedmen—and potential for growth to twice that number—on the Chiriqui site where they could also find employment digging the canal.

“The particular place I have in view is to be a great highway from the Atlantic or Caribbean Sea to the Pacific Ocean.” With this direct allusion to the proposed canal, Lincoln presented his colonization vision to a small group of African Americans at a widely publicized White House event on August 14, 1862. The speech was arranged by Mitchell as something of a public launch with a particular eye towards convincing the free black community, many of whom were skeptical of colonization, to give the president's policy a serious look. Lincoln's remarks on the occasion have long been considered a low point of his presidency. Even a cursory read reveals a patronizing speech in which he blamed the coming of the Civil War on the presence of the black race and announced “It is better for us both, therefore, to be separated.”²² Lincoln adopted “the language and arguments of an itinerant Colonization lecturer, showing all his inconsistencies, his pride of race and blood, his contempt for Negroes and his canting hypocrisy,” to borrow Frederick Douglass's scathing assessment.²³ Yet for all the scorn and derision that the remarks provoked, they also represented Lincoln's colonization vision at near-maturity, including his honest belief that white racism in a post-slavery United States would continue to plague African-

²⁰ An Act for the collection of direct taxes in insurrectionary districts within the United States and for other purposes, 425 Stat. 12 (1862).

²¹ Caleb B. Smith to Thaddeus Stevens, July 3, 1862, Caleb Blood Smith correspondence, Smith-Spooner Papers, Huntington Library, SS 366.

²² Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Negroes, August 14, 1862, *CW*, 55:372-3.

²³ “The President and His Speeches,” *Douglass' Monthly*, September 1862.

Americans to the point that their future could only be secured abroad.

Equally telling, these were no mere words or political palliatives to fall by the wayside. Lincoln moved forward aggressively on the scheme and gave it his personal attention. The very same week that George McClellan rushed to meet Robert E. Lee's invading army at Antietam, Lincoln spent many hours scanning over and personally editing a contract with Ambrose Thompson to commence the colonization venture. To carry out the task he commissioned Senator Samuel Clarke Pomeroy of Kansas to recruit an initial group of emigrants from the growing contrabands population—perhaps 14,000, or at least Pomeroy claimed as many signed his now-lost lists—for transport to the isthmus. Pomeroy was reportedly on the verge of securing suitable vessels to sail when the project came to an abrupt stop not long after the contract was signed.

A number of factors rapidly converged against the Chiriqui scheme in October and November 1862. The legality of the Chiriqui colony's land grant, and even the boundaries and validity of Thompson's claim, provoked the diplomatic ire of other Central American countries as well as—at least initially—Britain, and a scientific query into the quality of the promised coal deposits at the site came back negative. Perhaps most significantly, the government of Colombia was torn between two competing regimes at the time, casting deep uncertainty over whether the land grant would be honored. Lincoln evidently wished only to place the expedition on hold as these political issues were resolved, though at some point in the winter of 1862-63 he also learned of a more pressing problem that would plague colonization efforts for the remainder of his presidency. The Chiriqui project had become infested with graft, including collusive skimming from the colonization accounts by several high level public officials. Pomeroy in particular likely absconded with several thousand dollars from the appropriated funds. Further evidence implicated Richard Wigginton Thompson—a former Indiana congressman in the employ of the company that possessed the land claim—and John Palmer Usher, the deputy Secretary of the Interior who in January 1863 saw himself elevated to the cabinet post after the resignation of Caleb B. Smith for health reasons. The Chiriqui project was never formally closed, with elements of its land claims persisting as late as the 1880s as the canal component gained renewed attention. Yet mired in corruption and facing a number of political obstacles, the colonizationists in the administration had to turn their more immediate attention elsewhere.²⁴

None of this dampened Lincoln's enthusiasm for colonization, which prominently appeared as a component of his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation of September 22, 1862. After an extended cabinet discussion, Lincoln insisted on a pledge to continue colonization on a voluntary basis—a recurring proviso of his version of the policy. Shortly thereafter he instructed Seward to solicit partnerships in colonization with foreign governments, and particularly the European powers with West Indian colonies.²⁵ Prodded by the Blairs who had come to patronize an alternative scheme in Haiti, Lincoln also received a colonization proposal from businessman Bernard Kock around this time. Kock possessed a lease from the Haitian government over the Île à Vache, a small island off the southern coast near the city of Aux Cayes, which he hoped to

²⁴ Sebastian N. Page, "Lincoln and Chiriqui Colonization Revisited," *American Nineteenth Century History* 12, no. 3 (2011): 289-325; Paul J. Scheips, "Lincoln and the Chiriqui Colonization Project," *Journal of Negro History* 37, no. 4 (October 1952): 418-53.

²⁵ Gideon Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), September 26, 1862; Salmon P. Chase, *Diary and Correspondence of Salmon P. Chase*, (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1902), September 22, 1862.

populate with freedmen employed in the cultivation of sea island cotton.²⁶

Referring to some of the political difficulties that beset the Central American project in late 1862 including both the protests of the “Spanish-American republics” and the “interested motives” behind some colonization schemes, Lincoln used his Second Annual Message to Congress that December to signal an impending shift in the policy. Instead of seeking contractors, he proposed to deal with “the several states situated within the tropics, or having colonies there” on diplomatic terms, presumably by treaty or formal agreement with their governments. Lincoln also used the occasion to propose a largely forgotten constitutional amendment pertaining to colonization. Coupled with two other proposed amendments that were intended to initiate a compensated emancipation scheme, the measure provided that “Congress may appropriate money, and otherwise provide, for colonizing free colored persons, with their own consent, at any place or places without the United States.” His apparent intent was to provide clear constitutional sanction for the program, and particularly its extension to African-Americans outside of the Confederate states, as all resettlement appropriations to that point had been tied to the “contrabands” policy and were therefore legally constrained to the war power.²⁷ Congress proved to be a reluctant mover on the constitutional proposal, likely to Lincoln’s surprise given that he was actively pressing the Whig formula on the loyal Border States as a means to ending slavery there. Yet all considerations were also couched in another measure on which Lincoln also pledged his intentions, the approaching Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863.

Emancipation, Colonization, and the Second Wave

Several generations of historians have imputed significance into the final Emancipation Proclamation’s ostensible silence on colonization, supposing that it signaled a “shift” in the president’s priorities and, perhaps, the abandonment of the program to either political realities or a personal change of heart. Far less attention has been paid to an anonymous editorial in the *Washington Morning Chronicle* of January 2, 1863, predicting “a successful and prosperous colonization within the tropics of this continent of the black nation today liberated by the President’s wise and just decree.”²⁸ Belying the notion that colonization had run its course in the Lincoln White House, these words actually came from the pen of the president’s private secretary John Nicolay. They offered a glimpse into a shift of another sort, in which the administration was finally moving to execute its much-discussed voluntary resettlement policy.

Colonization was doubtlessly on the president’s own mind when he signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln had spent the late hours of the previous evening in a meeting with Senator Doolittle, Francis P. Blair, Sr., and Bernard Kock where they hammered out an agreement to settle 5,000 contrabands on the Île à Vache. Doolittle and Kock returned with the final draft of the contract on the morning of January 1st, obtaining Lincoln’s signature about an hour before he issued the Proclamation. By one account of their discussion, Lincoln was already

²⁶ James D. Lockett, “Abraham Lincoln and Colonization,” *Journal of Black Studies* 21, no. 4 (June 1991): 428–44; Phillip W. Magness, “The Île à Vache: From Hope to Disaster,” *New York Times*, Disunion blog, April 12, 2013, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/?s=The+%C3%8Eile+%C3%A0+Vache>, accessed August 26, 2015.

²⁷ “Second Annual Message to Congress,” December 1, 1862. *CW*, 5, 520, 530.

²⁸ “The Proclamation,” *Washington Daily Morning Chronicle*, January 2, 1863, in Michael Burlingame, ed. *With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and Other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860-1865*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 99-102.

aware of the problems of political intrigue surrounding colonization and cautioned its participants to keep the specific terms confidential.²⁹ With sizable appropriations behind it, colonization had drawn dozens of speculators, investors, foreign agents, and even con artists out of the woodwork, each claiming to hold tropical lands that would be suitable for a freedmen's settlement backed by federal subsidy. Colonization was a potentially lucrative business, as even public officials like Pomeroy and Usher were then learning, and competitor schemes abounded.

Though he possessed a number of documents from the Haitian government, Kock was one such investor and word of his agreement with the president quickly spawned a series of rumors that he had ulterior designs to hand his settlers over to the Confederacy for re-enslavement. We may only speculate as to the source among the myriad political interests who viewed Île à Vache as a rival to other locales, and though the rumors were ultimately unfounded they did foreshadow other faults in Kock's character. The Île à Vache agreement was nonetheless suspended and delayed until April 1863, when it was reissued under a new partnership carrying the guarantees of New York financiers Paul S. Forbes and Charles K. Tuckerman. The revamped contract came with the backing of several Wall Street investors including *New York Times* editor Henry Jarvis Raymond, and was likely seen as a security against the pitfalls that had plagued the earlier Chiriqui contract. With agreement in hand, Kock set sail from Fort Monroe, Virginia in mid-April. His chartered ship *Ocean Ranger* carried a little over 460 colonists, most of them recruits from a contrabands camp near the fort.

The voyage was plagued with poor planning, further political intrigue, and chance misfortune from the outset. Even before their arrival in Haiti, several settlers succumbed to a smallpox outbreak on the ship. They arrived at the island to find it largely unprepared to receive even a small colony, with minimal supplies on site and almost no dwellings. An anticipated supply ship that was supposed to arrive in the following weeks never set sail, itself a casualty of extended bickering between the Île à Vache financiers and the Interior Department over the release of colonization funding. The wrangling centered on disputed claims as to whether the Île à Vache partners had satisfied a contract clause with the U.S. government requiring certification of the settlers by Haitian authorities. It did not help that Usher, with his stake in the competing Chiriqui venture, had assumed the helm of the Interior Department and, with it, administrative control over the colonization accounts. Whatever the source of the disputed payments, the practical effect was to leave the colonists without sufficient supply and under the control of the increasingly autocratic Kock, now styling himself as the "governor" of the colony.

Though the Île à Vache venture lingered in turmoil, Lincoln had already initiated a new second wave of colonization projects along the model described in his December message to Congress, this time dealing directly with foreign governments that possessed tropical holdings in the Caribbean and Central America. Initiated in January 1863, in the weeks following the Proclamation, these arrangements intentionally sought to sidestep the problems the White House had thus far experienced with shady private contractors and disputed land claims. Lincoln first reached out to Lord Richard Bickerton Pemmell Lyons, the British minister to the United States, in late January and presented him with an ambitious proposal to transport colonists to the British

²⁹ Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, December 31, 1862, in Virginia Jeans Laas, ed. *Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 223; Bernard Kock, *Statement of Facts in Relation to the Settlement on the Island of A'Vache, near Hayti, W.I., of a Colony under Bernard Kock, with Documentary Evidence and Affidavits* (New York: William C. Bryant, 1864), 4-5; John T. Doyle, "An Episode of the Civil War," *Overland Monthly* 9, no. 53 (May 1887), 541.

West Indies. Around the same time James Shepherd Pike, the U.S. minister to the Netherlands, initiated formal treaty negotiations to the same effect with the Dutch government to establish a similar emigration program to its own South American colony of Suriname.³⁰

Notably, the negotiations with both were conducted through top-level diplomatic channels well outside of the public eye or even the majority of the government. Congress was almost entirely in the dark, save the vague reference in Lincoln's December message, and would remain so for over a year after the European powers were first approached. Lincoln, Seward, and Mitchell were present at the initial meeting with Lyons. Beyond them, knowledge of the project only extended to the cabinet by administrative necessity, as with Usher, or personal advocacy, as in the case of Montgomery Blair. The British Foreign Office was initially skeptical of the proposition, worried that Confederate claims made upon the resettled contrabands could draw Her Majesty's Government into the political complexities of the raging Civil War. Yet the proposal found an advocate in the Duke of Newcastle, the Colonial Secretary who welcomed the black colonists as a solution to a labor-starved economic malaise afflicting many of the West Indian territories. The strongest interest by far came from the largely undeveloped and lightly populated colony of British Honduras, or modern day Belize. In April, the government in London dispatched a colonial land agent named John Hodge to Washington to commence the negotiations.

Hodge met with Lincoln at the White House shortly after his arrival and advanced a proposal wherein the crown-backed British Honduras Company would recruit up to 50,000 freedmen colonists over the next decade. Noting the labor-starved conditions of the colony, Hodge was willing to finance the settlers' transport to Belize City through designated ports of embarkation in the northeast. This would in turn free the federal government's colonization funds for recruitment and administrative assistance in their embarkation. The plan also carried a further appeal, stressed by Mitchell and Hodge alike: its gradual execution would likely extend beyond the war's conclusion and accelerate at that time so as not to distract from more immediate and pressing military matters.

Lincoln had wanted New Orleans included in the list of ports and pressed for a formal treaty, though the hesitant British negotiators scaled these requests back to a simple emigration agreement between the two governments. Although the plan enjoyed the backing of Mitchell and Blair, Hodge's efforts met resistance from Usher, who tightened access to federal funds, as well as Secretary of War Stanton, who viewed the entire scheme as competition for soldier recruitment and blocked Hodge's access to the contrabands camps. After uniting his efforts with a similar proposal from the South American British colony of Guiana, Hodge obtained a second audience with Lincoln at the White House on June 13, 1863 to break the impasse. The meeting concluded with a presidential authorization permitting British Honduras and Guiana to commence recruitment of settlers and pledging the assistance of the U.S. government in this task. Further attesting that his interest remained with the resettlement program, Lincoln told Hodge at the meeting that colonization was his "honest desire" and countermanded the administrative impediments that Usher and Stanton had created to the project in the intervening months.³¹ In a

³⁰ Phillip W. Magness and Sebastian N. Page, *Colonization after Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011); Michael J. Douma, "The Lincoln Administration's Negotiations to Colonize African Americans in Dutch Suriname," *Civil War History*, 61, no. 2 (June 2015): 111-137.

³¹ Abraham Lincoln, Pass for John Hodge and S.R. Dickson, June 13, 1863, U.S. Department of the Interior, , Slave Trade and Negro Colonization Records, M160, RG 48, National Archives Branch

few weeks' time, Hodge returned to Belize City with a small American delegation in tow. Among them was John Willis Menard, an African-American emigrationist previously in the employ of Mitchell's office who had been tasked with surveying the site for the administration.

As the imperial schemes developed, the situation on Île à Vache devolved into chaos. Kock's autocratic attempts to govern the island and the continued shortage of supplies found him forcibly exiled to the Haitian mainland. Conflicting reports about the condition of the remaining settlers reached Washington through two less-than-impartial channels: James DeLong, the U.S. consul at Aux Cayes and a backer of a competing Haitian colonization scheme, and A. A. Ripka, an investigator hired by the New York financiers to allow them to collect their promised federal funding. After hearing reports of disease and starvation on the island, Usher was eventually forced to appoint D. C. Donnohue, an Indiana judge and old legal circuit acquaintance, to investigate the site for the government over the fall and winter of 1863. After Donnohue's report of the colony's destitution reached Washington, Lincoln dispatched a rescue ship to retrieve the remaining settlers. Though some chose to remain on the mainland and subsequently integrated into Haitian society, just under 300 survivors of the ill-fated colony docked at Alexandria, Virginia in March 1864. With no small irony, one of Stanton's recruiters reportedly greeted them at the docks and mustered an unknown number into the army.

Even as the Île à Vache expedition succumbed to abandonment, followed by rescue, the colonization negotiations that Lincoln launched with the European powers in early 1863 advanced with initial promise. Working from Europe, Pike drafted a formal colonization treaty with the Netherlands and conveyed it to Washington in late 1863 for intended Senate ratification. The investigative mission to British Honduras returned in late September 1863 with a cautious but favorable recommendation after visiting a sugar mill that Hodge was constructing near the settlement. Lincoln himself was further inclined to press forward on colonization by that summer's Draft Riots in New York City. The destructive episode, in which mobs indiscriminately attacked and in some cases lynched members of the city's African-American community, convinced the president that the greatest challenge for a post-slavery United States would be violence perpetrated against former slaves by white majorities. Colonization, he reportedly affirmed to Mitchell shortly after the riots, offered African-Americans an escape route to a better life.³²

Lincoln's reaction to the riots brought him onto unexpected common ground with a sizable minority of the North's free black population. While most African-Americans viewed the president's colonization overtures with skepticism, couched in both the vigorous opposition of Frederick Douglass and lingering suspicion from decades of tension with the ACS over Liberia, the riots had a profound effect upon a segment of New York City's black leadership. Reverend Henry Highland Garnet, a black abolitionist who narrowly escaped the riot mobs himself, shifted his longstanding emigration interests in Liberia to British Honduras in the wake of the attacks. After hosting Menard for a lecture upon his return to the United States, Garnet's organization approached Mitchell for funding to carry several hundred free African-Americans from New York to Belize City. Mitchell secured the group an audience with Lincoln in early November

Depository, College Park, MD, (hereafter cited as STNCR) Additional copies existent in the National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew; National Archives of Jamaica, Spanish Town; and Belize Archives and Records Service, Belmopan; John Hodge to Lord Lyons, July 9, 1863, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, CO 318/239.

³² Interview with James Mitchell, "Lincoln and the Negro," *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, August 26, 1894.

1863, and attempted to arrange for the lease of the ACS's own ship, the *Mary Caroline Stevens*, for the voyage.³³ Despite promising reports from the meeting with Lincoln, the planned expedition came to naught due to administrative obstacles that slowed the colonization project to a halt in early 1864.

Unlike Île à Vache, no single factor spelled the end of the British and Dutch projects although much of the trouble traced to the matter of funding. Unfortunately for Garnet's delegation, only former slaves from the rebellious states and the District of Columbia were named in the 1862 colonization statutes. Usher applied this clause narrowly and increasingly used it to constrict Mitchell's own sometimes-competing colonization objectives. By January 1864, tensions between the two men had devolved into an all-out feud for control of federal colonization policy. Mitchell, as a backer of the British projects in particular, had the president's attention while Usher, still likely holding out for a Chiriqui revival though also increasingly at odds with the backers of the unfolding Île à Vache disaster, held the purse strings. For his own part, Mitchell continued circumventing the Interior Department's chain of command on account of his appointment coming directly from the president. Usher retaliated in both bold and petty ways, at times intercepting the emigration commissioner's mail and even suspending janitorial services to his office.³⁴

The Mitchell-Usher feud proved a fatal distraction for the British partnership as it erupted at a crucial moment in the project's intended launch and left Hodge without the administrative support he expected from the American government. Further obstacles came from Seward, who was known to deprecate the schemes in front of foreign diplomats and frequently turned to his habit of foot-dragging in all matters colonization. The reluctant Secretary of State took almost two months to officially transmit Lincoln's agreement with Hodge to the British Legation in Washington, and only then after being directed to do so a second time by the president.³⁵ When word of the Dutch treaty, finalized and carrying royal assent from King William III, arrived from Pike in late 1863, Seward similarly deemed it an inopportune time to put the matter before the Senate for ratification and quietly set it aside. These actions only left the Dutch government confused and still eager for a colonization agreement up to a year after the Civil War. Britain seems to have interpreted the Secretary of State's inaction, not to mention the administrative feud at the Interior Department, as moments of wavering by the Americans, and allowed the matter to quietly wither on the vine.

After a year of containment in diplomatic channels, colonization burst back onto the pages of the newspapers in February 1864, a product of both the Île à Vache rescue mission and, more immediately, an inflammatory speech in Congress by Missouri Representative Frank Blair. Seeking to test the mood of the chamber, Blair's speech denounced the radical wing of the Republican Party and affirmed the administration's commitment to colonization. The remarks incensed the radical faction. Seeing an opportunity to rebuke the president through Frank's brother Montgomery, the radical congressman Henry Winter Davis of Maryland took to the floor to demand that the president repudiate his prior commitments to black resettlement. Lincoln ignored the request, though Blair returned to the House floor three weeks later to repeat such

³³ Phillip W. Magness, "The British Honduras Colony: Black Emigrationist Support for Colonization in the Lincoln Presidency," *Slavery & Abolition* 34, no. 1 (2013): 39-60

³⁴ Phillip W. Magness, "Mitchell and the Mystery of the U.S. Emigration Office Papers." *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 32 (2011), 50-62.

³⁵ Seward to Lyons, August 10, 1863, in *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1863), Vol. 1, 688-89.

claims in a speech that was widely interpreted as having the president's approval.³⁶

This chain of events appears to have directed congressional scrutiny to the colonization office's budget, prompting a Senate request for all pertinent records from the Interior Department. Usher's feud with Mitchell spilled over into the preparation of the requested report, as each man accused the other of withholding relevant documents and began preparing competing statements. Usher submitted his own report first, focusing upon Chiriqui and Île à Vache but also intentionally omitting any hint of the extensive diplomatic activities of the prior year with Britain and the Netherlands. Mitchell, whose political savvy extended to personal friendships with several elected officials, protested he had been excluded from the inquiry and requested time to prepare a second report, eventually delivered in the fall. In contrast to Usher, he emphasized the progress on the British project, still angling for its revival, while disavowing the Île à Vache disaster and the still-missing Chiriqui accounts as Usher's doing. The resulting administrative chaos provided an opportunity for colonization's critics to strike at the program, and in a sudden and confused debate in late June, Senator Morton Wilkinson of Minnesota attached a rider to the massive government budget bill, rescinding the remaining colonization appropriations from 1862.

Sloughing Off or Shifting Focus

In early July 1864, immediately following the Senate's elimination of the colonization fund, Lincoln's private secretary John Hay recorded in his diary that the president seemed to have "sloughed off that idea of colonization." Hay's entry reveals a fuller context in which he suspects that Lincoln came to know about Pomeroy's graft from the Chiriqui accounts including information, provided by none other than Mitchell, implicating Usher as well.³⁷ Yet Lincoln also had more to say on the matter than Hay's diary reveals, and more historians have commonly assumed that Hay's entry represents the final word on Lincoln and colonization. In a conversation with Mitchell a few weeks later, the President described the Wilkinson rider as an "unfriendly" amendment to a much-needed budget bill. He also may have signaled a continuation of interest in the British projects a week prior to the Senate debate when he instructed Seward to elevate diplomat John N. Camp—an outspoken colonizationist—to a consular post in Kingston, Jamaica, the administrative hub of the British West Indies.³⁸

Usher wasted little time in seizing upon the budget bill as a pretext to suspend Mitchell's salary and rid himself of the nuisance of an insubordinate administrator. The move was questionable and undoubtedly political in nature, as the hurried debate around the Wilkinson amendment had signaled the Senate's expectation that Mitchell would retain his post through the completion of his own competing colonization report for 1864 as well as the fulfillment of any outstanding obligations. There was also another legal complication, as the budget rider rescinded the \$600,000 in allocated funds from 1862 yet left the rebel land seizure law from the same year intact. The colonization portion of these proceeds had simply accrued over the previous two years

³⁶ Henry Winter Davis, "The Disposition of Freed Negroes," February 25, 1864 Cong. Globe, 38th Cong., 1st Sess. Appendix, 45 (1864); Francis P. Blair, Jr. *The Jacobins of Missouri and Maryland*. (Washington, D.C.: Francis P. Blair, 1864), 6.

³⁷ Michael Burlingame and John R. Ettliger, eds., *Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 217.

³⁸ James Mitchell to Abraham Lincoln, June 16, 1864, Entry 760, RG 59, National Archives; Lincoln to Seward, June 20, 1864, CW, 7, 403.

and sat untouched at the Treasury Department.³⁹

For all the uncertainty surrounding the status of the administration's colonization program at this stage of his presidency, Lincoln took an unusually proactive role in pressing for a legal means to restore Mitchell's salary. In early September he endorsed a petition from Mitchell—unfortunately now lost, but logged in a surviving letter register—and asked Attorney General Edward Bates for a formal opinion allowing him to retain the colonization agent in the wake of that summer's congressional action. Bates would answer in the affirmative, giving Mitchell his back-pay through the end of the year, but without a full opinion due to his own impending retirement from the cabinet.⁴⁰ The episode may have also carried a level of intrigue regarding Usher's own tenure on the cabinet, as Lincoln moved to replace the Secretary of the Interior with Iowa Senator James Harlan—a colonization supporter and close friend of Mitchell—shortly before his assassination. Harlan's elevation came about largely through the efforts of Matthew Simpson, a Methodist bishop with ties to the Lincoln family and a longstanding religious connection to Mitchell, and apparently provoked a less-than-cordial handover from Usher.

According to a rare surviving letter by Mitchell, Lincoln does appear to have suspended his now-defunded colonization enterprises in late 1864, although as a temporary move and for reasons very different than a commonly supposed change of heart on the subject or even as fallout from the corruption and failure of the Chiriqui and Île à Vache projects. In the February 1865 document, Mitchell recounted a conversation with the president about a month prior in which they settled on “closing the policy” of colonization “for the time being.” The two agreed that pressing forward at that moment carried a risk of diverting needed manpower from the U.S. Colored Troops, recently brought to the forefront by a competing “attempt of the men of Richmond to arm and emancipate their negroes.” As the Confederate leadership dropped emancipation entirely and the proposal to arm their slaves stalled until the final weeks of the war, Mitchell sprang into action again. On January 31, 1865—the day the 13th Amendment passed the House of Representative—he again met in private with another old acquaintance, the abolitionist stalwart Representative Thaddeus Stevens. The House Ways and Means chairman informed him that “Congress had no design in cutting off the [emigration] office by the repeal of the two large appropriations” the previous summer, and that he would be willing to extend a limited restoration of colonization funding under Mitchell's direction. Stevens' signature on Mitchell's account of the meeting affirmed this proposal, and carried an endorsement note for the president: “I cheerfully recommend the above named settlement.”⁴¹

Despite his radical antislavery reputation, Stevens had long acquiesced to a limited federal colonization enterprise as something of a safety valve for African-Americans to escape racial oppression. He seems to have opposed large-scale organized schemes along the lines of Chiriqui, though he was evidently much more amenable to the voluntary emigration model that took shape in the British and Dutch arrangements. His support in this regard contradicts the notion that colonization completely divided the moderate anti-slavery men from the radicals. Nor was Stephens alone in this regard, as Senator James Henry “Jim” Lane of Kansas—another antislavery radical—was advancing a proposal of his own at the time to reallocate the rescinded

³⁹ James Mitchell, Treasury Account of Rebel Land Sale Receipts (ca. 1864), Entry 179, RG 56 National Archives.

⁴⁰ Lincoln to Edward Bates, September 9, 1864 (original lost, logged in the Register of Letters Received), Entry 7, RG 60, National Archives; Edward Bates to Abraham Lincoln, November 30, 1864, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴¹ Mitchell to Lincoln, February 1, 1865, Entry 179, RG 56, National Archives.

funds to a domestic colonization scheme in western Texas and the territories.

Colonization Revealed and Revived?

The question of the final disposition of colonization at the end of Abraham Lincoln's life is a subject of recurring discussion and heated debate for Civil War scholars, in large part because he left few written words to go by in assessing its status at the end of his life—either as policy amidst the aforementioned and documented political circumstances, or as part of his own emerging vision of Reconstruction. Mitchell's account of his last meeting on the subject as well as Stevens' willingness to restore funding for a limited colonization function both suggest that the policy, though battered and legislatively gutted in its tumultuous final year, still showed signs of life as late as February 1865. This realization is less surprising in retrospect when one considers that colonization saw renewed political interest throughout the Reconstruction era. As late as 1872, one of Lincoln's presidential successors Ulysses S. Grant made a serious push to annex the Dominican Republic, intending in part to create a refuge location for freed slaves.⁴² At the same time, Lincoln's final position on colonization lacks a clear resolution if for no other reason than his life was ended prematurely by assassination, precluding the opportunity to record his final thoughts.

Lincoln's resumption of a colonization program of some sort in the Reconstruction era would certainly have been consistent with his political record. One contested piece of evidence suggests this course was likely. Writing many years after the war, Major General Benjamin Franklin Butler shared an anecdote of a meeting he had with Lincoln at the White House shortly after Robert E. Lee's surrender. With hostilities winding down but the challenges of building a post-slavery society ahead, the president reportedly solicited his visitor's thoughts about reviving colonization. Butler was the architect of the 1861 legal argument that designated captured and escaped slaves from the Confederacy "contrabands of war" as a way of freeing them. He had also conversed previously with Lincoln on colonization in 1863 and, despite the general's dubious military ability and reputation as a political firebrand, Lincoln evidently considered him "a kind of favorite" among his commanders.⁴³

According to Butler, Lincoln opened their conversation by expressing deep concerns about impending racial violence against the freedmen. Echoing the August 1862 address, he identified Central America as a prospective refuge. He then reportedly asked Butler to investigate the subject, including the possibility of employing the colonists on a canal project across the Isthmus of Darien. Butler returned a short while later with a plan to employ naval vessels carrying members of the United States Colored Troops to Panama. There they would oversee the military construction of a canal, and in time induce migration to the region as their families came to join them.⁴⁴

The story was accepted as part of the Lincoln biographical canon shortly after Butler

⁴² Nicholas Guyatt, "'An Impossible Idea?'" The Curious Career of Internal Colonization', *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4 (June 2014): 234-63.

⁴³ William O. Stoddard, *Inside the White House in War Times: Memoirs and Reports of Lincoln's Secretary*, ed. Michael Burlingame (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000): 83.

⁴⁴ Benjamin F. Butler, *Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences of Major General Benjamin F. Butler* (Boston: A. M. Thayer, 1892), 903; Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time* (New York: North American Publishing, 1886), 150; "Spain to Abandon Cuba" *New York Times*, August 20, 1884.

published at least three versions of it between 1884 and 1892, each successive one increasing in detail and the writer's own embellishments. As scholarly attention placed a renewed emphasis on Lincoln's racial evolution in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, however, the Butler anecdote fell from favor. Butler, it was contended, made for an unreliable witness, both on account of his personal reputation as something of a political blowhard and due to a number of timeline discrepancies in the story that suggested he could not have held the meeting on the dates that he claimed.⁴⁵ At the same time, scholarly opinion became similarly skeptical of Lincoln's interests in the larger resettlement concept and increasingly embraced what might be called the "lullaby" theory of colonization—the belief that Lincoln was actually something of an insincere colonizationist and may have advanced the policy to "lull" racist northern opinion, thereby easing acceptance of the Emancipation Proclamation.⁴⁶

The latter claim is easily disposed of as Lincoln plainly continued his colonization push well beyond the January 1, 1863 Proclamation, most of these efforts taking place in diplomatic channels operating well beyond the sightline of the voters they were supposed to palliate. Butler's reputation is more of a challenge for scholars, although we now have conclusive evidence that a private meeting did indeed take place on the morning of April 11, 1865 due to the discovery of an invitation card in Butler's personal papers.⁴⁷ The case for the Butler anecdote is therefore a matter of its consistency with Lincoln's known views on race and colonization, as well as speculation as to how they changed over his presidency.

As a reflection of the president's policy beliefs, Butler's story actually mirrors a track record of several decades in which Lincoln publicly adhered to a Clay-inspired vision of voluntary colonization, coupled with gradual emancipation. It also parallels what were then common beliefs in the political mainstream. This is true of both colonization, which remained in discussion throughout the Reconstruction era, and the canal proposal. Lincoln's original Chiriqui project proved a recurring reference point for subsequent U.S. canal projects, and no less a figure than Ulysses S. Grant briefly floated a strikingly similar plan to employ the USCT in digging the waterway in late 1865.⁴⁸

Lincoln's other views on race do seem to chafe somewhat with a sustained interest in colonization, particularly his acceptance of African-Americans as soldiers as the war progressed and, in the final week of his life, a cautious public endorsement of limited black voting rights. These apparent tensions may better reflect the complexity of 19th century racial politics than any particular feature of Lincoln's own internal consistencies of thought. For Lincoln, questions of race almost always involved considering the capacity of other whites to accept blacks as equals, rather than personal animus by the president. Lincoln had actually advanced colonization and the recruitment of black soldiers concurrently in the wake of the Emancipation Proclamation, illustrating that he did not see an inherent tension between the two outside of strictly logistical questions of available manpower to win the war. Even a devoted colonizationist like Mitchell was

⁴⁵ Mark E. Neely "Abraham Lincoln and Black Colonization: Benjamin Butler's Spurious Testimony," *Civil War History* 25, no. 1 (March 1979): 77–83.

⁴⁶ Gabor Boritt, *The Lincoln Enigma: The Changing Faces of an American Icon*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 13-14; See also Phillip Shaw Paludan, "Lincoln and Colonization: Policy or Propaganda?" *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 25, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 23-37.

⁴⁷ Phillip W. Magness, "Benjamin Butler's Colonization Testimony Reevaluated," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 1-28.

⁴⁸ Grant to Seward, November 10, 1865, in John Y. Simon, ed., 20 vols., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 15:413.

simultaneously involved in pushing for the creation of all-black troop units out of the belief that it would encourage people to “take pride” in their battlefield presence.⁴⁹ Yet it may be another feature of Lincoln’s distinctive brand of colonization that breaks from the notion of its supposed inconsistency, even on matters such as suffrage where Lincoln’s position moved during the course of the war. Lincoln always saw colonization as a voluntary venture, and one to be exercised by African-Americans who could not find political rights in the United States. The option of traveling abroad was intended to secure for them the very things that Lincoln feared he could not guarantee at home.

What is certain though is that Lincoln’s longstanding commitment to colonization was readily recognized amongst his contemporaries. “Once only did we disagree in sentiment,” remarked a bedridden William H. Seward as he recovered from the attempt on his own life the night of Lincoln’s assassination. The subject was “his ‘colonization’ scheme.”⁵⁰ Similar attestations of Lincoln’s persistent colonizationist beliefs may be found in an otherwise diverse assortment of political figures that includes Mitchell, Butler, the Blairs, Carl Schurz, George Julian, Samuel Pomeroy, and Edward Bates, among others. Gideon Welles, Lincoln’s Secretary of the Navy and a cabinet-level witness to several colonization propositions, stressed the centrality of the issue in an 1877 essay in perhaps even starker terms than Seward. “[T]hough disappointed in these experiments” at Chiriqui, Île à Vache, and the other colonization failures of his presidency, Lincoln “by no means abandoned his policy of [voluntary] deportation and emancipation, for the two were in his mind indispensably and indissolubly connected. Colonization in fact had precedence with him.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ James Mitchell to Abraham Lincoln, July 29, 1864, Entry 18, RG 110, National Archives.:

⁵⁰ Francis B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln*, University of Nebraska Press 1995 reprint (New York: Hurd & Houghton, 1868), 291. Welles, *Diary*, entry for September 4, 1868, 3:428

⁵¹ Gideon Welles, "Administration of Abraham Lincoln," *The Galaxy* 24, no. 4, (October 1877): 439