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MEAGAN WIERDA

Population Projections

Demographic Fearmongering and "Uterine Colonization" During the Age of Gradual Emancipation

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▼ **ABSTRACT** Centered primarily on the American Colonization Society (ACS), this article explores the movement to colonize free Black women and men in West Africa as a political—as well as a knowledge—project rooted in demography. Hostile to slavery and immediate emancipation alike, white colonizationists used quantitative rhetoric to transform African Americans along a vast spectrum of unfreedom into a "dangerous" and multiplying population in need of removal. While this demographic fearmongering proved effective, the ACS struggled to make large-scale expatriation appear equally so. To render removal "practicable," colonizationists harnessed the fertility of African American women. By specifically targeting those in their procreative prime for expatriation, colonizationists believed they could gradually deplete the country's Black population. The colonization project as envisioned by the ACS, then, was the clear inheritor of demography's hierarchizing tendencies. Not only did colonizationists reproduce the epistemic violence of a system that fragmented and instrumentalized the bodies of Black women, but in specifically targeting the latter for expatriation, they produced a new category via which to define African Americans as a threatening and unassimilable population.

Meagan Wierda • Université de Montréal, CA, meagan.wierda@umontreal.ca

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BREPOLS

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Buried within an 1838 issue of *The New York Review* lay the answer to "a great and (hitherto considered) insoluble American problem": how to put an end to slavery. At least this is what a short write-up endorsing a pamphlet published that same year would have its readers believe. The pamphlet, *Hints on a Cheap Mode of Purchasing the Liberty of a Slave Population*, advanced a proposal for realizing the "complete abolition" of slavery in the southern United States with minimal expense. And, at its center, was *partus sequitur ventrem*, the legal doctrine that made race and slavery heritable through the maternal line. Claiming that one of *partus*' corollaries had been overlooked, the pamphlet's unsigned male author argued that in order "to emancipate eventually a slave population," it would only be necessary to emancipate women who "are or may become prolific." By branding this proposal "Uterine Emancipation," the author left no doubts as to the ways in which the bodies of enslaved Black women could be instrumentalized in the service of abolition.[1]

At the same time, it was this very prolificness that raised the spectre of emancipation's perceived risks. The pamphlet's author expressed the need to shield southerners from "the sudden irruption into society of masses of ancient bondsmen, whom years of servitude have unfitted to exercise the rights of freedom." The use of the word "irruption," which signals a forcible arrival in large numbers, cast emancipation in a different—more foreboding—light. Indeed, white Americans, who conveniently disregarded both their own and the State's monopoly on the use of force, often imagined themselves as the victims of retaliatory action. As historian Kay Wright Lewis reminds us, however, it was whites who determined the likelihood of one-sided violence, the threat of extermination acting as "an essential tool for maintaining the institution of enslavement and white supremacy." Nevertheless, freedom, like slavery, had the makings of an insoluble problem.[2]

To address it, the pamphlet's author outlined a companion strategy entitled "Uterine Colonization" founded upon the selfsame principles. Far from idiosyncratic, this strategy was commonly floated by members of the American Colonization Society (ACS), a benevolent organization founded in 1816, whose goal was to resettle emancipated and free Black people in the West African colony of Liberia. Colonizationists determined that by targeting women in their reproductive prime for removal, they could cheaply and gradually depopulate the country of African Americans, thus averting what

1 "20.—*Hints*," 251; *Hints*, 3, 9. On *partus*, see Morgan, "Partus sequitur ventrem."
2 *Hints*, 20; Lewis, *Curse upon the Nation*, 3.

the pamphlet author—quoting English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley—called the "'retributive hour.'"[3]

That uteri were conceived of as vehicles of abolition as well as slavery has been well established. Scholars have highlighted how gradual abolition throughout the Atlantic world during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was tied to the wombs of captive women. These pernicious legal regimes freed children born to enslaved women only after a set date and only after a set period of service to their mother's enslaver. Regardless of where they were implemented, gradual emancipation schemes exploited women's reproductive potential in order to circumscribe Black freedom and benefit whites.[4]

Though the impetus to programmatically colonize African Americans is a recognized part of the story of gradualism, little has been made of the centrality of reproduction—and of demography more generally—to the colonizationist project. However, it is demography that connects the uterus, the colony of Liberia, and the United States. Indeed, the ACS viewed all three of these sites as ripe for its intervention. The uterus represented an opportunity for simultaneously vilifying and "redeeming" the reproductive potential of Black women. Liberia promised a context for the improvement of transported African Americans. And the United States was envisioned as a necessary—and, just as importantly, as an eminently possible—racially exclusive nation. Colonization, then, was a project that centered on the knowledge and manipulation of populations.[5]

First, this took the shape of demographic fearmongering. Colonizationists produced and deployed figures depicting African Americans as a multiplying threat in order to justify their removal. Population estimates, tallies, and projections alleging much faster rates of increase among African Americans than whites foretold a devastating future in which the former would necessarily—and perhaps violently—supplant the latter. White fear existed between what was knowable and unknowable, what was calculable and incalculable. And, during the early part of the nineteenth century, colonizationists did more than simply exploit these gaps. Rather, they created them by way of demographic fearmongering.

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3 *Hints*, 21.

4 On the relationship between Black women's wombs and gradual abolition throughout the Atlantic world, see Barragan, *Freedom's Captives*; Rosa, "Filial Freedoms, Ambiguous Wombs"; Paugh, *The Politics of Reproduction*; Turner, *Contested Bodies*; Gigantino, *Ragged Road to Abolition*; Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom*; Millward, "'That All Her Increase.'"

5 Though rich and increasingly varied, much of the literature on the ACS has been preoccupied with adjudicating its intentions: was it a pro- or an anti-slavery organization? The historiographical pendulum has swung back and forth on this question, recently settling somewhere in the middle, highlighting the compatibility between anti-Black and anti-slavery views. For a nuanced view of colonization, see Tomek and Hetrick, *New Directions*; Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart*; Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents*; Burin, *Peculiar Solution*.

But population figures could relieve just as readily as they could rouse anxious whites. After establishing the urgent need for removal, and in order to defend its practicability, colonizationists reassured prospective supporters that the Society need not expatriate all African Americans in order to halt their multiplication, but simply a precise number of "increasers" or "breeders" among them. In doing so, Black women's bodies became the loci of colonization's vast transformative potential.

Perhaps it is because the ACS, which only expatriated an estimated 11,288 people to West Africa between 1817 and 1865, was largely viewed as a failure that scholars have insufficiently appreciated the salience of demography to the colonizationist project. By reframing its impact in terms of epistemic violence rather than in number of expatriates, we are better placed to evaluate its dubious successes as well as its legacies.[6]

Yet, before we consider the ACS as progenitor, we must first think of it as inheritor, in this case of early modern discourses and practices. Historian Jennifer L. Morgan has argued that the knowledge regimes that developed in tandem with the transatlantic slave trade—including natural philosophy, political arithmetic, and theories of value—denied Black women from conveying kinship in order to facilitate the commodification of human beings and hereditary slavery. Demography in particular "set in motion an economization of life that merged human potential and racial hierarchies."[7] This hierarchization resembles what literary scholar Charlotte Sussman has referred to as "the colonial afterlife of political arithmetic." This evocative expression captures the shifting objects of interest of "projects spawned by political arithmetic" in Great Britain and its overseas empire between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Sussman notes that while demographic manipulation was once reserved for domestic populations, over time, it was not only transposed onto peripheral ones but actually came to define them. She argues that those on the periphery of empire were rendered subaltern "not just because of their place of origin, but because of their vulnerability to being displaced from it." In other words, to be mobile, to be rendered vulnerable to displacement or redistribution, marked populations as subaltern. What is perhaps most interesting about Sussman's observations are that even though "seventeenth- and eighteenth-century schemes to enumerate, transport, and increase populations took place almost entirely on the level of fantasy," unlike the contemporaneous slave trade, "the rhetoric surrounding them generated new categories through which to identify groups of people—in this case, the subaltern groups we now think of as the colonized." Sussman has recently been joined by such scholars as Ted McCormick, Molly Farrell, and Alison Bashford and Joyce E. Chaplin, who have variously explored the relationship between ideas about population and colonial projects—including the vulnerability of Indigenous and Black

6 "Work and the Cost," 223.

7 Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery*, 43.

bodies to transformation, exploitation, and hierarchization—throughout the Anglo-Atlantic world.[8]

The colonization project as envisioned by the ACS was clearly the inheritor of demography's long-standing hierarchizing tendencies. Not only did colonizationists reproduce the epistemic violence of a system that fragmented and instrumentalized the bodies of Black women, but by specifically targeting the latter for expatriation, they rationalized the definition of African Americans as a threatening and unassimilable population.

Colonization as Benevolent Project

When, in 1827, United States Secretary of State and ACS Vice-President John C. Calhoun imagined the "noblest eulogy" to be inscribed upon the tomb of the Reverend Robert Finley, it was: "Here lies the projector of the American Colonization Society." More than ten years earlier, Finley, a Presbyterian clergyman from New Jersey, insisted that colonization was the answer to the question of "what shall we do with the free people of color?" During the opening decades of the nineteenth century, this was a question on the lips of many white Americans, who struggled to imagine the integration of African Americans within the body politic. Finley believed that slavery was a "great violation of the laws of nature," and yet emancipation was no redress. He confessed to feeling anguished about the condition of free African Americans, stating in 1816 that "their number increases greatly, and their wretchedness too as appears to me." While Finley offered a passing acknowledgment of the continued discrimination faced by Black women and men, he appeared far more preoccupied with the effects of their freedom on whites. Not only would the existence of free African Americans negatively affect their morals and industry, but it also raised the prospect of interracial mixing, as well as the "heavy burden" of supporting those who fell into poverty. More to the point, it was simply "unsafe" to advocate for emancipation. "The evil therefore increases every year," he wrote, "and the gloomy picture grows darker continually, so that the question is often and anxiously asked—*What will be the end of all this?*" For Finley, unconditional freedom heralded disquiet for whites and disappointment for African Americans. Faced with such a seemingly untenable situation, he formulated an ambitious project to colonize free Black people, and with it, an improved vision of the future.[9]

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8 Sussman, "The Colonial Afterlife," 111, 117–18, 110. See also McCormick, *Human Empire*; Farrell, *Counting Bodies*; Bashford and Chaplin, *The New Worlds*.

9 "Annual Meeting," 336; Finley, *Colonization of Free Blacks*, 1, 6, 4–5; Brown, *Memoirs*, 77. David R. Egerton has instead posited Virginia's Charles Fenton Mercer as the intellectual founder of the ACS. My goal is not to tussle over its origins but rather to think alongside those who roundly viewed Finley as its "projector." See Egerton, "'Not a Little Curious.'"

From its incipient moments, the ACS was framed as a benevolent project. "If there is not reason to believe that it would be for the general benefit," wrote Robert Finley in 1816, "the idea ought to be given up and the scheme rejected." He argued that if Black people could be sent "back" to Africa, "a three-fold benefit would arise." First, "we should be cleared of them," next, "we should send to Africa a population partially civilized and christianized for its benefit," and finally, "our blacks themselves would be put in a better situation." These supposed benefits were touted by members of the ACS throughout the antebellum period, including by Theodore Frelinghuysen, the scion of an influential New Jersey family, long-standing ACS member, and future United States senator. In an 1824 address before the New Jersey Colonization Society, he praised Finley as well as colonization, a "project, as novel as it was bold and magnanimous." He stressed that "as American citizens, [African Americans] never can be free," and "as American freeman, they never would be valuable," explaining that "prudence and self-preservation forbid the one, and prejudices, that seem implanted in the very constitution of our nature, would for ever prevent the other." Like Finley, Frelinghuysen promoted colonization as a boon to white Americans, who feared for their safety, and to Black Americans, who faced continued discrimination.[10]

Read differently, however, colonization betrayed its proponents' inability to envision, or, indeed, their unwillingness to facilitate, a multiracial republic. With racial coexistence deemed an impossibility, anxious whites looked to circumscribe the country's racial geography. This project, which linked whiteness and nation-building, is not unlike that explored by Patrícia Martins Marcos elsewhere in this volume.

In reality, ideas about creating racially separate settlements to act as safeguards pre-dated the establishment of the ACS, stretching back to Founding Fathers Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe. Historian Brandon Mills has argued that the country's earliest efforts to colonize individuals of African descent "can be understood as an attempt at forging a counterrevolution in the wider Atlantic world: an effort to create the terms on which black republicanism might be cultivated, managed, and ultimately contained." Insurrections both realized, in the case of the Haitian Revolution, and thwarted, in the case of Gabriel Prosser's conspiracy, highlighted the urgent need for separation. Settlements that were initially envisaged within North America, however, were quickly scrapped, as whites feared alliances between Indigenous and Black communities. Proponents of colonization began looking much farther afield. In 1819, the ACS gained access to federal coffers via the Slave Trade Act, which extended support for the establishment of a colony with funds earmarked for the resettlement of recaptured Africans. By 1822, it had established the germ of a colony on the Windward Coast and had begun the process of

10 Brown, *Memoirs*, 77; Frelinghuysen, *An Oration*, 10, 9.

resettling free and formerly enslaved people at a safe distance from the United States.[11]

Robert Finley's colonizationist scheme bore all of the characteristic features of projecting as a practice. Not only did he define the problem (a growing and unassimilable free Black population) and assert agency over it (by claiming distinctive kinds of knowledge that made the problem actionable), but he teased the cost of inaction (catastrophe). Moreover, for Finley and others, it was not enough to establish the practicability and the profitability of colonization in order to justify intervention. Colonizationists likewise framed their expatriative project as one that was uniquely magnanimous, just as essential to the public good within the United States as it was to the people and the continent they viewed as benighted.[12]

Demographic Fearmongering and the Making of Speculative Futures

Though this framing assumed a shared set of benefits, it nevertheless relied upon the perception that Black Americans were incapable of citizenship and belonging within the United States. To this end, colonizationists helped create a threatening and unassimilable population by way of demographic fearmongering, linking—as shown elsewhere in this volume by Vera Keller—the history of knowledge and the history of emotions. Crucially, this strategy reached whites across the sectional divide. Whether colonizationists stoked fears of servile insurrections or drummed up panic with images of northern cities teeming with free Black people, demography could impress upon whites the problems posed by the unrestricted growth of the country's African American population.

Demographic arguments in favor of colonization proved especially useful for their ability to concede a slippage between the removal of free African Americans and the expatriation of the country's entire Black population. From its inception, a refusal to interfere with slavery was one of the hallmarks of the ACS; colonizationists assured reluctant supporters that they had no intention of meddling with the property rights of enslavers. Free Black people—not their enslaved counterparts—were the intended beneficiaries of their efforts. However, it was exceedingly tempting for colonizationists to cast a much wider net, as many often did. Aggregating the country's free and enslaved Black populations was useful in part because it increased the size of the alleged threat posed by African Americans.

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11 Mills, *The World Colonization Made*, 11, 34. On the geographic segmentation of Black and white freedom, especially in relation to climactic determinism, see Asaka, *Tropical Freedom*. On the ACS's relationship with the federal government, see Ericson, "Not-So-Private Colonization Project," 112–28; Burin, "The Slave Trade Act," 1–14. On recaptured Africans, see Fett, *Recaptured Africans*.

12 Keller and McCormick, "A History of Projects," 423–44.

Steadily, demographic fearmongering began featuring in memoranda to Congress, annual reports, speeches as of 1820, and, beginning in 1825, with much greater frequency within the pages of the ACS's newfound organ, *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*. With every invocation of present-day or projected population totals, colonizationists underscored the necessity of removal. The parent society's fourth annual report, for example, included an excerpt from a report from one of its Virginian auxiliaries, which cautioned that "our own country is blackened with the victims of slavery, already amounting to nearly two millions of souls." If the evil of slavery "be of fearful magnitude *now*," wondered the members of the auxiliary society of Frederick County, "what will it be in *fifty years hence* ?" Raising the prospect of a "servile war," they maintained that it was "undoubtedly desireable gradually to emancipate and colonize the whole coloured population of the U. States."[13]

During the ACS's seventh annual meeting in 1824, society Vice-President Robert Goodloe Harper delivered an address that similarly exhibited the hallmarks of demographic fearmongering. He bluntly stated that the Society's central object was to spare whites as well as the country more broadly from the "great social evil" represented by individuals of African descent, who, like "a cancer on the body politic," would gradually deplete the State's vitals "till at length it has destroyed, the entire mass of our social strength and happiness." Harper warned that the removal of a few thousand Black people would do little to stall an "evil of such magnitude," as this class of population "consists of more than a million and a half of persons—and though 3 or 400,000 already free should be removed, the great political mischief among us would be but slightly affected." Only the "complete eradication of this evil" would do, argued Harper.[14]

To this same annual report, the parent society appended a favorable review of colonization by *The Christian Spectator*, which reproduced the Society's rhetoric. The article in question asked its readers to apply "one very simple arithmetical calculation" to the problem of slavery. The article noted that in 1820, the enslaved population totaled 1,500,000, that its annual increase was estimated at 35,000, and that it doubled in less than twenty years. "Things remaining as they are now," it warned, "in 1840 we shall have 3,000,000 of slaves; in 1860, 6,000,000; and in 1880, 12,000,000; a nation of slaves larger than by 4,000,000 than the whole present white population of the United States." And even though some sixty years needed to elapse before this became reality, the author wondered "how much terrour [*sic*] and anxiety must be endured, how many plots must be detected, how many insurrections must be quelled" during the intervening moments.[15]

13 *The Annual Report*, 5, 22, 26.
14 American Colonization Society, *The Seventh Annual Report*, 7–8.
15 Ibid., 90–91.

The continued presence of African Americans in the United States not only imperiled whites, but, according to colonizationists, African Americans themselves. In 1825, *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* excerpted an article from a popular weekly, which argued that emancipation without colonization essentially risked the self-extinguishment of Black people. "Experience has shewn [*sic*] us," claimed the author, "that their numbers will rapidly decline, through their improvidence and want of knowledge how to take care of themselves." And, if "experience" was not enough, "the bills of mortality for New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, &c. always shew [*sic*] an excess proportion of deaths among the free blacks." The view that the latter were unsuited to freedom was widespread among whites, and dovetailed with the prevailing extinction discourse, which consigned the so-called "primitive races" to vanishment. This vision not only contributed to the racialization of Black people, to say nothing of belonging within the American republic, but rationalized the colonizationist project, which was framed as salvationist.[16]

The irony, of course, was that African American emigrants to Liberia experienced incredibly high mortality. Essentialist ideas about Black bodies being suited to temperate or tropical climates notwithstanding, African Americans had no inherent immunological advantage in Africa. Malaria, in particular, proved deadly. Tom W. Shick has shown that although 4,571 emigrants arrived in the colony between 1820 and 1843, by the end of this period, and owing largely to the high death rate, only 1,819 remained. For African Americans, colonization "came closer to being a death sentence than the start of a new life." Thus, whereas whites faced the speculative dangers of insurrection, the dangers experienced by emigrating African Americans were decidedly real. Nevertheless, colonizationists operated under the assumption that the risks as well as the rewards associated with the project were shared, further underscoring its indispensability.[17]

Conceiving a Practicable Solution

Having proven the necessity of colonization, the ACS next needed to prove it was feasible. Throughout much of the 1820s, then, demography was enlisted to support the notion that expatriating the country's Black population was "practicable." Practicability was the watchword of the ACS over the course of this period, as it sought legitimacy and attempted to secure necessary funds from donors. Indeed, expatriating the country's free Black population was both logistically and financially ambitious, as evidenced by the roughly

16 "Niles' Weekly Register," 182–83. It is noteworthy that both the ability and the seeming failure of African Americans to reproduce served to justify the interventions of colonizationists; extermination and extinction made anything-but-strange bedfellows, rooted as they both were in anti-Blackness. On the "extinction discourse," see Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*.

17 Shick, "A Quantitative Analysis," 58. See also McDaniel, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*.

1,200 African Americans who had been transported to Liberia by the end of the decade. For this reason, colonizationists needed to prove that removal was as practicable as it was paramount.[18]

As it turns out, defenses of the practicability of colonization largely hinged upon—and were calibrated by—the reproductive potential of enslaved and free Black women. In their speeches, annual reports, and other promotional materials, colonizationists frequently tried to allay the misgivings of would-be supporters by directing the ACS's efforts not toward the country's entire African American population but rather toward the yearly increase among Black people. Theirs was, by and large, a strategy of attrition. Thus, whereas one might reasonably view the wholesale removal of the country's Black population with skepticism, the gradual removal of individuals commensurate with the annual increase in the number of African Americans was eminently more practicable.

Jennifer L. Morgan has observed that, beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, planters in Barbados began using the term "increasers" to refer to enslaved women of childbearing age, as well as the term "increase" to refer to their children. There was no mistaking the value that enslavers accorded the reproductive lives of their human property. This was especially true when it came to bequeathing enslaved women, whose reproductive potential hinted at the possibility of even greater wealth. "Slaveowners whose prospects might have seemed somewhat bleak looked to black women's bodies in search of a promising future for their own progeny," argues Morgan. Continuing, she notes that "with such demographic expectations also came an articulation of the longevity of the slaveowners' enterprises and a greater certainty of a future in and for the colony." Nearly two centuries later, many colonizationists—a number of whom were enslavers themselves—would take up the language of increase and of demographic expectation, similarly pinning the future stability of a white republic on the reproductive potential of Black women.[19]

The value of reproduction to the colonizationist project during the 1820s was particularly pronounced. The aforementioned ACS Vice-President Robert Goodloe Harper could not have made the relationship any clearer when, in 1824, he stated that the organization's object was first and foremost to "[relieve] us from a species of population pregnant with future danger." Though Harper surely employed the word "pregnant" figuratively, to indicate that the country's African American population was "full," or "suggestive," of future danger, the invocation of reproduction was hardly immaterial. Similarly, Mathew Carey, a publisher and political economist unsympathetic to a multiracial republic, noted that according to past ratios of increase, the

18 U.S. Senate, *Message from the President*, 152–95.

19 Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 82–83. On enslavers tying their future stability to Black "increase," see Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery*, 180–97; Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property*, 20–24; Berry, *The Price*, 10–33.

country's Black population would total more than 10,000,000 in 1868 and more than 15,000,000 by 1882 "unless some efficient measures of prevention be adopted!" "Who can regard this enormous increase without affright?," he demanded. "Who can consider any expense too great to avert the horrible consequences, with which it is pregnant?" Colonizationists such as Harper and Carey ultimately viewed Black women's reproduction as a threat to their safety, as well as to that of the republic. However, they also believed that by simply expatriating a number of individuals corresponding to the yearly growth in the free and/or enslaved Black population, colonization could feasibly "relieve" the country of the threat allegedly posed by the latter.[20]

The affective overlap between fearfully expectant whites and expectant mothers was likely not lost on members of the ACS and its supporters, who, like Harper, used the image of pregnancy to convey eventual peril. In her sweeping study of childbearing in the United States, historian Judith Walzer Leavitt argues that an important part of women's experience of parturition was their anticipation of dying or else suffering permanent harm. The "shadow of maternity" not only followed them throughout individual pregnancies, but throughout their childbearing years and, indeed, pervaded the whole of American society. That these fears were often confirmed explains why pregnancy was viewed with such trepidation. Leavitt contends that "childbed deaths were so familiar to Americans, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, that fearful anticipation characterized the common and realistic attitudes toward pregnancy." For colonizationists, however, pregnancy was not just a useful metaphor, giving shape to feelings of apprehension. When used to describe the actual condition of Black women, and the specter of a growing Black population, pregnancy itself cast a long shadow.[21]

It is no wonder, then, that colonizationists began singling out Black women and, to a lesser extent, Black men, in their procreative prime for removal. As Kelly J. Whitmer shows elsewhere in this volume, project-makers often targeted young people, whose youth incarnated—and teased the possibility of shaping—the future. In 1823, the New York Colonization Society (NYCS) published its first report, which included a number of appendices, among them one that addressed the "*feasibility of the project.*" Rebuffing claims that colonization was too unlikely and too expensive, the NYCS argued that it was only necessary to remove "a certain class of population" in order for it to be effective. Expanding upon this, it reprinted an undated article from *The New-York Statesman*, which advocated expatriating annually a total of 6,000 free Black "females between the ages of 18 and 28 years" and free Black "males between 20 and 30 years." Taking into consideration "how large a portion of the increase will spring from this class," the article claimed that within a decade at least 100,000 free African Americans could be removed from the country.

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20 American Colonization Society, *The Seventh Annual Report*, 7; "Letter from Matthew Carey," 271.
21 American Colonization Society, *The Seventh Annual Report*, 7; Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, 14, 27.

If, over the course of the next ten years, free Black people increased at a rate comparable to that determined by the last census, and if the same "deduction" was made, their numbers would drop to 142,000 in 1840 and to 80,000 in 1850. Existing as a kind of mirror image of the upwardly ratcheting population totals used to elicit white fear, this plan explicitly linked the practicability of colonization to the gradual removal of Black men and women at the height of their reproductive prime. If conducted, "all, therefore, but the aged, would be removed in less than forty years." The NYCS closed out its argument by urging that "the same process be adopted with the whole black population, and remove 30,000 yearly, and the whole will be removed within 50 years." One year later, the parent society recirculated the article from *The New-York Statesman* in its seventh annual report. In 1825, the same article, along with the NYCS's exhortation to extend its removal strategy to all African Americans between the ages of 18 and 30, appeared in *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*.[22]

Likewise, ACS Vice-President William H. Fitzhugh suggested earmarking the most prolific class of African Americans for removal. In an 1826 letter extolling the practicability of colonization, he conceded that it would be possible to expatriate 50,000 individuals yearly—that is, 10,000 above the annual ratio of increase—which would "in the course of a very few years, leave not a vestige of the population in question." However, the annual removal of "a much smaller number" would doubtless be more efficient, "as the emigrants would, in the nature of things, consist of the younger, and healthier, and more productive classes," whereas the "rate of increase of those remaining behind would be very much diminished." Moreover, by "encouraging the emigration of those but lately married," colonization would become far more economical. By singling out the most fecund individuals of African descent for removal rather than all free Black people, Fitzhugh looked to counter arguments against the practicability of the project.[23]

Even proponents of colonization who harbored misgivings about expatriating African Americans in their procreative prime centered their rival plans on the reproductive potential of Black women. In an 1824 letter to Jared Sparks, one of the ACS's first historians, Thomas Jefferson instead put forward a *postnati* plan for emancipation and colonization. While the Founding Father and enslaver had been advancing such a project for the better part of forty-five years, since the very first publication of *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which scholar Thomas Dikant invites us to read as advancing a program for a settler colonial biopolitics, this letter underscores the extent to which demography had come to dominate ideas about colonization.[24]

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22 "(B.) *Facts*," 17–18. See also *The Seventh Annual Report*, 105–8; "The New York Statesman," 245–46.

23 "The Colonization Scheme," 254.

24 Jefferson, *Notes*, 228. For more on *Notes* as a work of statistics, see Dikant, "Settler Colonial Statistics," 69–96.

Though Jefferson acknowledged that the "gradual diminution of breeders" among the country's Black population would undoubtably make large-scale removal more practicable, he nevertheless suggested "emancipating the after-born, leaving them, on due compensation, with their mothers, until their services are worth their maintenance, and then putting them to industrious occupations, until a proper age for deportation." Not only would this strategy be cheaper, seeing as "the estimated value of the new-born infant is so low (say 12½ Dollars) that it would probably be yielded by the owner gratis," but it would not infringe on the property rights of enslavers. In this formulation, the success of colonization hinged not only upon the ability of enslaved women to carry their children to term, but upon their capacity to care for and educate them until they were ready for "deportation." On this point, Jefferson granted that "the separation of infants from their mothers too would produce some scruples of humanity;" however, he dismissed these concerns on the grounds that "this would be straining at a gnat, and swallowing a camel." Invoking the biblical verse Matthew 23:24, in which Jesus admonished the Pharisees for observing minor dictates while neglecting far more consequential laws, Jefferson effectively rejected any hand-wringing regarding familial separation. The far greater problem, he argued, was the danger African Americans posed to the safety and happiness of whites. For Jefferson, as for many colonizationists, enlisting the reproductive potential and labor of Black women was essential to making removal thinkable.[25]

Uterine Colonization

Though the 1820s witnessed a marked outpouring of arguments in favor of the practicability of colonization, this line of reasoning remained persistent in the years that followed, the best example of which was *Hints on a Cheap Mode of Purchasing the Liberty of a Slave Population* from 1838. In this wide-ranging pamphlet, the unsigned male author drew from classical texts, the Bible, German surgeon Johann Friedrich Dieffenbach, Shakespearian plays, population theorists such as John Graunt and Thomas Robert Malthus, census records, and Romantic poetry, all in an effort to make a case for exploiting the reproductive potential of Black women. He theorized that in order "to emancipate eventually a slave population, it is not necessary to emancipate a single male nor any of the females, excepting such as are or may become prolific, and that by the emancipation of these alone the whole population, both male and female, becomes free in the next generation."[26]

Though *Hints* was seemingly detailed, the plan for "Uterine Colonization" advanced by its author was necessarily vague. As Vera Keller has recently

25 "From Thomas Jefferson."
26 *Hints*, 20.

shown, vagueness was a feature of the "hint" as a genre. Indeed, this early modern literary technology made a virtue of ignorance and of uncertainty. In the case of the author of *Hints*, even though he boasted a roadmap "to emancipate eventually a slave population," his plan lacked sufficient detail, as well as the means to hold him—already anonymous—accountable for its future success or failure. Perhaps this is what allowed him to engage in such speculative projecting regarding Black women.[27]

Importantly, the author's central focus on liberating women of the age of parturition largely corresponds with the very theories of value that facilitated the commodification of humans throughout their life cycle. Indeed, he rejects the inclusion of those "who have past the age of parturition," as they represented a "waste of their value in funds," as well as young girls, "as there is always a chance of death before puberty." On the other hand, "Uterine Emancipation" was so remarkable that it could even "redeem" enslaved women with "physical or intellectual defects"—that is, those judged "of the least value in the slave market, provided only that their procreative power be unimpaired." More than anything else, fecundity dictated the value of liberated and enslaved women.[28]

Nothing illustrates this point more plainly than the author's inclusion of an obituary from a "southern paper," which announced the passing of a woman whose family had been "remarkable for its numbers and health." At the time of her death in 1835, the woman's descendants were said to include 10 children, 73 grandchildren, 245 great-grandchildren, and 17 great-great-grandchildren, for a total of 344 lineal successors. Freeing a single enslaved woman of childbearing age, then, could reap measurable rewards for whites who feared the consequences of immediate emancipation. To that end, the author proposed calculating "almost with mathematical certainty, what fewest in number should be annually emancipated, in order to preserve a gross amount of slavery the same."[29]

Given that the author of *Hints* enlisted the bodies of enslaved women in their procreative prime to forward an efficacious system of gradual emancipation, it is perhaps not surprising that he likewise introduced the concept of "Uterine Colonization" as a companion strategy based on the same principles to gradually whiten the United States. Indeed, he advocated the colonization or exportation "of similar proportions of females[,which] would in the next generation or more remotely, as we might desire, cause the disappearance of the Ethiopian race from our country." Not unlike the scheme featured in the *New-York Statesman* approximately fifteen years earlier, later taken up with enthusiasm by the NYCS and its parent society, the undisclosed author

27 Keller, "Into the Unknown," 86–110.

28 *Hints*, 10, 19. On the monetary value placed on enslaved people throughout their life courses, see Berry, *The Price*.

29 *Hints*, 7.

ultimately rejected immediatism and the possibility of a multiracial republic. By specifically targeting Black women of childbearing age for expatriation, whites could cheaply and steadily check population growth among enslaved African Americans, ensuring the eventuality of a monoracial country.[30]

And, while it is not entirely clear who penned *Hints on a Cheap Mode of Purchasing the Liberty of a Slave Population*, what is apparent is that "Uterine Colonization" belonged to a long-standing class of demographic ideas and practices that rendered certain populations vulnerable to quantification, to transformation, and to transportation. That colonizationists were unsuccessful in their project to expatriate African Americans is somewhat immaterial, given the ideological carry-over of viewing Black people—and Black women in particular—as subject to instrumentalization. Indeed, it was not simply that members of the ACS pathologized African Americans, indelibly marking them as unassimilable racialized others, but that they viewed them as a necessarily manipulable population. By reducing Black women to "increasers" and "breeders," by laying claim to their reproductive potential, all in the service of white futurities, colonizationists helped to reinscribe the meanings of Blackness.

Anti-Blackness as Project

At the close of the ACS's first full decade in existence, Francis Scott Key, a lawyer, enslaver, and colonizationist, delivered a public address in Lower Manhattan in favor of colonization that encapsulated the operative role demography had taken on within the Society. In a particularly trenchant section of his 1829 speech, Key questioned the wisdom of unconditional emancipation from the perspective of northerners and southerners alike on the grounds that, when free, African Americans were unassimilable and ungovernable. He warned that former slaveholding communities would be beset by a dangerous "heterogeneous mass," meanwhile, "the free people of colour, even in the free States, were thought to be injurious to the whites, were a distinct and degraded class, and must ever be so," and that a number of these states "already have suffered from an excess of that population." The threat posed by free African Americans, he argued, resisted sectionalism. For this reason, Key invited the "North and South [to] unite in this work of justice and benevolence." Moreover, and pushing back against the claims that "the evil is too great to be remedied—that the annual increase of the coloured population is 50 or 60,000—that it will take a million dollars every year to remove this increase," he noted that only the "producing portion" of it need be removed. Though brief, Key's speech reveals the prevalence of demographic thinking among colonizationists, who simultaneously viewed Black population growth

30 Ibid., 20.

as perilously inevitable and yet reassuringly manageable by way of strategic culling.[31]

As this article has argued, demography was at the heart of the colonizationist project. Aggregates allowed colonizationists to make gross generalizations about the alleged threat to whites posed by African Americans, which was ideologically consistent with—and had currency within—a society rooted in white supremacy. In order to achieve the broadest possible support for its expatriative project, the ACS and its supporters mobilized population-based arguments vilifying individuals of African descent. Thus, whether African Americans were reproducing in freedom or slavery, colonizationists could portray their growing numbers as an assured threat to the safety and prosperity of whites. Indeed, the ACS's demographic fearmongering as well as its expatriative project repurposed demography's racial logics in order to make colonization legible to would-be supporters, especially in regions where enslavers were skeptical of immediatism. Central to this was the belief that the reproductive potential of African American women along a vast spectrum of unfreedom could be exploited to serve the present and future needs of whites. By targeting Black women and their "increase" for removal, rather than simply all individuals of African descent, expatriation became practicable in the eyes of colonizationists. More importantly, this kind of demographic thinking helped colonizationists restrict the possibilities of emancipation, all the while stabilizing the meaning of Blackness within the United States. This is perhaps one of the Society's most influential legacies. Because while it might be tempting to argue that ACS-sponsored colonization ultimately proved ineffectual according to the numbers, as it turns out, the numbers propounded by colonizationists were extremely effective in repackaging a specific form of anti-Blackness for the era of gradual emancipation.

About the Author

Meagan Wierda is an assistant professor of history at the Université de Montréal. She writes about who gets to count within the antebellum United States.

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31 American Colonization Society, *The Proceedings*, 25, 27.

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