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BOOK REVIEW

New Directions in the Study of African American Recolonization, by Beverly C. Tomek and Matthew J. Hetrick. Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2017. $89.95 U.S., cloth. ISBN: 9780813054247. Pages 1 – 356.

Reviewed by Evan C. Rothera[1]

Too often, for a number of reasons, scholars rush through colonization when they teach U.S. history. The American Colonization Society occupies a minute or two of the survey class – a brief rise, limited appeal, and a period of decline after William Lloyd Garrison thunders onto the scene. However, *New Directions in the Study of African American Recolonization* offers a strong caution against dismissing or minimizing this movement. Beverly C. Tomek, currently associate chair of humanities at the University of Houston-Victoria and Matthew J. Hetrick, who teaches history at the Bryn Mawr School, have assembled an excellent volume that challenges much of what scholars think they know about colonization. As Tomek notes in the introduction, "when Garrison declared war on the ACS, he focused on a national organization whose appeal cannot be measured simply by examining its membership rolls and lists of donors" (1). Tomek, Hetrick, and the contributors demonstrate that colonization was a national movement with significant resources and that it lasted beyond the end of the U.S. Civil War.

Part I explores missionary work as central to the colonizationist impulse. Gale L. Kenny argues that colonizationists used a missionary sensibility to portray themselves as Christian humanitarians, the ACS as part of a broader missionary movement, and colonization as the best course of action. This missionary sensibility did not disappear from the antislavery movement and "long after the ACS faded away, missionaries and humanitarians would continue to draw on colonizationists' ideas of sympathy, race, distance, and religion as they appealed to Americans to feel and act on behalf of suffering others" (46). Ben Wright notes that colonization appealed because it held out the possibility of salvation for Africa and moral redemption for the U.S. Conversionism united a broad and unwieldy, but nevertheless influential, coalition of black and white people as well as men and women.

Conversionism, he asserts "united colonizationists in a way nothing else could. That their millennial vision proved a mirage does not mean we can dismiss it" (66). Andrew N. Wegmann and Debra Newman Ham focus on Liberia. Wegmann analyzes Lott Cary a black Baptist from Virginia. Cary was "the first settler-missionary, the first public figure who in action and thought saw Liberia as a black Christian nation, who supported black-led missionary work and civilization through Christian ideas rather than Western images" (73). Ham illuminates the often-overlooked efforts of African American women settlers in Liberia. She finds women motivated by the Great Commission and Christian ideals and contends that their contributions "were vital for the development of Liberia" (105).

Part II explores the political and diplomatic dimensions of colonization. David F. Ericson, Daniel Preston, and Nicholas P. Wood examine the domestic politics of the ACS. Ericson argues that the ACS "may have been a private organization, but its African colonial enterprise was not a

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private project. Almost from its inception, the society enjoyed the financial support of the federal government" (111). Daniel Preston zeroes in on James Monroe. He finds that Monroe shared most of the prejudices of his contemporaries, that he worried about slavery as a threat to the nation's domestic tranquility, and that he provided support as president and after his presidency to the ACS. Wood acknowledges the power of conversionist language to hold together a wide coalition of people and the ACS's desire to make colonization a government program. He then illustrates how the debates over the admission of Missouri into the Union "destroyed the cross-sectional trust essential for a federal colonization program" (146).

Many white Southerners, in other words, became concerned that colonization was too dangerous to entrust to the federal government. Also in this section, several essays take an international approach. Brandon Mills notes that while Liberia was one of the first attempts by the U.S. to engineer democracy abroad, "it would be difficult to argue that the United States actively pursued an expansionist agenda in Liberia" (166). Bronwen Everill compares Liberia and Sierra Leone, noting that they were "both part of a wider movement to establish models of extraterritorial representative citizenship in the period following American independence" (200). In both colonies, authorities attempted to create a dependent, but free, black citizenry. Sebastian Page concludes the section with an account of the ACS during the U.S. Civil War. He contends that the perseverance of colonizationists "demonstrates the recurrent appeal of escapism in reconciling the founding promises of the United States with the realities of prejudice, exploitation, and the preeminence of states' rights in determining blacks' status" (219). Nevertheless, colonizationist projects faced obstacles such as gaining consent.

Part III posits new answers to old questions about colonization. Eric Burin argues against the old idea that colonization was little more than a pipe dream. In reality, he demonstrates, through a compelling account of the negotiations over the Cape Mesurado contract, that "Liberia's establishment was much harder than historians have supposed" and that scholars err in overlooking colonizationist accomplishments. Andrew Diemer asserts that "colonizationists' rhetorical use of European immigration helped render antislavery politics all but impotent before the 1850s, by moving away from the gradual but coercive model of emancipation toward an entirely consensual one" (250). Robert Murray links colonization studies and whiteness studies and argues, fascinatingly, that Africans in Liberia labeled African Americans as white. Thus, whiteness became "a shifting cultural category reflecting one's association with the culture, education, literacy, dress, language, and Christianity of the United States or Europe" (270).

Matthew J. Hetrick examines the historical memory of Paul Cuffe. All the complexity about Cuffe's life – such as fighting for African American equality while seeking a home in Africa – disappeared. Later accounts made him into "a Horatio Alger story of success through hard work and perseverance" and ignored his interest in colonization. Phillip W. Magness returns to an argument he has made before – that "Lincoln plainly did not cede his longstanding interest in compensated emancipation after January 1, 1863" (304). Magness discusses why scholars focus so closely on Lincoln and colonization. He is no doubt correct to criticize some analysis of Lincoln's attitudes toward colonization, but, at the same time, he occasionally stretches some of his evidence and asks it to bear more weight than it can. Nicholas Guyatt concludes the volume with a call to restore colonization to its proper context. Colonization "allowed antislavery moderates to acknowledge popular prejudices against racial mixing, and to avoid commitments to

equal citizenship after emancipation" (343). Thus, he contends, what should trouble us is "their enduring confidence that they could promote grand schemes of segregation while insisting they weren't racists" (344).

Anyone teaching the first half of the U.S. History survey, or classes focusing on the Civil War and Reconstruction, the Antebellum U.S., or the Age of Jackson, should read this book and grapple with the arguments found therein. Tomek and Hetrick offer a powerful reminder to take colonization seriously and illustrate how much more research needs to occur on this subject. One hopes that the authors will assemble another volume that thinks about colonization with an even broader lens, particularly colonization schemes in Latin America.