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WILLIAM THORNTON AND  
NEGRO COLONIZATION

BY  
GAILLARD HUNT





American Antiquarian Society

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## WILLIAM THORNTON AND NEGRO COLONIZATION

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BY GAILLARD HUNT

IN the Caribbean Sea, stretching eastward from Porto Rico, lies a group of about one hundred small islands, some mere rocks in the sea furnishing no sustenance for human beings, and some of larger size where a few planters raise sugar and cotton. These are the Virgin Islands discovered by Christopher Columbus on his second voyage in 1494, and named by him in honor of the Eleven Thousand Virgin Martyrs of St. Ursula; but this pious name did not prevent them from being, in the middle of the seventeenth century, the favorite resort of those picturesque desperadoes, the pirates of the Spanish Main, who found in their numerous inlets and harbors which were dangerous to pursuing navigators a safe refuge from the consequences of their crimes. The largest of the islands is Tortola, the Turtle Dove, a beautiful little domain, twenty-four miles long and five miles wide, with rich valleys and a range of high hills. Travellers seldom go to Tortola now, planting is unprofitable, the island is almost deserted; but in the eighteenth century it flourished, and a few planters and numerous black slaves lived there prosperously and contentedly. In 1756 the whole population of the island was 460 white persons and 3,864 negro slaves.<sup>1</sup>

Chief among the planters was an English Quaker

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<sup>1</sup>The Development of the West Indies, by Frank Wesley Pitman, Ph. D., Yale Historical Publications, 1917, p. 383.

named Thornton and over his household presided his young wife, Dorcas Downing Zeagurs.<sup>2</sup>

On May 27, 1761, their son William was born. I have fixed the year approximately by circumstantial evidence; for he never disclosed it and there are no vital statistics for Tortola. When William Thornton was two years old his father died, and when he was five he was sent to his father's relatives, his grandfather and aunts, in Lancashire, England, to be educated. In 1777, when he was sixteen, he was apprenticed to a Doctor Fell of Ulverstone, England, to learn the business of a doctor, who was also then an apothecary, a dentist and a phlebotomist. Thornton attended Doctor Fell's shop, learned to make boluses and plasters, how to bleed people and how to pull their teeth out, and before he left Doctor Fell he had earned several sixpences and shillings with his lancet and forceps. After three years with Doctor Fell he went to Edinburgh to take the finishing course in medicine for which the University at that city was famous. He entered in 1781 and took his degree in 1784. After a brief return to Tortola he went to Paris to continue his scientific studies and there he learned a great deal and made many pleasant acquaintances. By this time he had formed the definite idea that he was to be a leader in the world, but to obtain this leadership a large private fortune was needed and he determined to acquire it by marriage. In 1787 he came to America and made a considerable stay in Philadelphia and Wilmington. It was at this time that he addressed himself to Governor John Dickinson, of Delaware, and asked the hand of the Governor's daughter in marriage. The Governor was rich and had married an heiress himself, but he rejected Thornton's overtures because he thought his daughter was too young to marry, she being only sixteen years old. The lover could not

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<sup>2</sup>Thornton Papers, Library of Congress MSS. Unless otherwise stated these papers are the authority for this paper.

wait for her to grow older, and went back to Tortola in April, 1788. He intended to settle in America, however, and had been naturalized as a citizen of Delaware on January 7, 1788. When he reached the West Indies he met another heiress, whose initials only have been preserved, Miss R. H., and became engaged to her. Shortly before the day set for their marriage she ran off with another man. This mortifying circumstance threw Thornton into a fever and he was very ill. As soon as he had recovered sufficiently to travel, he came back to America to mend his health and heart. Neither was permanently broken, for he was soon in good physical condition, and in October, 1790, within a year from the time he was jilted in the West Indies, he was married in Philadelphia to Anna Maria Brodeau. Two failures to secure heiresses had somewhat diminished his matrimonial ambitions, but his wife was not portionless. Her mother was a French woman, a widow of high social position in Philadelphia, clever and influential, and Thornton's position in Philadelphia, and afterwards in Washington, was strengthened by her support. Although her daughter was hardly older than Miss Dickinson was when the Governor rejected Thornton, Mrs. Brodeau was not afraid to entrust her happiness to Thornton's care. In fact, she was pleased with the match, for she saw that her son-in-law was a remarkable man, and she yielded, as others did, to his charm of manner and conversation, his sprightliness and enthusiasm which made him more like a Frenchman than an Englishman.

At the time of his marriage he was thirty years old, of medium height, with regular features, brown hair and English complexion, an aquiline nose, active in body and abnormally active in mind. There was hardly a man in America who had received a scientific education equal to his, for the Americans who studied abroad usually went through a classical course only, but Thornton, having received a rudimentary classical

education, had studied medicine and chemistry and then botany and other branches of natural science. The young man was no adventurer, nor was he penniless, for the plantation yielded him an income which was, however, not always certain. By nature he was a fearless idealist and believed that the New World would welcome plans and projects which in Europe would go unheeded.

In 1793 the American Philosophical Society awarded him the Magellanic gold medal for his essay entitled "*Cadmus; or a Treatise on the Elements of Written Language, Illustrated by a Philosophical division of Speech, the power of each character, thereby mutually fixing the orthography and orthoepy, with an Essay on the mode of teaching the surd or deaf, and consequently dumb, to speak.*" It was a treatise upon the elements of written language and the application of a new system of letters and spelling to the teaching of the deaf to speak. Much of the argument has become familiar to later generations in the literature concerning Volapuk, Esperanto, simplified spelling and visible speech.<sup>3</sup>

Before Thornton attracted attention in this field he had become the patron, friend and coadjutor of John Fitch.<sup>4</sup> He made John Fitch's steamboat a success. Twenty years later he swore that Robert Fulton had stolen the plans of the boat. It was soon after his experiments with the steamboat began that he invented a steam cannon which drove twenty-four bullets successively in two minutes through a plank an inch thick, but this rapid-fire gun he considered to be more curious than useful. In 1792 his plans for

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<sup>3</sup>CADMUS, or a Treatise on the Elements of Written Language, Illustrated by a Philosophical Division of Speech, the Power of each character thereby mutually fixing the Orthography and Orthoepy. Cur nescire, pudens prave, quam descire malo? Hors Ars. Poet. V. 88. With an Essay on the Mode of Teaching the Surd or Deaf and Consequently Dumb to Speak. By William Thornton, M.D., Member of the Societies of Scots Antiquaries of Edinburg and Perth; the Medical Society and the Society of Natural Hist of Edin. the American Philosophical Society, &c., Philadelphia, Printed by R. Aitken & Son, No. 22, Market Street, M.DCC.XCIII.

<sup>4</sup>William Thornton and John Fitch, by Gaillard Hunt, in *The Nation*, May 21, 1914.

the new Capitol building at Washington were accepted. He had previously designed the Philadelphia Library Building. Subsequently, he designed several other buildings including some beautiful private houses, a few of which are still standing. The history of his connection with the Capitol building has been written by Glenn Brown. A full account of William Thornton, the Architect, has yet to be written. He studied architecture for the first time when he drew the plans for the Capitol, but architecture was never more than a recreation with him. He gave up the practice of medicine before he left Philadelphia for Washington and never regularly resumed it. The fees were much smaller in this country than they were in the West Indies, but, apart from that, he felt an aversion for many branches of a general practitioner's duties, and in those days there were no specialists. He took an interest in agriculture and had a farm near Washington, but he never followed farming as a profession. He was a prolific writer, a printer of pamphlets, a contributor to the newspapers, and letters flowed from his pen in endless numbers, but he never wrote a book and he could not be called an author. His writings cover a bewildering multitude of subjects—negro colonization and emancipation, a national university, landscape gardening, somnambulism,<sup>5</sup> South American independence, the breeding of horses, city building, George Washington, to mention only a few. Of no circumstance in his life was he as proud as he was of Washington's friendship. The intimate association began in Philadelphia in 1792 and when Tobias Lear ceased to be Washington's private Secretary the following year Thornton aspired to succeed him. The President's reply to him saying he had chosen his wife's kinsman, Bartholomew Danbridge, was warm and friendly in tone. Washington appointed him a Commissioner of the new federal

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<sup>5</sup>See in *Harper's Weekly* for Oct. 1, 1910, "The Remarkable Case of William Kemble," based on one of Thornton's papers.



district in 1794, moved to the selection, doubtless, because he wished him to have oversight of the construction of the building he had designed, because he believed him to be a genius in planning generally, and because he had confidence in him and a personal liking for him. He and Commissioner Thornton tramped together over the ten miles square and he lent a willing ear to Thornton's projects, liking them none the less because many of them were Utopian. Thornton told him how a philosophical society must be founded; how there must be a national university on a novel plan which should include mechanical as well as classical and scientific education; how there must be an agricultural institution on a comprehensive scale—that government, art, science, learning, mechanics, husbandry, all must have their central point in the new city which this modern Cadmus hoped to build.

Thornton fairly revelled in the intimacy with Washington. He wrote to his friends in England about it; he planned to become Washington's Boswell and to record his daily sayings and doings; but he appears to have abandoned the idea—at any rate he has left us no notes to indicate that he even started to carry it out. The friendly letters which Washington and the family at Mt. Vernon wrote him survive as conclusive proof that he did not exaggerate his position. At Washington's request he wrote out his ideas on the subject of the national university and they were printed in 1796 under the title "Public Education." He designed the General's handsome house on North Capitol Street between B and C streets, and supervised the building, being often intrusted by Washington with large sums of money to pay for the work as it progressed. He helped Washington's nephew, Lewis, in planning his country house. Mrs. Washington appealed to him on occasion as a physician and often intrusted him with those

small household commissions which are a sure sign of intimacy.

After Thornton had served as Commissioner of the District of Columbia for five years, the office was abolished and he became Superintendent of the Patent Office, then under the Department of State, serving from 1802 up to the time of his death in 1827. His activities as a citizen were numerous. He served as a justice of the peace; was an officer in the militia; was one of the founders of the Columbian Institution, the first society for mental improvement organized in Washington; he was one of the organizers of the Washington Assemblies in 1800, the first effort to give form to the society of the place; he painted amateur portraits; he wrote verses; he entertained a great deal. He became interested in South American politics and was a correspondent of several of the leaders in the struggle for South American independence. In 1815 he printed a pamphlet entitled "Outlines of a Constitution for United North and South Columbia, Addressed to the Citizens of North and South Columbia"—a fantastic plan for uniting the whole Western Hemisphere under one government with the capital on the Isthmus of Darien. He wanted to be a minister to one of the South American republics.

He was a contentious man, and the habit grew on him as he grew older. He was a writer of long, explanatory, circumstantial letters, all true enough but doubtless wearisome to receive. He quarreled with his fellow Commissioners of the District, with Fulton over the steamboat, with Latrobe over the Capitol. He importuned Congress on many subjects, the Secretary of State over the Patent Office, the President on Appointments to office and public questions. He became a man with grievances and claims. I have read a great many of these letters and they seem convincing that he was right. Nevertheless, I can imagine how sorry his correspondents were



to receive them, how reluctantly they read them, and how difficult they found it to answer them, knowing, as they did, that he would be sure to write more long letters in reply.

He was an unconquerable man and he never grew old. When he died on March 28, 1828, at the age of 67, he was still planning, still contending, still hoping for that leadership and success which he had resolved should be his when he started out in life.

I have said that Thornton wrote on negro colonization and emancipation, and his connection with this subject I shall now develop by several of his surviving papers.

I must turn first to another West Indian, who like Thornton was born in the Virgin Islands, who was also a Quaker, a physician, an emancipationist and a scientist of varied accomplishments and great curiosity. John Coakley Lettson had already made his mark in London when Thornton came upon the scene, being some seventeen years older than Thornton, and to him Thornton appealed for assistance in his plans for helping the negroes to be free and the free negroes to become useful members of society.<sup>6</sup> For Thornton's benefit Lettson obtained an account from Granville Sharp of his experiment at Sierra Leone. Granville Sharp was a philanthropist and pamphleteer, a sympathizer with the American Revolution, a friend of General Oglethorpe and a most effective friend of the negroes. It was he, in fact, who brought about the litigation in England which resulted in the British declaration that a slave became free as soon as he landed on British soil. Sharp's letter of October 13, 1788, to Doctor Lettson, told how Sierra Leone had been bought for a trifling sum from King Tom, a negro chief. The King not only sold his territory but his subjects as well. He was in the slave trade, and did, in fact, sell some of the free negro colonists when their

<sup>6</sup>Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the late John Coakley Lettson, M.D., LL.D., etc., by Thomas Joseph Pettigrew, F. L. S. London, 1817.

number became few and they could not resist him. To Sierra Leone, Sharp and several others, with the aid of the British Government, sent some four hundred wretched negroes early in 1787. They were the remnant of those American slaves who had been incorporated into the British Army and Navy during the American Revolution, besides some runaways who had found refuge in London. They started on the voyage much debilitated by long waiting on ship-board and by drunkenness from the rum which was served to them as a part of their rations. Only two hundred and seventy-six got to Sierra Leone. A few months later only one hundred and thirty of these were still in the Colony.

Doctor Lettsom's friend, Henry Smeathman,<sup>7</sup> a scientific explorer who had lived for several years on the West Coast of Africa, was the originator of the Sierra Leone experiment, and when Thornton heard in 1786 that Smeathman intended to visit Africa he wrote to Lettsom, Nov. 18, 1786, that he would like to go with him. He said that he wished to emancipate the slaves on the plantation in Tortola, but as only half of them, some seventy or eighty, belonged to him he would have to take his slaves away. Where could he send them? To their own country, naturally, but in that country some one must protect them from their relatives, the natives, and from their own helplessness. Thornton wished to be that protector. Before removing his slaves from Tortola he intended to allot to them some land and require them to pay him for it gradually before they were emancipated. He hoped in this way to arouse in them habits of independence. He said that in Africa a commonwealth should be founded. He worked out his plan in detail. It

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<sup>7</sup>Smeathman wrote: Plan of Settlement to be made near Sierra Leone on the Grain Coast of Africa, intended more particularly for the service and happy establishment of Blacks and People of Colour to be shipped as freemen under the Direction of the Committee for Relieving the Black Poor, and under the Protection of the British Government. By Henry Smeathman, Esq., who has resided in that country nearly four years. London 1786.

included, as he was then a Quaker, disarming the inhabitants and the making of inviolable treaties of peace with all the world. His activities extended to the free negroes in America. He told Lettsom, February 15, 1787, that he found many free negroes in Rhode Island who were desirous of going to the Guinea Coast and who approved of his project to transport them thither. He learned that there were a great many free blacks in Boston. The American blacks were anxious to know if Sierra Leone was a British colony or an independent settlement. If it was a colony they would not go, but if it was independent they would go and Thornton would go with them. They changed his plans by insisting upon the right to carry arms for their self-defense; otherwise they might be captured and reduced to slavery again. Thornton could get 2,000 to go with him. The blacks in Newport were organized as the "Union Society", and more than seventy had signed as ready to join him. Going to Boston he grew warmer in his plans. May 20, 1787, he wrote that hundreds were ready to go from that place. He discussed his project with Samuel Adams, who approved of it. Thornton wished to dedicate himself to "this grand affair," as he called it. Returning to Philadelphia in July, 1788, he was still full of his black commonwealth, but the expedition to Sierra Leone having sailed, he would wait to hear how it turned out. If it failed he would organize another expedition. If it succeeded his American blacks would join the new settlers. They would go in prodigious numbers if the settlement was free and not a colony. The free blacks had petitioned the legislature of Massachusetts for vessels and equipment to take them to Africa. If it was necessary, Thornton would fit out transports himself for that purpose. In 1789 began his correspondence on the subject with the French emancipation society, "Les Amis des Noirs," but he appears to have derived only moral encouragement from that source. He thought he

could do more good in Africa than he could anywhere else on the globe, but he must have the "superintendence of the undertaking." (To Lettsom Nov. 13, 1789.) He was then a bachelor, and had no ties to deter him from personal risk. On June 15, 1790, he was still ardent for his plan. After that we hear no more of his desire to go to Africa. He was married in October of that year. His attention was now engrossed by his explorations in the elements of written language. He was writing a dictionary of the English language, giving all the roots of words and their true spelling, which had never been properly given. By 1794 he was telling Lettsom about the new capital, which he thought would be "one of the most elegant cities in the world." (January 8, 1795.)

When Thornton was deep in his colonization plans he laid them before Samuel Adams, as we have seen, and he approved of them, and he found encouragement and assistance from James Madison who wrote out for him certain considerations which he incorporated in his letter to the President of the "Société des Amis des Noirs."

#### J. DOTY TO WILLIAM THORNTON

[Tortola] [1786]

Dear Sir

I informed you I would transmit to you early intelligence of the determination of the members of the House of Assembly on your address to them, and the letter to me which accompanied it. I yesterday submitted both to them, and according to the usual form, the further consideration of the Subject matter was ordered for the next meeting. In the mean-time it may not be improper to state to you, the Ideas which this Subject seems to have given rise to, in the minds of some of the members. It is not extraordinary that a plan, which has for its object, the establishing a Colony of free blacks, in a tropical climate, for the purpose of Cultivating the usual articles which are the produce of the West Indies, and promoting the Interests of Freedom among those people, should not be a very popular one in this Country. And some of the members of the Assembly seem to be of opinion that such an establishment



should it be carried into effect and be successful, will eventually be highly injurious to the Interests of the West India Islands, and therefore ought not to be countenanced by them. There are some other Gentlemen, who seem desirous of knowing, to whom the Colony intended to be established at Sierra Leone is to be made Subject; whether it is to be absolutely a dependency of Great Britain, or whether it is intended to be only placed under the protection of that power, and as to matters of Government, Commerce, &c to remain in a state of Independency. I must confess it appears to me, that a discussion of this subject at large, in this, or any other of the Islands, will be a fruitless, and futile, undertaking, as the establishing, and ultimate existence and success of such Colony, will depend upon causes, which these Islands can very little Influence or control, but were this not the case, I can conceive that the establishment of a Colony of free people of colour in Africa, may not only, not be injurious to the Interests of the West India Islands, but may even be rendered beneficial to them, for if to the free Blacks who it is intended shall be removed from North America to Africa, the plan is so extended as that the free people of colour in the Islands may be added, the community without an Act of injustice might be disencumbered of a class of people, who it is universally acknowledged are highly injurious to its Interests. These people are, in the Islands, in a situation more ineligible than they are on the Continent of North America, and probably would most willingly emigrate to another Country whose policy would not make it necessary to restrict them, in the rights of Citizenship. In the Islands they can scarcely be said legally to possess any visible permanent property, in some of them they are not allowed to possess the smallest quantity of Land in fee, nor beyond a very small number of Slaves, and in others where they are permitted by Law to hold a small quantity of Land in fee, they are prohibited from planting any, but certain Articles of cultivation. In this Island, their legal right to hold property within it, is a more liberal one than in most others, but even here, they cannot possess more than eight Acres of Land, nor more than fifteen Slaves. In one of the Windward Islands of this government it is at present or was lately in contemplation, to pass a Law, prohibiting any free person of Colour, from keeping a Huckstering shop, and from retailing Rum and other spirituous liquors, in any of the Towns in the Island, and as this business has hitherto constituted a principal object of employment with these people, should such a Law pass the Legislature, many of them will be deprived of the means of subsistence, at least until they have adopted some other object of employment. They are not eligible to

the holding any publick office of trust, or profit, in many of the Islands, nor have they a Vote in the election of any publick officer, and in some of the Islands (particularly in the foreign) they are prohibited from following any but certain Trades and employments. In the French Islands their situation is much worse than in the English, if the late revolution in the Government, has not operated to their advantage, and in the Danish & Dutch, they are but little removed from mere Slaves.

Without reasoning as to the Justice of the distinction which is universally made between the white Inhabitants and the free people of colour, and the very great distance at which the Law has placed the one from the other, it is sufficient that the policy of the West Indies, will never suffer these poor people to emerge from their present humble state, or to possess the equal rights of free Citizenship. To these causes, and their consequent poverty it is to be attributed that in general in the Islands, they are an Idle, profligate Race, and very Injurious to the Interests of the rest of the Community of which they are Members, and they probably will ever remain so, until they are placed in a situation, where they can enjoy the rights and immunities of free citizens. Where the right of possessing property to any extent, may operate as a spur to the acquiring it by an exertion of honest industry, and where, finding a fair reputation will be an essential prerequisite in the acquirement of office, and the good opinion of the Community, it will be their Interest to be careful of their moral conduct, and to preserve a decent appearance.

The House of Assembly stands adjourned to tuesday next, on which day, or at any subsequent meeting, I shall be happy in communicating to the members, any further information on this Subject, which you shall think proper and necessary to be submitted to their consideration.

I am

Sir

with great Respect

Your most obedient Servant

J Doty

*Friday Morning*

Doctor Thornton

General Outlines of a Settlement on the Coast of Africa particularly that part under the Appellation of the Tooth-Ivory Coast. In the Language of the Blacks *Quaqua*.—[by Thornton].

This part of the Coast is chosen because it enjoys as good Air as any of the Windward Coast, is not so subject to pestilential Fevers as the Grain Coast, because it does not contain large Rivers.<sup>8</sup>

It does not abound so much with Minerals as the Gold Coast, therefore the Water will probably be better. It is equally luxuriant with any part, for Nature providing always with a Bountiful Hand has placed there the largest Animals with which we are Acquainted, (the Elephant), and the Sugar Cane grows there, naturally, in the most rich manner as Food for them. The Natives are much more numerous than on any other place on the Windward Coast, for they have generally been more peaceable, and have not yet got into the refined Species of Traffic i. e. for Men.

The European powers have no Forts there, & cannot on that Account be jealous of a Settlement that promises not to interfere with their immediate Views. They could be supplied with Grain on one side, and Gold Dust for a medium in Traffic on the other.

1. The Country must be visited, and Lands purchased of the Natives, making a Settlement in a peaceable manner.

2. The Courts of England, France, & the States of America to be visited that a Treaty of Commerce with them & the Africans may be established. This Treaty not to exclude them from a free Trade with any other power, or with the whole World: And that any Vessel which may be built in Africa or owned there, shall have free admittance into the ports which receive their Commodities. If any power shall encroach upon the Liberties of the Settlement the most formal & fixed Resolution shall be taken never more to trade with that power till Restitution be made, and the other powers in treaty will doubtless protect from Insults their commercial Allies. The Americans having no Settlement in the torrid Zone would be much benefitted by such a Treaty. No power would ever be jealous, as this Settlement would be one founded in perfect peace, and therefore incapable of assuming or dictating to any other. The Articles of Commerce would be, to Europe, Cotton, Indigo, Gold Dust, Ivory, Gums, Dying Wood, Drugs & Spices; to America the same with the addition of Sugar & its products; Cocoa, Coffee &c. as they have no Colonies that would interfere with such productions, and as their chief dependence is on the Agriculture of their own Country, might be supplied with some Manufactures of Africa.

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<sup>8</sup>There are instances where the Rivers on the Grain Coast have risen during the Rainy Season 150 feet perpendicular from the Bed and when the Sun dries them up the Stench is intolerable.—Bennett. [Note in the MS].



3. Blacks who are now free in America & Europe, or who may be made free in the West Indies hereafter, to be taken to the New Settlement carrying with them such Utensils as will be requisite to cultivate the Lands, and also to form the necessaries of Life. The West India Negroes will be well acquainted with the culture of Sugar, Cotton, Indigo, Cocoa, Ginger, Coffee, Rice, Corn, (Indian & Guinea) and raising such live Stock as is peculiarly adapted to the torrid Zone. The Negroes of the Northern Countries, who have been amongst Christians (a sect which the poor West India Negroes know little of, except by Name) would be easily induced to live a regular Life, and by their Example the rest, as well as the Natives, might become a sober religious People. The northern Negroes too, by the Example of Industry which they have been accustomed to behold in the lower Classes of the White Inhabitants of those Countries would easily, by introducing their acquired Habits & Customs, bring to Industrious Lives the ignorant & slothful of the warm Country of Africa.

4. The Lands already purchased from the Natives might be divided into portions or Estates according to the number of their Family. These might be taxed in a very light degree, for the support of—

5. Schools & religious Houses, which are to be raised by the public Stock.

6. Such a Trade might be opened with the Africans that into this Settlement great Riches would be drained from the other parts, and the European Powers, particularly Great Britain & France and also the States of America, would find their Advantage in opening an extensive Commerce with it.

7. A Code of Laws to be framed for the mutual good of each Member of the Community which Code must be signed by every Individual, and executed by the Sentence of a Majority of Judges, a Jury, or single Judge, according to the nature of the Crime and Circumstances.

8. That such valuable Vegetable productions, as do not naturally grow in that part of Africa, be imported to the most proper nurseries appointed for the general Good of the Community, and their culture could then be extended with the demand.

9th To buy the Slaves that are brought from different parts and more fully to answer the purpose particular Ships may be stationed upon the Coast to receive them, and prevent their being offered to trading Vessels, and to free every person thus purchased, making him a member of the Community and giving equal privileges with the rest. If he have a Wife, or she a Husband, or they have Children or Friends in the

Country whence they were brought, by having permission to return and invite such Friends or any other persons to this Settlement of Peace, and paying their own Ransom by working or by Commerce, with Interest, the Community would increase rapidly, and as any province is rich only by the number of its Inhabitants such a Settlement would doubtless soon acquire an immense property. By this mode Thousands would annually be rescued from the most oppressive slavery, or Death, would be adopted into a Family of Peace on Earth, and taught Doctrines of Him, the King of Kings who has promised peace to his followers, in Heaven. The price which each would give for his Freedom would so much exceed any Sum that could be offered with Advantage by the Slave Traders, that in a little time the Traffic would cease. What heavenly pleasure must dilate every Breast that has been instrumental in delivering from oppression the poor defenceless Captive, and restoring tranquillity to his Family. The power that created you as Instruments would never leave you! What happiness awaits him who calls a Soul from Bondage under the promise of the most high, but my Friends what infinity of happiness shall be theirs who deliver from bondage & call unto Christ so many Thousand Souls!

W. T.

To the Black Inhabitants of Pennsylvania, assembled at one of their stated Meetings in Philadelphia. [Draft by Thornton].

It is in Contemplation by the English to make a free Settlement of Blacks on the Coast of Africa, which they have already begun, and have purchased a Tract of Land twenty Miles square at Sierra Leone for the intended Settlers.<sup>9</sup> They are desirous of knowing if any of the Blacks of this Country be willing to return to that Region which their Fathers originally possessed, and finding many in Boston, Providence and Rhode Island very desirous of embarking for Africa, wish also to be informed if any of the Blacks in Pennsylvania are inclined to settle there. They would on landing be entitled to Estates, or certain Tracts of Land, and possess them for ever.

The Place intended for this Settlement is at the mouth of the River of Sierra Leone, which is navigable back 240 Miles. It is situated in about 10 Degrees East Long: of Tenerif, and 8 Deg: North Lat: Sir George Young of the British Navy who visited this Place gives the following Account of it. "St. George's Bay, in which the first Township is formed, is,

<sup>9</sup>See Substance of the Report delivered by the Court of Directors of the Sierra Leone Company to the General Court of Proprietors on Thursday the 27th March, 1794. London, 1794.

without exception, as fine a Harbour as any in the World; that the Mountains abound with Brooks of fresh Water; and are covered with the most noble Forests of all kinds of Timber, and with perpetual verduer; that when he ascended those Mountains, and looked about him he had never been so agreeably struck before with beautiful Landscapes of Wood and Water; and that he found the Air so cool upon the Mountain that he could have borne his great Coat with pleasure."

The Blacks who form this Settlement should be a free and independent People, governed by their own Laws, and by Officers of their own election. Their Ports would be open to trade with the whole World, whereby they would have the Advantage of procuring every thing at the cheapest Rate, which would not be the Case were the Settlement monopolized as a dependent Colony, by any power either of Europe or America; but it is imagined the Slave Trade will be soon abolished, and that the Europeans and Americans will co-operate in the establishment of this laudable Undertaking.

It is requested that those who may be disposed to embark for Africa will sign their Names, Ages, Trades and Families, &c., in the following, or a similar manner.

Names	Ages	Trades	Families
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The immediate Exports from Africa to Europe would be Gold Dust, Ivory, Cotton, Dying Woods, Gums, Drugs, Spices, Fruits and Preserves, Wood for Cabinets, &c. Oil of Palms &c, Indigo, Tobacco, Rice and Wax; to America the same, except the four last Articles, but with the Addition of Cocoa, Coffee, Sugar & its products &c, as the Americans have no Colonies with which such productions would interfere.

WILLIAM THORNTON TO ÉTIENNE CLAVIÈRE [1788]

Mons.<sup>r</sup> [Étienne] Clavière

*President de la Societe des Amis des Noirs*

Respected Friend

Thy Letter with which I was lately honored is truly interesting & I perused it with must satisfaction, and think myself highly obligated for this favour: I am happy that your Nation while engaged in a noble struggle for her own Privileges was not inattentive to the rights and happiness of the most oppressed of the human Race. While the Voice of Liberty was heard in every Street, and acclamations of Joy rent the Heavens, you listened to the voice of humanity, in the midst of gladness, the cry of the afflicted in a distant Land pierced each Heart of Benevolence. The Sum of your Happiness is not yet complete

for Tears of Sorrow continue to flow from the Eyes of Slaves, and the God of Man cannot delight in the freedom of one who binds another to administer to his pleasures. Let that nobleness of Character which has distinguished your People rouse you to assert for the Africans those privileges that are claimed so loudly by the French! then will their solemn appeals to Heaven and to Earth for the Rights of Man be marked with consistency, requiring that *all Men* are *equally* entitled by Nature to the same Favours! Thus shall each name that dignifies your Society do honor to human Nature, and when the Trumpet of Fame has done sounding the names of Heroes, your Names will be heard with secret Joy in the most remote Ages, and Time will hand them over to Eternity.

I am happy that you approve of the Men with whom I propose to form a Settlement in Africa, though you think it will be necessary to form a concert of opinions and of actions between the different powers of Europe in favour of the plan previous to the attempt to form the Establishment: if however we consider that even with all the disadvantages of inexperienced Superintendents, appointed over a lawless Banditti and not very satisfactorily equipped, the English made an Essay, and as I have lately been informed not unsuccessfully, we might, with reason, hope that with such Men as I had the honor of proposing to you, properly provided with Necessaries & Arms, a free Settlement might be established upon the most solid Basis; for it does not appear that either the continuance of Slavery in other places, or even the Slave Trade affected the Settlers at Sierra Leone materially and, as the Traders seek only to take the Men, not the Country, they would have no Inducements to attack the free Blacks who were trained to Arms, and who were determined to sell their liberty only with their loss of Life. The Blacks of the Eastern States of North America still continue anxious to embark for Africa. They even addressed the Legislature of Massachusetts, and received an Answer truly worthy of that noble-spirited People, signifying that they were willing to grant the prayer of their Petition, in furnishing Ships with Stores, Implements of Labour, and Necessaries for the Coast of Africa, as soon as a proper place could be secured to them, either by Grants made by the African Princes, or in Consequence of Negotiations with any of the European Powers.

I am incapable of expressing my admiration of your spirited and excellent address to the Bailliages or Districts entitled to send Delegates to the states Gen<sup>l</sup>: It speaks the Language of Magnanimity, but though its justice may stare every slave dealer in the Face, and each sleeping Conscience be awaked to its Sense of Guilt, it withdraws behind the impenetrable Veil



of Interest, and the Mind is afraid to give way to conviction. A total and immediate abolition of Slavery may indeed be pregnant with some Danger to Society, but there can be no inconvenience in a gradual Emancipation to commence as soon as general Safety will permit it. You expect the abolition of the Trade: I sincerely hope that the Voice of a few Slave Traders, the most despicable of human Beings will not be suffered to dictate the most unchristian of practices to your enlightened Nation so justly famed for humanity and generosity: But whether or no you succeed in this praiseworthy attempt to abolish a traffic in the human Species let me urge the immediate consideration of the plan for forming a Settlement in Africa. The English will no doubt co-operate with you, and the Americans are willing, What can be urged against it that will not shrink before Resolution? If the Colonies preserve their unjust Titles to hold Slaves, how will they interfere with Africa? If the Slave Trade be still permitted even on every part of the Coast, what Madman would run headlong into danger to take them, knowing the dispositions of regularly disciplined Men in Arms especially if the terror of retaliation in Slavery were threatened by the Victors on both sides? If you be afraid that the surrounding Kings might be instigated by the Traders to destroy and captivate the Settlers, Laws might without difficulty be enacted to prevent under pain of Death any Traders from making Slaves within a few Degrees North and South of the Settlement—Prudence is to be admired, but no difficulties ought to overcome the Minds of Men engaged in the Cause of Virtue. Liberty is now alive: Let her not die *till she visit another* Quarter of the Earth—You are not immortal, and know not who shall succeed you. The Sun shineth today—to-morrow may never come.—No political objection can be urged against the Plan. The Manufacturing Nations of Europe, particularly France and England, will be benefitted by procuring raw materials, at a cheaper rate, exchanging for them manufactured articles. America also will find great advantages in the Productions of Africa. The immediate Exports from Africa to Europe would be gold Dust, Ivory, Cotton, Dying Woods, Gums, Drugs, Spices, Fruits and Preserves, Wood for Cabinets &c. Oil of Palms &c. Indigo, Tobacco, Rice & Wax; to America the same, except the four last Articles, but with the addition of Sugar and its products, Cocoa, Coffee, &c. as they have no Colonies with which such productions would interfere.

The Planters in the West Indies particularly the Sugar Planters cannot for many Years be affected by the exportation of any tropical Productions from Africa to Europe for the expense of Sugar Works would be too great for a new Settle-

ment, and were Sugar after that as cheap in Africa as in the East Indies it would bear so heavy a Duty that the Revenue of either France or England would be much increased by its Importation; however if these nations should regard more the Interest of the West India Planters than the increase of their Revenues though at the expense of the Subjects resident in either Kingdom, they might lay such high Duties on the African Sugar as to be prohibitory, or at least equivalent to a Bounty on West India Sugars, till *true* policy should open the Eyes of European Politicians, and force them to urge the eternal abolition of Slavery.

Reasons in favour of the immediate Settlement of Africa may be collected from the Sentiments of many in this Country. I will give you upon this Subject the Opinion of a Gentleman from one of the most respectable States in the Union—a Gentleman who does honor not to America only, but to human Nature—a Gentleman of the first Abilities, and whose Voice has ever been listened to with uncommon attention in the Councils of this Nation. His own Words are the best adapted to his Sentiments. [Insert the note by Mr.M.]

“Without inquiring into the practicability or the most proper means of establishing a settlement of freed blacks on the Coast of Africa, it may be remarked as one motive to the benevolent experiment that if such an asylum was provided, it might prove a great encouragement to manumission in the Southern parts of the U. S. and even afford the best hope yet presented of putting an end to the slavery in which not less than 600,000 unhappy negroes are now involved.

“In all the Southern States of N. America, the laws permit masters, under certain precautions to manumit their slaves. But the continuance of such a permission in some of the States is rendered precarious by the ill effects suffered from freedmen who retain the vices and habits of slaves. The same consideration becomes an objection with many humane master ag<sup>st</sup>. an exertion of their legal right of freeing their slaves. It is found in fact that neither the good of the Society, nor the happiness of the individuals restored to freedom is promoted by such a change in their condition.

“In order to render this design eligible as well to the Society as to the Slaves, it would be necessary that a complete incorporation of the latter into the former should result from the act of manumission. This is rendered impossible by the prejudice of the whites, prejudices which proceeding principally from the difference of colour must be considered as permanent and insuperable.

“It only remains then that some proper external receptacle be provided for the slaves who obtain their liberty. The

interior wilderness of America, and the Coast of Africa seem to present the most obvious alternative. The former is liable to great if not invincible objections. If the settlement were attempted at a considerable distance from the White Frontier, it would be destroyed by the Savages who have a peculiar antipathy to the blacks. If the attempt were made in the neighbourhood of the White Settlements, peace would not long be expected to remain between Societies, distinguished by such characteristic marks, and retaining the feelings inspired by their former relation of oppressors & oppressed. The result then is that an experiment for providing such an external establishment for the blacks as might induce the humanity of Masters, and by degrees both the humanity & policy of the Governments, to forward the abolition of slavery in America, ought to be pursued on the Coast of Africa or in some other foreign situation.<sup>107</sup>

Such is his Opinion, and he further intimated that Slavery is not likely to be *ever* abolished in the Southern States of America till an Asylum be provided to which the manumitted Blacks may be sent.

I have only to add my sincere Wishes that the honorable and benevolent Society over which thou presidest may concur with me in Sentiment respecting the propriety of adopting a plan of immediately commencing this Settlement, as it may beside other beneficial Effects have that of forwarding the abolition of not only the Slave Trade, but Slavery itself, teaching the European Nations that Slavery is not necessary for raising the productions of the torrid Zone, and teaching the Kings of Africa that their Kingdoms would be much richer by a Sale of their Commodities, than by a sale of their Inhabitants; that a King who sells his Subjects to enrich himself is (according to Montesquieu) like one who cuts down his Trees to pick off the Fruits.

Nothing I hope will subdue your Minds! Great is your Cause, and may Heaven prosper your Society! You defend not imaginary Titles; you plead not the cause of an Individual or a Family; you support not the honorary dignities of a Kingdom; but you disinterestedly raise your Voice in favour of many Nations, to preserve the Lives of many Millions, and in defence of the dearest rights of Man!—

I am with the greatest regard & esteem

thy respectful Friend

W:T.

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<sup>107</sup>This insertion is in James Madison's handwriting.



## SUGGESTION TO BUY PORTO RICO FOR FREE NEGROES.

DRAFT, BY THORNTON [1802]

About the year 88, at the time that the Government of England was engaged in settling a free Colony at Sierra Leone the Americans in New England were desirous of sending all the free Blacks from that Country and offered Ships and every necessary for their support. The Blacks likewise were desirous of fixing in any Country where they might enjoy the rights & privileges of free-men, which they knew could not, consistently with the policy of the American Government, be accorded to them while so large a portion of the Black people remained in a State of Slavery. But without they had returned to Africa there was no place in which they could find the contemplated Asylum. If an Island had been in the possession of the Americans it would have served this valuable purpose. The English made a Settlement, which some French Privateers destroyed, and which humanity has to lament; but Virtue generally perseveres in the plans she has commenced, because she seldom commences them without considering attentively the end. They again sent settlers and it is thought they will amply repay the trouble and expense incurred. The same Causes that induced the Inhabitants of Boston to desire a place of settlement for the Blacks still exist, and we yet possess no place that can without various objections be dedicated to this end. But the mere settlement of the Blacks is perhaps not a sufficient inducement to the Government of America to engage in the establishment of a Colony, for it has been considered by many wise men as incurring a great expense, & subjecting any Nation to the Evils of foreign warfare. It is in part true, but only as it relates to certain European powers. With respect to us is it materially different, and though we are at present but in the infancy of our political Existence we are considered as so important in the Scale of Nations that were we even now to possess one or more Islands no Nation would presume to molest us, because our weight thrown into any Scale would outbalance the advantages of opposition to any of our National Measures; especially if there were not direct aggression on the rights & privileges of others; and though it might be extremely difficult for the Americans at any other time to obtain from the Court of Spain, or any other Nation an Island in the West Indies, especially of sufficient importance to be worthy of being possessed by one of the most extensive Nations in the world, yet at this time it would not be difficult to induce the Court of Spain to cede to us, what is not important to them, I mean the

Island of Porto Rico, for it is an annual expense to the Spanish Government of above 150,000 Doll<sup>s</sup>. Other motives might tend to induce them to grant us this Island which may be enumerated. During a War, & the present particularly, the English may make prize of it, if they know the Americans wish it, may sell it to them, thereby depriving the Spaniards not only of our Friendship but also of the Island & the Money we would give. It is not however the policy of England to grant the Americans an Island for the very Idea of giving us more strength in the American Archipelago is contrary to their national policy, not only on acct. of increasing our Seamen & consequently our naval power, but of being her competitors in the Sugar Market: but this policy would give way to the consideration of our obtaining from the Spaniards what was refused by them, and the National Jealousies between the two Courts would at this time work mutually to our Advantage. If the English had wished for Porto Rico, or any, or all, of the Spanish Islands, & other Settlements, they could at any time have obtained them, as well as the french Settlements, but the Merchants of England who have lent Money to the Jamaica Planters, on their Estates, and the Planters who at great Expense have settled Sugar Estates, would oppose the Intention of Government, if a Disposition were shown to extend their Colonies in such rich & fertile Islands, where a competition would diminish the value of their settled possessions—and these rich merchants & planters who possess Boroughs in England and send by their extensive Patronage & Influence many Members to parliament do not express their wishes without being heard by the royal or Ministerial Ear. The French Islands have been repeatedly taken by the English and restored at the conclusion of the War, but if retained they would only have thrown the same quantity of Sugar into a different Channel without actually increasing it & there could be less objection to their being retained. If the American Government were opposed to *purchasing* the Island there is no doubt it would be ceded by our giving way in the Settlement of our Western Limits of Louisiana—for if a serious demand were to be made of the Rio Bravo or Rio del Norte as our Boundary, the Spaniards would be extremely adverse to a Dispute, & would be equally or more adverse to the relinquishment of a Territory that contains the richest Gold Mines in the world, which are situated in the Mountains of the Province of Texas, and several Rich ones in the neighborhood of S<sup>ta</sup>. Fé, besides some of the richest Silver Mines in the world—rather than permit such a cession of Territory there is no Doubt they would give the two Floridas & Porto Rico: the last however is the richest most beautiful most pleasant & healthy Island in

the same Latitude or between the Tropics in the world. It is likewise very extensive in fertile Land, and contains more really rich Land proper for Canes & at the same time in a healthy situation than all the other possessions of this Government, if even what is mentioned above were ceded to us. Porto Rico contains Ports that are very extensive & very safe. It is more easy of access to our Ships than any Settlement we can form, as they can run thither & back with the Trade Wind, without beating up or tacking. If the Government possess that Island and make it a free Port it would give, independent of the produce, an astonishing revenue, and if a free Port, it would prevent the Jealousies that it might otherwise excite. If the Government were even adverse to this Island being considered as an object of exchange for such a portion of Louisiana as we may have a right to claim, and were also adverse to making a purchase of it, would any Objection arise to their acceptance of its Sovereignty, and permit a private Company to purchase the Island under the Sanction of the American Government, permitting every proprietor to hold his Land, and the Company taking possession only of the Crown Lands. Upon these Principles the English the Danes the Dutch & others have established Settlements which have been so productive as to give immense revenues.

DRAFT OF A LETTER TO A NEWSPAPER.

BY THORNTON [1816?]

Mess<sup>rs</sup>. Editors

The Cause of the Blacks has called forth the energetic power of England, & Cruisers have been sent to the Coast of Africa to put a Stop to that inhuman trafic, that has so long disgraced the most enlightened Nations of Europe. Such evidences have been produced that we find it is impossible to deny that many of our own People are engaged very deeply in this Business, furnishing under different Flags, the Spaniards of Cuba, with Slaves, who again wait for convenient opportunities to send them to Missouri, & thus many thousands have been introduced in the very teeth of the Constitution; against law, against humanity, against every rule of right & every principle of Christianity, at the very time that we are tickling the vanity of each other, in orations on our freedom & declaration of common rights, & at the very time that we are immolating those poor wretches, who listening to our 4<sup>th</sup>. of July flights, declare that "whatever is praiseworthy in Massa, is certainly praiseworthy in his Slave!"

The Eye of Heaven is not blinded with Gold-dust, & the Day of reckoning is drawing near. Has a single Individual

dared to stand forth the Champion of the Oppressed: has he dared to recommend to Congress that a law should be passed to take to the Coast of Barbary every Man captured on board the Slave-trading Vessels who was engaged directly or indirectly in making Slaves or trading in them; & that such Individuals should be exchanged to ransom the innocent Captives of the Barbarians!— We are seeking for a President. Give me the Name of such a Champion of humanity, & I would write Night & Day to blazon forth his Virtues, and to make him the Ruler of the People. I would have none of your cold-blooded, tardy-thinking and calculating Characters. I would have the warm-hearted the noble-minded & generous Being who would dare to stem the torrent of opposition, and whose Virtues would rise against every attack, with a bolder crest: for in this land there is still great virtue, but it lies in a latent State. It requires to be brought forth, & to be fostered. It would, under the cherishing influence of a great master-spirit, be productive of effects that cannot be contemplated by the puny Soul! The North Americans would thus be distinguished as a great, a generous, a virtuous, & magnanimous People. It would then be an honor to be called by such an Appellation. At present we look not for good and enlightened Men to fill our offices, but for men of money, of influence in Elections, of intrigue, to help forward our contemptible views of self-interest. Even parties are created, without knowing why they are to be enlisted on this or that side, and without seeing the causes that tend to ultimate results, of which they remain as ignorant as if the wood-and-wire worked here were to dance puppets in the moon! If an Envoy be sent to a foreign Country, it is not for what he is expected to do there; but to pay for electioneering services performed here, or to be performed. He may be old to superannuation, he may be deaf & dumb,—that is, incapable of understanding, or speaking intelligibly a word of the People to whom he is sent.—What impositions are these upon the Community! Can no man be found who has honesty enough to call upon the actors in these base desertions of common Sense! No, we have no men, or few who dare write, & fewer still who dare publish what is written: for all the Papers that obtain extensive circulation are in the pay of Government. The Laws are to be published in each of these papers, not for the benefit of the People, but to pay the vile hirelings who are as much bought & sold, as the hack-lawyers, that will plead in favor of any villain, in a cause, known to be iniquitous, for a fee. I speak to you Citizens, without your accustomed homage, & I call upon you to publish what I write if you have any of the spirit of '76. It was then that men dared to think, and to write. It was then that those



bold and home Truths were told in the Pages of *Common Sense*. But the Times have changed, & I call upon you my Countrymen to resume your native energies.

When this Country declared its Independence the Inhabitants were but ab<sup>t</sup> two millions & a half, of which nearly a Million were slaves. We were then without Ships, without Money, without Arms, without ammunition: and yet the whole power of England was insufficient to subject us to an unconditional Submission to parliamentary decrees. We became independent! England was at the commencement of the Struggle nearly free from Debt: at the end of the war they were involved in a debt of 500,000,000 Sterl<sup>g</sup>. The great men of this Country & many others thought it impossible that England could long sustain such a burthen of Taxes as were requisite to pay the interest of this enormous Debt. But England has since that sustained a War against all the powers of Christendom & when engaged with all Europe, we, to obtain a redress of some grievances, threw our power into the Scale against England. She sustained the whole! and put down, finally, the power of France, that had forced the rest of Europe to succumb. That Nation, England, that seemed unappalled by a combination of all the powers of the World, pretends now, in perfect peace, to dread the effects that will be likely to result from an effort of the Emperor of Russia to humble the pride and power of the Turks, if unopposed by the rest of Europe! Has England any thing to fear even if Alexander were to make Constantinople his winter's, & St. Petersburg his summer's, residence? His Empire would be assailable, in so many points, that he would never be able to defend it. He would prepare only for revolutions, for when men are placed under Rulers acting only as Vicegerents, they are apt to break the Clue of power and wind up a Ball for themselves. The East Indies will become independent of Great Britain—New Holland will become independent—The Cape of good-hope will become independent, but all these speaking the English Language will give such advantages to our Commerce as to render us in a few years the most potent Nation in the World.

[December, 1816.]

To the honorable Henry Clay, Chairman of the Assembly for promoting the establishment of a free and independ<sup>t</sup>. Nation of Blacks in Africa [draft by Thornton.]

Sir

My public Duties did not permit my personal attendance at the meeting lately held for this praise-worthy object but I have heard with unspeakable satisfaction of the respectability

of the meeting & of the unanimity of benevolence with which this Subject was discussed. It is a Subject that has long impressed my mind as one of the most momentous; for it involves the happiness of millions of our FellowBeings; and as the Government of America was the first to provide against the extension of Slavery it is with inexpressible pleasure that I view among its most respectable Citizens a zealous desire to restore to their Country the Descendents of the Africans who have obtained their freedom among us. It has been thought by many that they would depart with reluctance for the region of their forefathers, but the feelings of human nature are the same in all. Let those who prejudge the feelings of the Blacks apply the Case to themselves, and ask if they were carried into Slavery among the Barbary Powers or other savages, and by degrees had gained their freedom, and a desire were expressed by the Barbarians that the emancipated & their descend<sup>ts</sup> should be restored to their original country, could there be a hesitation in those to whom such a proposal should be made in embracing the offer, especially if they were to have lands presented to them, and were to be assisted in forming a free Government? It is impossible on this subject, if well considered, to offer a doubt. But lest any should judge from expressions that may have escaped from contented Individuals, I will mention a Fact in favor of this contemplated Establishment that cannot fail to make some Impression.

In the winter of 1786-7 I was travelling in Rhode Island & Massachusetts. I found many free Blacks & having been engaged in a correspondence with some of the members of the Sierra Leone Society of London, among whom were some of my Friends I was desirous of knowing what number of free Blacks in Mass. & R.I. could be found, desirous of joining in that Settlement. I made my wish known to some of the elder Blacks who informed me they would call Meetings that they might be informed of the contemplated object of such a Settlement. They assembled in hundreds, in one of the places of worship & in the most orderly and decent manner, heard all I had to say. They were delighted with the prospect, and in a few Weeks informed me that two thousand were willing to accompany me. I made this known to some of the Member of the Assembly of Massach<sup>ts</sup> who expressed a desire of aiding in sending them out of the Country, and I had no doubt from the ardour with which the proposal of taking them away entirely, was advocated, that the Legislature would have furnished then with Ships, with provisions, Tools &c. and many of the members promised that every requisite would cheerfully be granted. When however I explained to them the intention of taking the Blacks to Sierra Leone—then Members

of the Legislature expressed an unwillingness to send them out of the limits of the U.S., & wished a Settlement to be made in the most southern part of the back Country between the whites & Indians. I informed them that I would never be instrumental in placing those men, who were now comparatively happy & in a state of protection, between the Indians & Savages on their Borders, where they would become a prey to both; besides I was confident the Blacks could have no motive for wishing such a change; for if they should prove capable of defending themselves ag<sup>st</sup> all their Enemies, & should preserve their political freedom, could they ever hope to be rec<sup>d</sup> as representatives in our Assemblies? Could they ever be treated with an equality in a country where many of their Colour were still held in Slavery? It would be morally impossible, but if possible it would be politically dangerous. We thus parted, but I had still a hope that the Day would arrive when other views of this Subject would open to the mind a prospect of such unbounded good to that miserable race, that all minor Considerations would vanish. Happily the Day has arrived, and I hope that the holy zeal with which this Business has commenced may never feel a check; for most fortunately for the cause of humanity, the Cause of self Interest has nothing to fear from its advancement.

I laid before the World in 1804 a Letter containing a plan for emancipating the Blacks, a copy of which I take the liberty of presenting with this.<sup>11</sup> It is however a Subject distinct from the one now under contemplation. This is on the mode of establishing them as a free, distinct, & independent people. Without attempting to combat the various opinions that prevail on this Subject, I think it sufficient to give my own but I offer my Sentiments upon this great Subject with the utmost deference. The Almighty in that wisdom that Man cannot pretend to scan, has destined Africa to be the Country of the Blacks. They lived in a state of Nature, enjoying the fruits & natural productions of one of the most fertile regions of the Earth—till America was discovered. The rich mines of Silver & Gold found there induced the nations of Europe who possessed themselves of these inexhaustible sources of Wealth after sacrificing millions of poor Indians, to import Africans to work their mines & cultivate their lands. These People have been subject to cruelties, at which human Nature has long shuddered. Their sufferings have made impressions that have roused the activity of many benevolent & highly distinguished Characters. The Slave

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<sup>11</sup>Political Economy founded in Justice and Humanity in a letter to a friend by W. T. Washington, 1804. Printed by Samuel Harrison Smith.



Trade has been abolished, many humane Persons have liberated their Slaves, and more would follow them if such provision were made for their future destiny as would be likely to ensure a prospect of felicity. An Establishment was made by the English at Sierra Leone, on one of the finest rivers, & in the richest country in Africa. This settlement flourished till broken up by the French through a mistaken Jealousy. It is revived, & hopes of its advancement entertained. The liberal policy of those enlightened Characters who commenced that Establishment of free Blacks would doubtless induce them cordially to assist in extending it to the free Blacks of this Country, & of all others. To join those already in some degree established would offer advantages to each; but this is only under the supposition that the Settlement is to be considered as appertaining to not only a free but compleatly independent People: and in no respect whatever to be viewed as a Colony. If they should be settled as a Colony, they would be restricted by regulations to trade with particular nations, & would be subjected to oppressive Duties. They might be considered as free but not independent. In an establishment of this kind, where provision should be made for unborn Millions, every movement should be correspondent. Let the Sovereignty of five hundred miles square be purchased of the natives of Africa, by discreet and competent agents and let this region be recorded by our Government as a free gift forever to the people who may settle thereon. The price of purchase may perhaps be small in comparison to the immensity of the Object & particularly if the surrounding People be informed that nothing but good is contemplated. But instead of thousands were it to cost us millions it would be unworthy of the Consider<sup>n</sup>. of a great & magnanimous People, who have not hesitated to sacrifice more than a hundred Millions in asserting National Principles in defence of private Rights; especially when this great Cause is a beneficent retribution for long sustained injuries inflicted on the Innocent; & to blot from the records of Eternity the highest stigma of humanity. After purchasing the Country let it be surveyed in the same manner as our own back Countries, & the fee simple only be disposed of by degrees that the Settlers may be kept compact, and be thereby more capable of defending themselves & their flocks from the incursions of the Savages & from the beasts of the wilderness. A form of republican Govern<sup>t</sup>. would be prepared for them—and they ought for a while to be protected by a due force. Every Advantage should be accorded to them, that an orderly & reasonable people could desire. Public Schools & places of worship should be established. Whatever would tend to their advancement in

this world, & preparation for the next should be solicitously fostered—and if with all our Care such a people should be produced as might reasonably be expected to arise from such preparatory Steps, they would bless the humble Instruments of this great work;—for when the surrounding Nations of Africa now wrapt in miserable Ignorance should incline to join their emancipated Brethren they would find them truly emancipated—not from the chains of Slavery alone, but from the thralldom of the Mind. They would find them enjoying the light of Christianity—and able to instruct their fellow men in the precepts of divine wisdom. Thus would Slavery, the darkest stain on Christian Professors, be finally rendered subservient to the work of heaven & the poor Africans be in a manner repaid for the long sufferings of their unhappy children. The wilderness would flourish in Arts, Agriculture & Science, their Ports would be open to the whole world, the Native African would be taught the principles of Christianity & be happy; thus millions unnumbered in singing halelujahs to our God, would bless the Children of the West!

W: T:









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