The Antislavery Movement in the Upper South Before 1840

By GORDON E. FINNIE

 BENJAMIN LUNDY, THE ABOLITIONIST EDITOR OF THE Genius of Universal Emancipation, estimated that there were in 1827 a total of 106 antislavery societies with 5,150 members in the slave states, whereas there were no more than 24 such organizations with 1,475 members in the free states. These statistics have frequently been used by scholars to support the thesis that there was a strong antislavery movement in the South before an alleged reaction in the 1830’s repressed a rising tide of antislavery feeling and transformed it into a positive defense of the institution of slavery. Since most Southern antislavery sentiment was in the upper slave states, this paper seeks to determine the validity of this interpretation by a survey and analysis of the antislavery movement in these states.

1 Genius of Universal Emancipation, October 14, 1827. The Genius of Universal Emancipation (hereafter cited as GUE) was published in Greeneville, Tennessee, from 1821 to 1825. It was published with variations in title in Baltimore from 1825 to 1831, in Washington from 1831 to 1833, and in Philadelphia from 1834 to 1836. There is an overlapping with the Genius of Universal Emancipation and Baltimore Courier (cited hereafter as GUEBC) from 1825 to 1827.

2 Among the most important works published before World War II are Stephen B. Weeks, Southern Quakers and Slavery (Baltimore, 1896); John Spencer Bassett, Anti-Slavery Leaders of North Carolina (Baltimore, 1898); Mary Stoughton Locke, Anti-Slavery in America from the Introduction of African Slaves to the Prohibition of the Slave Trade, 1619–1808 (Boston, 1901); Alice Dana Adams, The Neglected Period of Anti-Slavery in America, 1808–1831 (Boston, 1908); Asa Earl Martin, The Anti-Slavery Movement in Kentucky Prior to 1850 (Louisville, 1918); Martin, “The Anti-Slavery Societies of Tennessee,” Tennessee Historical Magazine [cited hereafter as THM], I (December 1915), 261–81; Theodore M. Whitfield, Slavery Agitation in Virginia, 1829–1832 (Baltimore, 1930); Ruth Scarborough, The Opposition to Slavery in Georgia Prior to 1860 (Nashville, 1933); Joseph Clarke Robert, The Road from Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832 (Durham, 1941). A few recent publications have raised serious questions about the validity of the thesis that a strong antislavery tradition existed in the South before the alleged reaction of the 1830’s. For example, see Louis Filler, The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830–1860 (New York, 1960); Dwight L. Dumond, Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America (Ann Arbor, 1961); Robert McColley, Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia (Urbana, 1964).

Mr. FINNIE is assistant professor of history at West Georgia College.
In Delaware, most northeastern of the slave states, the gradual abolition movement before 1800 was principally confined to the Society of Friends, the Nicholites, a few Methodists and Presbyterians, and two abolition societies. The first of these societies was organized at Wilmington in 1788 and was so frail that it faded away in 1795. The second was also established at Wilmington in 1788 and was quite small, having about fifty members in 1796. Since support for the organization was so paltry, it disbanded in 1800.3

After 1800 the antislavery movement in Delaware was dominated by the Delaware Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. This society was organized at Wilmington in December 1800 and drew its membership almost exclusively from prosperous Quaker merchants, manufacturers, and tradesmen in the Wilmington and Brandywine area. During the first four years of its existence the society managed to add a few members to its meager roll, but it was unable to set up auxiliary societies among the Methodists at Duck Creek, Dover, and Milford. Interest in the society's program began to wither in 1805, and by 1807 the organization lost much of its original enthusiasm and former support. By the summer of 1811 it had become so feeble that it held only one meeting between then and January 1, 1816. There was some thought of disbanding at that time, but a decision was made to continue, and the society was reorganized in the following November. Little is known about the society after its reconstruction, except that it continued to meet regularly and send delegates to the annual meetings of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. The society also persisted in its efforts to abolish slavery gradually and to help the free Negro. Moreover, it expanded its objectives in 1826 by supporting the deportation and free-produce movements.4

The Delaware Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery


received assistance from four other anti-slavery organizations in Delaware during the nineteenth century. The first of these was established in Sussex County in November 1809 and the second in Kent County in 1817. The Wilmington Society for the Encouragement of Free Labor was set up in 1826 for the purpose of encouraging the production and consumption of goods produced by free labor, and in 1838 the Delaware Anti-Slavery Society was organized at Wilmington as an auxiliary to the American Anti-Slavery Society. These organizations were Lilliputian in size, languished shortly after their formation, and endured for no more than three years.⁵

There was also an inconsequential deportation movement in Delaware during the third decade of the nineteenth century. Two deportation societies were organized in 1824 at Wilmington, and in the winter of 1827 the Delaware legislature adopted a resolution commending the American Colonization Society. Between that date and the summer of 1833 the movement encountered chilling apathy in Delaware. Some interest was awakened as a result of abolitionist attacks upon the Colonization Society, but the great majority of Delawareans were so indifferent to the deportation movement that it never achieved more than a precarious existence.⁶

Although Delawareans were reluctant to support the organized anti-slavery movement, they voluntarily manumitted a sizable number of slaves. Except for the decade 1810–1820 the number of free Negroes in Delaware increased consistently from 1790 to 1840. In 1790 the federal census reported a free Negro population of 3,899, and in 1800 the number of free Negroes increased to 8,268. The number grew to 13,136 in 1810, to 15,855 in 1830, and to 16,919 in 1840. The total number of slaves in the state declined from 8,887 in 1790 to 2,605 in 1840.⁷

These remarkable population trends, coupled with the disin-


clination of Delawareans to back the antislavery movement, seem to indicate that a great number of persons in Delaware seriously questioned the merits of the institution of slavery but were unwilling to espouse an organized movement to destroy it. These phenomena also suggest that the overwhelming majority of persons in Delaware adhered to a position on slavery comparable to the one expressed anonymously by "A Plain Citizen" in 1798: "I abhor," he declared, "the slave trade, [but] I neither conceive [slaveholding] inconsistent with my Conscience, nor derogatory to the Christian religion, the rights of mankind, or the different orders of subordination; yet have no objection to its gradual abolition."8

A similar attitude was probably shared by many who lived in Maryland, where the antislavery movement won little support before 1800. Prior to that date organized sentiment in favor of gradual emancipation was mainly confined to the Quakers, Nicholites, and Methodists,9 and to the Maryland Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. This society had about six members at the time of its organization at Baltimore in September 1789 and encountered widespread suspicion and hostility. In spite of this unfavorable reaction, it succeeded in forming three auxiliary societies in 1790–1791 and in expanding its membership to about 250 in 1797. But these momentary gains were not enough to keep the society alive, and it dwindled away by 1798.10

After the degeneration of the Maryland Society, the antislavery movement in Maryland made little progress. The Quakers and Nicholites persevered in their attack upon the institution of slavery, but emigration and their minority position within an expand-

8 Quoted in Munroe, Federalist Delaware, 162; see also pages 164–65, 218.
ing slaveholding population impaired their effectiveness. The Methodists tried to stand by their rules on slavery; but the exigencies of institutional life, the inclination toward compromise within the church, and the growth of proslavery feeling made fidelity more and more difficult.\textsuperscript{11} From time to time a few courageous individuals also begged the state legislature to destroy the domestic slave trade, to eradicate slavery gradually, and to improve the condition of the slave. But each appeal met with callous indifference, outright rejection, or carefully reasoned arguments for retaining the status quo. Moreover, emancipationists confronted such an adverse climate of opinion that a quarter century passed before they established a single organization devoted primarily to the abolition of slavery itself.\textsuperscript{12}

This body was formed at Baltimore on August 25, 1825, and was known as the Maryland Anti-Slavery Society. Its fundamental purpose was to promote the gradual abolition of slavery, but it also advocated the deportation of the free Negro. The society hoped to achieve these ends by setting up auxiliaries throughout Maryland and by participating in political activity designed to further its objectives.\textsuperscript{13} During its first three years the society organized eleven auxiliaries and recruited about five hundred members. But it suffered devastating defeats at the polls when it ran antislavery candidates for the state legislature in 1825 and 1826. And support was so meager thereafter that the society held its last meeting in September 1830.\textsuperscript{14} Nothing is known of it after

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Mt. Pleasant (Ohio) \textit{Philanthropist}, March 13, 1819; April 20, 1820; GUE, July 1821; March 1822; January 20, 27, February 24, 1827; August 1830; April 1832; GUEBC, February 4, 1826; ACPAS, \textit{Minutes}, 1804, p. 25; ibid., 1817, pp. 13–15; Jeffrey R. Brackett, \textit{The Negro in Maryland: A Study of the Institution of Slavery} (Baltimore, 1899), 55–56; Adams, \textit{Neglected Period}, 49.
\item \textsuperscript{13} GUE, August and September 1825; October 7, 21, December 23, 1826; GUEBC, September 5, October 1, 8, 1825; February 4, April 29, 1826; ACPAS, \textit{Minutes}, 1826, pp. 27, 30, 31; ibid., 1827, pp. 51–52; Merton L. Dillon, \textit{Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom} (Urbana, 1966), 109–11.
\item \textsuperscript{14} GUEBC, September 17, 24, October 1, 8, 1825; April 29, September 2, 1826; GUE, September 16, October 7, December 23, 1826; March 31, December 22, 1827; February 23, May 24, 1828; ACPAS, \textit{Minutes}, 1827, p. 51; Dillon, \textit{Benjamin Lundy}, 111–14, 115–17.
\end{itemize}
that date. In all likelihood the organization was dissolved and its auxiliary societies merged with the American Colonization Society. Most of its members probably redirected their activity into the deportation movement.

This movement began in Maryland in June 1817, when the Baltimore Colonization Society was established. In the following January the Maryland legislature unanimously endorsed the idea of removing free Negroes, and a state deportation society was organized at Baltimore in August 1818. During the next decade ten auxiliary societies were formed, and Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Methodists, and Quakers periodically lauded projects for getting rid of the free Negro. In spite of these somewhat encouraging developments, sentiment in favor of the deportation movement waxed and waned unspectacularly in Maryland until the autumn of 1831, when the tragic events associated with the Nat Turner insurrection catalyzed hitherto lukewarm deportationists and quickened Negrophobia in the state.

This ominous episode in Southampton County, Virginia, and the ghastly fear it engendered infused new life into the deportation movement in Maryland and led to a series of actions that were calculated to reduce Maryland’s expanding Negro population. In December 1831 the legislature passed a law providing for the appointment of three commissioners to supervise the removal of free Negroes from the state. This law also appropriated $20,000 to assist in deporting free Negroes, arranged for funding in the future, and authorized judicial officials to furnish the commissioners with lists of manumitted slaves to be removed. In addition, the law required that sheriffs deport free Negroes out of the state if they refused to go to Liberia. Shortly thereafter the languid state deportation society was revived, and in April 1833 the Board of Managers of the Maryland State Colonization Society decided to establish a colony of free Negroes on the coast of


ACS, Annual Report, 1828, pp. 78–79; African Repository, III (October 1827 and February 1828), 250–51, 368–69; V (October 1829), 251; VI (May, June, and July 1830), 73, 125, 155; John H. B. Latrobe, Maryland in Liberia (Baltimore, 1885), 10–12, 14–15.

Negro population in Maryland increased from 111,079 in 1790 to 155,932 in 1830. Negro Population, 45.
Africa. They also took a step which was unprecedented in the history of the deportation movement: they declared that the purpose of the Maryland State Colonization Society was "the ultimate extirpation of slavery, by proper and gradual efforts . . . ."

This radical action on the part of the board evidently alienated many deportationists in the state. As a result, the state society's efforts to establish new auxiliaries met with little success throughout the remainder of the decade. Nevertheless, the society did succeed in planting a colony of free Negroes at Cape Palmas in February 1834, and it continued to receive the financial support of the state legislature.

Maryland legislators had no humanitarian illusions about their partnership with the Maryland State Colonization Society. They regarded their patronage as a device to rid the state of an unwanted free Negro population. In their view the deportation movement was merely a way of assuring themselves that "in process of time, the relative proportion of the black to the white population, will hardly be matter for serious or unpleasant consideration." They also tried to make it clear that their support for the movement should not be interpreted as abolitionist in nature. Indeed, they were so intent on making this position known that they expunged two petitions for gradual abolition from the General Assembly's journal a few months after the state society indicated it favored the gradual abolition of slavery.

Such actions were only to be expected. By 1836 radical opposition to slavery was so unpopular in Maryland that the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which had formerly contained a sizable number of emancipationists, condemned the abolition movement. And the situation was so bad by 1838 that Maryland Hicksite Quakers even refused to allow their members to become "entangled" in any way with the antislavery movement.

18 Quoted in African Repository, IX (May 1833), 91; see also ibid., XVII (June 15, 1841), 184; GUE, April 1832; June 1833; Latrobe, Maryland in Liberia, 12, 15–16; The Maryland Scheme of Expatriation Examined (Boston, 1834), 6–12.
19 African Repository, IX (November 1833), 280; XI (January and October 1835), 58, 295; XII (April 1836), 132; XVII (February 15, September 15, 1841), 54, 276; Latrobe, Maryland in Liberia, 45–46, 67–68, 74, 84.
20 Quoted in African Repository, VII (March 1831), 30; see also ibid., VIII (April 1832), 52–55.
21 Maryland Scheme of Expatriation Examined, 13.
22 L. C. Matlack, The Antislavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York, 1881), 82; Drake, Quakers and Slavery, 144.
Conditions were slightly better in Virginia, but the antislavery movement made little headway there. Before 1800 organized support for gradual abolition was limited primarily to the Society of Friends, the Methodists, and two manumission societies in Henrico and Frederick counties. There was also sporadic opposition to slavery on the part of a few isolated individuals, the most radical of whom were James O'Kelly and David Barrow. But these persons represented an insignificant minority in Virginia. Indeed, proslavery sentiment was so widespread by the turn of the century that Francis Asbury soberly predicted that slavery would endure in Virginia for ages.\(^23\)

After 1800 the gradual abolition movement in Virginia became more and more feeble. The Society of Friends, a small number of Methodists, and a few radical Presbyterians doggedly tried to block the onrushing tide of slavery, but they constantly lost ground. Moreover, no more than ten weak antislavery societies were established during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, and they were all confined to Loudoun and Frederick counties. They were also dominated by men who were principally concerned with extricating white Virginians from the baneful effects of slavery and with promoting the deportation of the free Negro. Six of these societies met in August 1827 and attempted to organize a permanent convention devoted to gradual abolition and deportation, but their efforts met with little success, and the convention was disbanded sometime in 1828.\(^24\)

The decline of sentiment in favor of gradual abolition was accompanied by the growth of the deportation movement in Virginia. In 1817 a "small but opulent society of slave-holders" was organized as an auxiliary to the American Colonization Society.\(^25\) Between that date and 1820 nine more auxiliaries were estab-

\(^{23}\) ACPAS, Minutes, 1796, p. 10; ibid., 1797, pp. 37–38; ibid., 1798, p. 10; ibid., 1800, pp. 9–11; [David Barrow], "Circular Letter. Southampton County, Virginia, February 14, 1798" (Richmond, 1798); James O'Kelly, Essay on Negro Slavery (Philadelphia, 1784); Elmer T. Clark et al. (eds.), The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury (3 vols., Nashville, 1958), II, 151; McColley, Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia, 2–3, 4, 5, 35–36, 81, 114–75, 180–89; Weeks, Southern Quakers, 213.

\(^{24}\) ACPAS, Minutes, 1804, pp. 16, 20, 25; GUE, October 1824; June and September 1825; May 5, August 18, September 29, 1827; April 26, May 3, October 18, 1828; John D. Paxton, Letters on Slavery . . . (Lexington, Ky., 1833); Mathews, Slavery and Methodism, 37–39; McColley, Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia, 152–53.

\(^{25}\) Early Lee Fox, The American Colonization Society, 1817–1840 (Baltimore, 1919), 53.
lished, and the society obtained such popularity by 1825 that the General Assembly appropriated five hundred dollars for its support and officially approved its purposes. In 1828 the number of auxiliaries in the state increased to twenty-nine, and the Colonization Society of the State of Virginia was organized at Richmond. A heated dispute in Congress over the federal government’s constitutional authority to acquire an African colony momentarily crippled the deportation movement in Virginia after 1828, but the prolonged furor following the Nat Turner insurrection in the summer of 1831 revitalized the movement almost overnight. Languid auxiliaries returned to life, a few new ones sprang up, and many former opponents of the movement endorsed it. Indeed, the revival flourished to such an extent by 1832 that some deportationists even tried to secure the enactment of a bill providing for the gradual deportation of Virginia’s entire Negro population. This determined effort was defeated on January 25, 1832, when the legislature adopted a resolution stating that it was “inexpedient” to take such a step at that time. Nevertheless, sentiment in favor of deportation persisted, and support for the movement was so widespread by 1833 that the editor of a Virginia newspaper asserted that “there is very little opposition felt or manifested to the scheme of African Colonization. Men, of all creeds in politics and of all sects in religion, cooperate in advancing its interests.”

Humanitarians in North Carolina were not so fortunate. In 1804 the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery asserted

that public opinion in that state, is exceedingly hostile to the abolition of slavery, that every attempt towards the emancipation of people of colour is regarded with an indignant and jealous eye; that at present, the inhabitants of that state, consider the preservation of their lives, and all they hold dear on earth, as depending on the continuance of slavery; and are even riveting more firmly the fetters of oppression.


27 Virginia’s Negro population almost doubled during the years 1790–1830, growing from 305,493 in 1790 to 517,105 in 1830. Negro Population, 45.


29 Quoted in Fox, American Colonization Society, 92; see also Staudenraus, African Colonization Movement, 181.
... that no language the Convention could use, would have the smallest tendency to promote a relaxation of that rigorous severity, which the great body of the citizens believe necessary to preserve them from insurrection and massacre.\textsuperscript{30}

Under conditions such as these the gradual emancipation movement made little progress in North Carolina. Before the organization of the Manumission Society of North Carolina in the summer of 1816 the movement was dominated by Quakers and Nicholites, and it embraced only a minute proportion of the total white population.\textsuperscript{31} The Manumission Society contained few non-Quakers, encountered almost insurmountable difficulties from the moment of its establishment, frequently failed to muster a quorum of fifteen at its annual meetings, and was hampered by the awareness of the unpopular nature of its cause. It was also weakened by a split within the society between incorporationists and colonizationists and by a controversy over the question of establishing segregated Negro schools under the direction of the society. At the height of its influence in 1826 the society's membership was approximately sixteen hundred persons; and it had no more than forty auxiliary societies, all of which were confined to seven or eight counties of western North Carolina. After 1826 support dwindled, and by 1831 criticism of its activities reached such intensity that the society cautiously refused to petition the legislature for the repeal of a law prohibiting the education of slaves. By July 1834 the General Association, with twelve members present, adopted a resolution authorizing the president "to use such means as in his judgment may seem expedient to arouse the sleeping Branches."\textsuperscript{32} With this, the General Association adjourned, never to meet again as the Manumission Society of North Carolina.

\textsuperscript{30} ACPAS, Minutes, 1804, pp. 25–26.


Deportationists in North Carolina experienced a similar disappointment. When the American Colonization Society first began its propaganda campaign there in 1818 it discovered that a considerable amount of good will toward the society prevailed. This was particularly true at Raleigh, Fayetteville, and Chapel Hill, where auxiliary deportation societies were set up in 1819. In spite of this auspicious beginning, the deportation movement advanced at a snail's pace. During the next seven years well-meaning North Carolinians occasionally uttered evanescent endorsements of the Colonization Society, and additional auxiliaries were established at Greensboro and Hillsboro and in Hertford County. In December 1827 a state deportation society was organized at Raleigh, and by the end of 1828 the number of auxiliaries increased to nine. But deportation sentiment began to crumble in 1828. As a result, only one auxiliary society was established during the next three years, and the movement almost faded into oblivion. By 1835 persons advocating an antislavery position constituted a hopeless minority in North Carolina, even when they restricted their activity to the deportation of Negroes who were already free.

A comparable situation existed in Tennessee, where the gradual abolition movement was pathetically weak. Before the organization of the Manumission Society of Tennessee in 1815 the movement was principally confined to the Quakers of Greene, Jefferson, Washington, Blount, and Grainger counties and to the Methodists of eastern Tennessee. After 1815 the movement was chiefly restricted to three small and ineffectual antislavery organizations: the Manumission Society of Tennessee, the Humane


Protecting Society of Greene County, and the Moral, Religious, Manumission Society of West Tennessee. With the exception of the Manumission Society of Tennessee, none of these organizations existed for more than three years or experienced any growth.

The Manumission Society was organized in Greene County on November 21, 1815. The number of branch societies grew from seven to sixteen during the next year, and the membership increased to 474, all of whom were residents of the eastern counties of Greene, Sullivan, Washington, Blount, Grainger, and Cocke. By September 1823 the auxiliaries numbered twenty, and the membership expanded to more than six hundred. The society reached its maximum strength in 1824, when the total number of societies increased to twenty-two and the membership swelled to approximately eight hundred.

Despite this apparent growth the Manumission Society of Tennessee was never so "strong" as its North Carolina counterpart. Although it managed to escape the internal controversies which plagued the North Carolina organization in its early years, the Manumission Society of Tennessee was forced in 1820 to plead with the branch societies for financial support. Moreover, local auxiliaries increasingly neglected to send delegates to the annual convention. The state of affairs was so bad by August 1825 that the delegates to the annual convention lamented "the want of zeal, the want of energy, and the want of exertion, in many of their branches, and members." In the following year the president of the society asserted that the condition of the organization was beginning to be critical because many of the members were so "luke-warm and indifferent." Matters continued to worsen, and

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36 "West" Tennessee is really a misnomer. The Moral, Religious, Manumission Society of West Tennessee was organized at Columbia in Maury County, which lies south of Nashville in Middle Tennessee.

37 The Manumission Society was organized in Greene County on November 21, 1815, and for all practical purposes died by December 1821. The Humane Society, which was made up of persons who also belonged to the Manumission Society, was established in November 1820 and faded out of existence sometime in 1823. The West Tennessee group was formed in December 1824 and was probably dissolved in 1826 or shortly thereafter. Martin, "Anti-Slavery Societies of Tennessee," 266, 272, 276. See also Jonesborough Emancipator, April 30, 1820; "Constitutions and Rules of the Humane Protecting Society [November 1820]," GUE, November 1821; "Constitution of the Moral, Religious, Manumission Society [December 1824]," ibid., February 1825.

38 Jonesborough Emancipator, April 30, 1820; ACPAS, Minutes, 1823, p. 17; GUE, July 1825; Martin, "Anti-Slavery Societies of Tennessee," 266.
by December 1831 the society was practically, if not actually, defunct. 39

It is hardly surprising that the Manumission Society of Tennessee languished. The desire to inhibit the growth of the free Negro population had become so pronounced in Tennessee by December 1831 that the General Assembly passed a law forbidding the further immigration of free Negroes into the state. This statute also made it unlawful for a slave to be manumitted except on the explicit condition that he be immediately removed from Tennessee. 40 Indeed, antislavery sentiment was so weak in Tennessee by 1834 that there were less than two thousand persons, out of a total estimated white population of 550,000, who openly advocated the gradual abolition of slavery, even if accompanied by the immediate deportation of the entire free Negro population. Of these persons, more than one-third lived in Washington and Greene counties. 41

The deportation movement was also limited in scope and effectiveness in Tennessee. In 1817 the Presbyterian Synod of Tennessee officially sanctioned the American Colonization Society, and in the following year Andrew Jackson was elected a

39 Jonesborough Emancipator, September 30, 1820; GUE, September 1822; August 15, 1823; July and September 1825; December 2, 1826; March 31, December 22, 1827; November 1830; Martin, "Anti-Slavery Societies of Tennessee," 272. Quotations are from "Address of the Eleventh Annual Convention of the Manumission Society of Tennessee to the Respective Branches [August 1825]," GUE, September 1825, and "President's Address to the Members of the Manumission Society of Tennessee [August 1826]," GUEBC, December 2, 1826.

40 The law of 1831 was also designed to inhibit manumission itself. For example, it required that the owner give bond equal to the value of the slave as a guarantee that the liberated Negro would be sent out of the state and that he would be provided for until he left. Caleb Perry Patterson, The Negro in Tennessee, 1790-1865 (Austin, 1922), 154-55, 157.

41 By 1834 antislavery sentiment was confined almost entirely to the eastern section of the state, where slavery could not be profitably adapted to the economic and agricultural mode of life. Moreover, the antislavery movement in Tennessee was almost completely dominated by those who favored deportation. Every antislavery petition presented to the constitutional convention of 1834 sought the deportation of the free Negro, and the most radical members of the convention asserted that they would not support any plan for the gradual abolition of slavery which failed to provide for the immediate deportation of the liberated Negro. Journal of the Convention of the State of Tennessee, Convened for the Purpose of Revising and Amending the Constitution Thereof (Nashville, 1834), 26, 31, 33, 48, 52, 70, 71-73, 79, 81, 82, 85, 98-99, 102-105, 108, 125-30, 145, 147-51, 209, 222-28, 256, 349. See also Chase C. Mooney, "The Question of Slavery and the Free Negro in the Tennessee Constitutional Convention of 1834," Journal of Southern History, XII (November 1946), 487-509, for an excellent and comprehensive discussion of the struggle over slavery in the convention.
vice-president of the society. Moreover, the state legislature authorized Tennessee's representatives in Congress to seek federal assistance for procuring a colony in Africa where free Negroes might be sent. Sentiment in favor of deportation gradually increased during the next decade, and in 1829 a state deportation society was organized. By May of the following year the number of auxiliaries in the state had increased to twenty, and an agent for the society reported that ministers of all denominations were giving the movement their support. In spite of these promising developments, the deportation movement was unable to gain momentum in the Volunteer State. In July 1831 a member of the state society lamented that deportationists had made little, if any, progress in Tennessee.42 This judgment was confirmed several months later when an agent of the parent society reported that Tennesseans were so hostile toward the Colonization Society that the most he could do was "to communicate correct information as to the design and operations of the Society, and remove prejudice and suspicion..."43 By 1832 the number of auxiliaries in the state began to diminish, and in October 1833 the state society reported that there had been "very limited interest hitherto taken in the cause, by the people of this State."44 After 1833 the deportation movement in Tennessee declined rapidly.45

Following the loss of public support for deportation, a few Tennesseans continued to oppose slavery in a radical manner. In 1835 a society advocating the immediate abolition of slavery was organized at Rock Creek in East Tennessee. This frail organization had nine members at the time of its establishment and dwindled away two years later. In 1836 fifty-five Rhea County citizens sent a petition to the state legislature protesting the enactment of a law making the receipt of abolitionist literature a penitentiary offense. The following year there was some radical antislavery activity at Maryville College, a Presbyterian institution in Blount County. About the same time Elijah Eagleston, a Presbyterian minister at Madisonville, expelled two of his most prominent members from the church because they had partici-

42 ACS, Annual Report, 1818, pp. 19, 24-25; African Repository, I (March 1825), 5; III (February 1828), 372-77; V (December 1829), 301; VI (May 1830), 72, 78; VII (July 1831), 145-46.
43 African Repository, VII (January 1832), 346.
44 Ibid., IX (December 1833), 319-20; see also ACS, Annual Report, 1831, Appendix; ibid., 1832, Appendix.
pated in the slave trade in the preceding year. Such expressions
of antislavery sentiment were rare in Tennessee after 1834. Ne-
evertheless, a small number of emancipationists continued to chal-
lenge the status quo.46

Radical opposition to slavery was also uncommon in Kentucky.
Before 1800 there was only sporadic criticism of the institution
of slavery, and most of this was associated with David Rice, a
Presbyterian minister. Shortly before the Kentucky constitutional
convention of 1792 Rice published an antislavery treatise which
unequivocally condemned slavery as being inconsistent with the
law of nature and the Christian ethic.47 Although Rice and a small
group of antislavery delegates to the convention persistently at-
ttempted to make the Negro’s inalienable right to freedom a social
and political reality in Kentucky, the proslavery majority tri-
umphed. This in turn intensified the determination of the anti-
slavery faction and eventually led to the organization of an aboli-
tion society. Nothing is known of this society, except that it ex-
isted in 1797 and was probably organized by Rice.48

During the years 1800–1823 organized support for gradual abo-
lation in Kentucky was largely confined to a small group among
the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians.49 Although there
were occasional indications of a growing sentiment among some
slaveholders that neither the financial well-being nor the personal
safety of the white population was enhanced by slavery, the aboli-
tion movement never embraced more than a small fraction

46 AAS, Annual Report, 1838, p. 53n; Martin, “Anti-Slavery Societies of Tennes-
see,” 277–78; Patterson, Negro in Tennessee, 195–97; Woodson, “Freedom and
Slavery in Appalachian America,” 148; Patton, “Progress of Emancipation in Ten-
nessee,” 97.

47 [David Rice], Slavery Inconsistent with Justice and Good Policy (Lexington,
1792). Rice delivered the text of this pamphlet as an address before the conven-
tion.

48 ACPAS, Minutes, 1797, pp. 37–38; Martin, Anti-Slavery Movement in Ken-
tucky, 13–17, 24–25.

49 William Warren Sweet (ed.), The Rise of Methodism in the West: Being the
I, 328–30, 508, 564–67; II, 169–70, 378–80, 382; [John Finley Crowe], “The
Apologist,” Abolition Intelligencer and Missionary Magazine, I (October 1822),
82–84; John M. Peck, “Kentucky Baptists,” Baptist Memorial and Monthly Chron-
icle, I (February 15, 1842), 44; J. H. Spencer, A History of Kentucky Baptists
from 1769 to 1885 (2 vols., Cincinnati, 1885), I, 182–86; Walter B. Posey, “The
Baptists and Slavery in the Lower Mississippi Valley,” Journal of Negro History,
XLI (April 1956), 118, 120; Martin, Anti-Slavery Movement in Kentucky, 19–20,
23, 35, 36, 38–41.
of Kentucky’s population, and it never had more than a transitory existence.\textsuperscript{50} The antislavery society organized by David Rice in 1797 had only a handful of members and disappeared shortly after its establishment. The Baptized Licking-Locust Association of Humanity experienced a similar history. This association was principally restricted to the counties of Nelson, Nicholas, Bourbon, Mason, Montgomery, Woodford, and Shelby; and at the time of its formation in September 1807 it had about 190 members. In September of the following year the association was reorganized and became the Kentucky Abolition Society. This society maintained a feeble existence until its dissolution in 1823. Like the Friends of Humanity, the Abolition Society had only a small number of members and a few thinly scattered auxiliaries. At no time in the society’s history did its membership exceed one hundred nor the number of auxiliaries go beyond four. Indeed, the society was so weak that it never attracted more than twelve delegates to any one of its annual meetings.\textsuperscript{51}

After the disbanding of the Kentucky Abolition Society in 1823 the antislavery movement in Kentucky was increasingly dominated by men who were chiefly interested in deporting the free Negro. By that date the major religious bodies in the state had endorsed the objectives of the deportation movement, and sentiment in favor of deportation grew to such an extent in January 1826 that the General Assembly unanimously passed a resolution urging Kentucky’s congressmen to use their efforts to promote the shipment of free Negroes to Africa. The following year the legislature formally sanctioned the American Colonization Society and reiterated its instructions to the state’s representatives in Washington.\textsuperscript{52} In December 1828 the Kentucky State Colonization Society was organized at Frankfort for the purpose of relieving Kentuckians of “the serious inconveniences resulting from the existence among them, of a rapidly increasing number of free persons of colour, who are not subject to the restraints of slav-

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{GUE}, September 8, 15, 29, October 6, 14, 1827; October 18, 25, 1828; April and July 1833; Martin, \textit{Anti-Slavery Movement in Kentucky}, 64–68, 88–97, 102–38.


\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Abolition Intelligencer and Missionary Magazine}, I (October 1822 and February 1823), 86–87, 158; ACS, \textit{Annual Report}, 1823, p. 70; Robert Davidson, \textit{History of the Presbyterian Church in the State of Kentucky} (New York, 1847), 337–38; Martin, \textit{Anti-Slavery Movement in Kentucky}, 52–53.
ery . . . "53 Shortly thereafter the parent society appointed four agents to disseminate information concerning the deportation movement, and this resulted in the creation of at least twenty-five auxiliary societies during the next three years. But an epidemic of Asiatic cholera struck Kentucky in the summer of 1833, and the growth of the deportation movement was somewhat retarded thereafter. Nevertheless, a considerable amount of support for the movement continued, and the American Colonization Society became the primary channel through which Kentuckians expressed their opposition to slavery during the remainder of the 1830's.54

Although deportationists dominated the antislavery movement in Kentucky during the third decade of the nineteenth century, a few persons continued to believe in more drastic types of anti-slavery activity. During the years 1831–1833 gradual emancipationists made three unsuccessful attempts to establish antislavery organizations, and in March 1835 James G. Birney organized the Kentucky Anti-Slavery Society at Danville. This organization was an auxiliary of the American Anti-Slavery Society and was dedicated to the immediate abolition of slavery. But hostility toward the society was so intense that Birney was forced to leave Kentucky the following October. His departure marked the disappearance of the Kentucky Anti-Slavery Society and clearly revealed that Kentucky's proslavery majority would not tolerate the presence of men who were unequivocally opposed to slavery.55

A similar attitude prevailed in Missouri. Before 1820 sentiment in favor of slavery was so pervasive that only a small number of persons in Saint Louis, Jefferson, Washington, Lincoln, and Cape Girardeau counties even dared to question the propriety of continuing the institution of slavery in the state. Moreover, not a single restrictionist was elected to the Missouri constitutional con-

53 Quoted in African Repository, IV (January 1829), 351. The number of free Negroes in Kentucky almost doubled during the years 1820–1830, increasing from 2,759 in 1820 to 4,917 in 1830. Negro Population, 57.
54 Kentucky State Colonization Society, Annual Report, 1834, p. 3; ACS, Annual Report, 1831, Appendix; Martin, Anti-Slavery Movement in Kentucky, 53, 62; J. Winston Coleman, Jr., "Henry Clay, Kentucky, and Liberia," Kentucky State Historical Society, Register, XLV (October 1947), 315; see also Coleman, "The Kentucky Colonization Society," ibid., XXXIX (January 1941), 4–9, for the details of the deportation movement in Kentucky after 1840.
vention in 1820; and only one delegate to the convention, Benjamin Emmons from Saint Charles, voted against the slavery clauses of the constitution. According to the historian of the anti-slavery movement in Missouri, Emmons’ vote was the only trace of antislavery sentiment in the convention.\textsuperscript{56}

During the years 1820–1840 proslavery sentiment grew rapidly in Missouri. The number of slaves increased from 10,222 in 1820 to 58,240 in 1840,\textsuperscript{57} and hostility toward any kind of antislavery activity was so bitter by the summer of 1833 that emancipationists were severely flogged, repeatedly intimidated, and frequently forced to leave the state. Furthermore, sentiment in favor of proscribeing free speech grew to such an extent by October of that year that a Saint Louis newspaper asserted that “no man has the right to discuss the abstract question of slavery where it is calculated to jeopardize the life and property of his fellow citizens.” Indeed, in January 1837 the state legislature unanimously adopted a law prohibiting any kind of antislavery activity in the state. By 1840 Missourians had such a hatred of abolitionists and the principles they advocated that the word “abolitionist” was used as “an epithet which signified ... the sum of all villanies ...”\textsuperscript{58}

Under such inimical circumstances the antislavery movement failed to make any real progress in Missouri. From 1820 to 1840 a few fitful expressions of antislavery sentiment were uttered in sparsely distributed communities throughout the state, and a small number of emancipationists in Saint Louis made two feeble attempts to begin a gradual abolition movement, the first in 1827–1828 and the second in 1835. Some antislavery activity was also associated with a group of Mormons in Jackson County in 1831 and 1832 and a small number of Baptists in Saint Louis County in 1834. Moreover, a few immediate abolitionists tried to proselytize in parts of central and northeastern Missouri after 1835. A group of German immigrants who settled in Saint Louis and


\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Negro Population}, 57.

Warren counties in 1837 also evinced some hostility toward slavery but made no particular efforts to destroy it. Indeed, the climate of opinion in Missouri was so antagonistic to abolitionists, immediate or gradual, that they failed to establish a single anti-slavery society in the state before 1840.\textsuperscript{59}

Conditions were somewhat more favorable for deportationists. In March 1817 an editorial in the \textit{Missouri Gazette} lauded the deportation of free Negroes as “a means of protection for the white race.”\textsuperscript{60} During the next decade sentiment in favor of deportation grew sufficiently to make possible the establishment of a small auxiliary deportation society at Saint Louis in 1826. Nevertheless, a sizable number of Missourians feared that congressional support for deporting free Negroes might open the door for federal interference with the institution of slavery. The deportation movement therefore languished until the spring of 1833, when the Saint Louis Colonization Society experienced a momentary revival and began an intensive campaign to overcome prejudice against the movement. This effort resulted in the creation of four new auxiliaries late in 1833 and in the growth of some support among the Methodists of Missouri. But resentment toward the movement continued to persist, and it received little support thereafter.\textsuperscript{61}

Viewing the antislavery movement in the upper South in retrospect, several conclusions concerning its nature and its supporters seem warranted. To begin with, there never was a single antislavery movement in the upper South. Instead, there were at various times and places in the upper slave states at least three antislavery “movements.” The first was carried on by an infinitely small number of \textit{immediate abolitionists}. These persons insisted that “slaveholding is a great crime in the sight of God . . . [and] that the best interests of all concerned require its immediate


\textsuperscript{60} Quoted in Merkel, “Antislavery Movement in Missouri,” 5–6.

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{ACS}, Annual Report, 1827, pp. 81–100; \textit{ibid.}, 1828, pp. 97–120; \textit{ibid.}, 1829, p. 79; \textit{African Repository}, III (August 1827), 186–87; IX (May 1833 and January 1834), 91, 349; XI (December 1835), 371; Staudenraus, \textit{African Colonization Movement}, 136, 170, 186; Merkel, “Antislavery Movement in Missouri,” 37–38, 80.
abandonment." They also demanded that legal steps be taken to ensure the Negro's rightful place in American society. The second movement was conducted by a small number of gradual emancipationists, who tended to be either incorporationist or colonizationist in outlook. The incorporationists, who represented only a small proportion of gradual emancipationists, were utterly opposed to slavery itself, condemned it as being inconsistent with the Declaration of Independence and the Christian religion, and sought to abolish it gradually. Since they were convinced that justice could not be done to the Negro through emancipation alone, and inasmuch as they were opposed to making expatriation a condition of freedom, the incorporationists urged that steps be taken to prepare the enslaved Negro for assimilation into society as a full and permanent citizen of the United States.

The colonizationists were also opposed to slavery in principle and sought to abolish it gradually. But they did not think it would be possible or desirable to incorporate the emancipated slave into American society. Many colonizationists, particularly the Quakers, were genuinely concerned with the welfare of the free Negro and had learned from long experience that most Southern states failed to provide the legal and social immunities that would protect him from abuse, degradation, and probable re-enslavement. Moreover, a large number of colonizationists were profoundly skeptical of the Negro's capacity for moral and intellectual growth, and they asserted that such an "inferior" being could not be peaceably incorporated into society. Many colonizationists were also persuaded that the free Negro was a fruitful source of lawlessness and crime, of social and political insecurity; and others were afraid that the free Negro would ultimately seek social and political equality with the whites and that amalgamation would be the inevitable result of his continued residence in the United States. Colonizationists therefore

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62 Kentucky Anti-Slavery Society, Proceedings, 1835, pp. 1–2, 6; the quotation is on pages 1–2. See also James G. Birney, Letter on Colonization . . . (New York, 1834) and James Duncan, A Treatise on Slavery (Vevay, Ind., 1824), which exemplify the most radical expressions of antislavery sentiment ever uttered by Southern abolitionists.

63 For typical incorporationist writings see David Barrow, Involuntary, Unmerited, Perpetual, Absolute, Hereditary Slavery Examined . . . (Lexington, 1808); "To the People of Tennessee, GUE, July 1822; John Rankin, Letters on American Slavery (Boston, 1833); O'Kelly, Essay on Negro Slavery.
generally insisted that the free Negro be removed from the South immediately after manumission.64

The third movement was carried on by deportationists. A few of these persons sincerely believed that the deportation of the free Negro would eventually lead to the ultimate abolition of slavery, which they regarded as being contrary to every principle of morality and religion. But the overwhelming majority of deportationists neither opposed slavery in principle nor sought to abolish it. Instead, they opposed only the evil effects the white man had to endure when slavery was not properly controlled. Moreover, they were principally interested in liberating themselves from the threats inherent in the rapidly multiplying Negro population. Unlike the colonizationists and the few deportationists who genuinely supported gradual abolition, the great majority of deportationists—who were in most cases members of the American Colonization Society—constantly asserted that their only purpose was to rid the country of an unwanted free Negro population. They carefully and openly disclaimed any intention whatsoever of interfering with the rights of property or of promoting the abolition of slavery; and they declared that such a purpose would be incompatible with the interests the deportation movement was designed to promote. They therefore limited their “antislavery” activity to the deportation of Negroes who were already free or who might be freed for the purpose of deportation.65

William H. Roane, one of the leaders of the “antislavery” faction in the Virginia legislature during the slavery debate of 1832, was typical of many deportationists. During the debate Roane asserted that he would never go into abstract questions concerning “the metaphysical doctrines of the natural equality of man, or the abstract moral right of slavery.” He emphatically stated that

64 See the following, which are representative colonizationist writings: “Letter from Jeremiah Hubbard of Guilford County, North Carolina . . . to a Friend in England,” African Repository, X (April 1834), 33–43; Paxton, Letters on Slavery; “Address of Moses Swaim to the General Association,” Wagstaff (ed.), Minutes, 124–33.

65 See the following, which are typical deportationist writings: “Resolution of the Powhatan Colonization Society to the General Assembly of Virginia, 1829,” African Repository, V (March 1829), 15–23; “Address of James T. Morehead to the Kentucky State Colonization Society, January, 1834,” Kentucky State Colonization Society, Annual Report, 1834, pp. 13–32; and an extract from the Leesburg, (Va.) Genius of Liberty in GUE, November 1821; see also ACS, Annual Report, 1828, pp. 14–19; ibid., 1833, xiii–xvi; African Repository, VI (September 1830), 193–209; VIII (January 1833), 331–36; ACPAS, Minutes, 1818, pp. 47–54, 60–68.
he had never "revolted at the idea or practice of slavery . . . . It has existed," he declared, "and ever will exist, in all ages, in some form, and to some degree." Moreover, he asserted that history, experience, observation, and reason had taught him "that the torch of liberty has ever burnt brightest when surrounded by the dark and filthy, yet nutritious atmosphere of slavery." He also insisted that he did not "believe in that Fan-faronade about the natural equality of man." Indeed, he said: "I do not believe that all men are by nature equal, or that it is in the power of human art to make them so. I no more believe that the flat-nosed, woolly-headed black native of the deserts of Africa, is equal to the straight-haired white man of Europe, than I believe that the stupid, scentless greyhound is equal to the noble, generous dog of Newfoundland." Roane therefore stated that he would support "a slow, gradual, certain, and energetic system for the removal of all emancipated or purchased slaves from the Commonwealth, till the ratio of population between them and the whites, attains, at least, that equilibrium, which, in all future time, will give to every white man in the State, that certain assurance that this is his country . . . and . . . that his slave is his own property." Thus he would support the deportation of the free Negro and, if absolutely necessary, allow the state to purchase and remove enough slaves to reduce the threat to white supremacy. Beyond that he would not go.

Roane's attitude could hardly be called "antislavery." But it accurately reflects the nature of the position many so-called "antislavery" Southerners adopted during the nineteenth century. Before the organization of the American Colonization Society in 1816 the antislavery movement in the upper South was dominated by men who were fundamentally dedicated to the gradual abolition of slavery. Thoroughly convinced that all men were equally entitled to freedom in the social order and that slavery was utterly inconsistent with the Christian ethic, a handful of incorporation-

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66 This discussion of Roane's position is based upon an extract from the Richmond Enquirer, February 4, 1832, which is quoted in Robert, Road from Monticello, 80-81.

67 See also James McDowell, Jr., Speech of James M'Dowell, Jr., . . . in the House of Delegates of Virginia, on the Slave Question (Richmond, 1832); Philip A. Bolling, The Speeches of Philip A. Bolling . . . in the House of Delegates of Virginia, on the Policy of the State in Relation to Her Colored Population (Richmond, 1832); Charles James Faulkner, The Speech of Charles James Faulkner . . . in the House of Delegates of Virginia, on the Policy of the State with Respect to Her Slave Population (Richmond, 1832).
ists and a few colonizationists struggled against overwhelming opposition in their attempts to exterminate slavery. But as the nineteenth century advanced, death and wholesale emigration systematically stripped the gradual emancipation movement of its most radical leaders and loyal supporters. As a consequence, the antislavery movement was left in the hands of an increasing number of Roane-type deportationists. Under their leadership the movement lost much of its essential character as an abolitionist crusade and was ironically transformed into an undertaking that was in essence deportationist, proslavery, and anti-Negro.

After 1816 a few abolitionists, immediate and gradual, continued to oppose slavery in a radical manner; and some deportationists genuinely regarded their activity as a means of promoting the ultimate extinction of slavery. But a large majority of deportationists absolutely denied that they, under the specious pretext of removing a "vicious" and "noxious" population, were secretly undermining the rights of property and declared that they would withdraw their support from the deportation movement if such charges could be proved.68 Any deportationist who admitted such a purpose would be a "base traitor" to the movement and its "worst enemy." Such an individual, they asserted, should be tried by "an outraged community" and, if found guilty, should be branded as "a traitor to his country and the cause of humanity."69 Deportationists who shared these views probably contributed some support to the gradual abolition movement in the upper South before 1840, but they did so inadvertently and in violation of their most cherished convictions.

Since Roane-type deportationists played an increasingly larger role in the antislavery movement in the upper slave states during the nineteenth century, historians need to be extremely cautious when making generalizations about the extent to which antislavery sentiment actually existed in the upper South. Many mistakes in historical judgment can be avoided if scholars will make a clear-cut distinction between Southerners who were genuinely opposed to the principle of slavery itself and those who were opposed only to the adverse effects white men had to endure when slavery was not properly controlled.

If this distinction is made, historians are not likely to make the

68 For example, see "Memorial of the Auxiliary Society of Powhatan County, Virginia, to the General Assembly of Virginia," in Philip Slaughter, The Virginian History of African Colonization (Richmond, 1855), 16–17.
dubious claim that there was a widespread antislavery movement in the upper South before the so-called "Great Reaction of the 1830's." Instead, they will see that there were at various times and places in the upper slave states a minute number of abolitionists who advocated the immediate abolition of slavery, a few incorporationists who promoted the gradual abolition of slavery and the incorporation of the Negro into American society, and a somewhat larger number of colonizationists who supported programs for gradual abolition when they were accompanied by the immediate removal of the liberated Negro from the South. At no time in the history of the upper South did these persons represent more than a small fraction of the white population. Furthermore, only a small number of feeble and thinly scattered abolition societies ever existed in the upper slave states. These organizations never achieved more than a tenuous existence, they were generally dominated by Southerners who urged that the Negro be removed from the South immediately upon manumission, they were in most instances confined to geographical localities where the use of slave labor was relatively limited in scope, and they never received any substantial support from non-Quakers. Most Southern churchmen with a proclivity for humanitarian reform usually became deportationists and joined the American Colonization Society.

This organization received a considerable amount of support in the upper South. But its influence was principally limited to areas where relatively large numbers of persons were engaged in non-agricultural employment, to counties where the number of Negroes often exceeded 40 per cent of the total population, and to other areas where white Southerners were especially apprehensive about the deleterious influence of slavery on the white man. Although the Colonization Society managed to establish a substantial number of auxiliary deportation societies in the upper South, these organizations were quite small, they were dominated by slaveholders and those who had a profound aversion to the Negro, most of them usually languished a short time after they were formed, and they were most active in times of real or imagined threats of insurrection.