

A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF LIBERIAN COLONIZATION FROM 1820  
TO 1843 WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MORTALITY

BY

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A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF LIBERIAN COLONIZATION FROM 1820  
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By the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were one million black people in America with 108,000 of that population legally free citizens. In the next twenty years both freemen and slaves increased so that in 1820 there were over 233,000 freemen and 1,500,000 slaves.<sup>1</sup> This population represented a serious race problem for white America at a time when the slavery solution was becoming increasingly unprofitable. Emancipation was considered by many as simply another problem of equal if not greater magnitude. A small minority of the black population "had been freed only to exchange compulsory servitude for a travesty of liberty ... many liberal citizens had voted for the African's liberty but nobody wanted his company."<sup>2</sup> One solution which attracted a disparate group of supporters was the idea of complete black removal. The American Colonization Society (ACS) was formed in 1817 with the immediate goal of removing all free blacks and eventually the entire population. The Society was organized and controlled by whites attracted to 'benevolent causes.' It was destined to fail as a viable

solution, but nevertheless its activities represented the most elaborate attempt at black deportation.<sup>3</sup> During the period 1820 to 1843 a total of 4,571 black emigrants left America for colonization in Liberia through the apparatus of the American Colonization Society.<sup>4</sup> A quantitative analysis of this emigrant population affords the opportunity to reexamine various historical generalizations that have been advanced about the period in both America and Liberia.

As the number of emigrants increased through the twenty-three years, certain general demographic characteristics developed which reflect both that segment of the black population which left America and the kind of communities formed in Liberia. The sex ratio was balanced while the age distribution shows a wide base of infants and young children with a gradual reduction until age forty-six. (see fig. 1) The even sex ratio and the age distribution indicates a pattern of family emigration and also suggests the prospect of steady population growth. New emigrants were constantly arriving in Liberia throughout the period in question. For the first five years the new arrivals were limited to less than 150 per year. During the next ten years the numbers rose markedly with 718 emigrants arriving in the year 1833. After 1837, the rate of emigration fluctuated from year to year but never again reached the 1833 level. (see table 1) This outline of the broad features demands a closer examination of the more specific aspects of the population.

The Society organized numerous state auxiliaries whose responsibility was the spread of colonizationist sentiment within the states.

Figure 1

Population Distribution for Liberian Emigrants,  
1820-1843

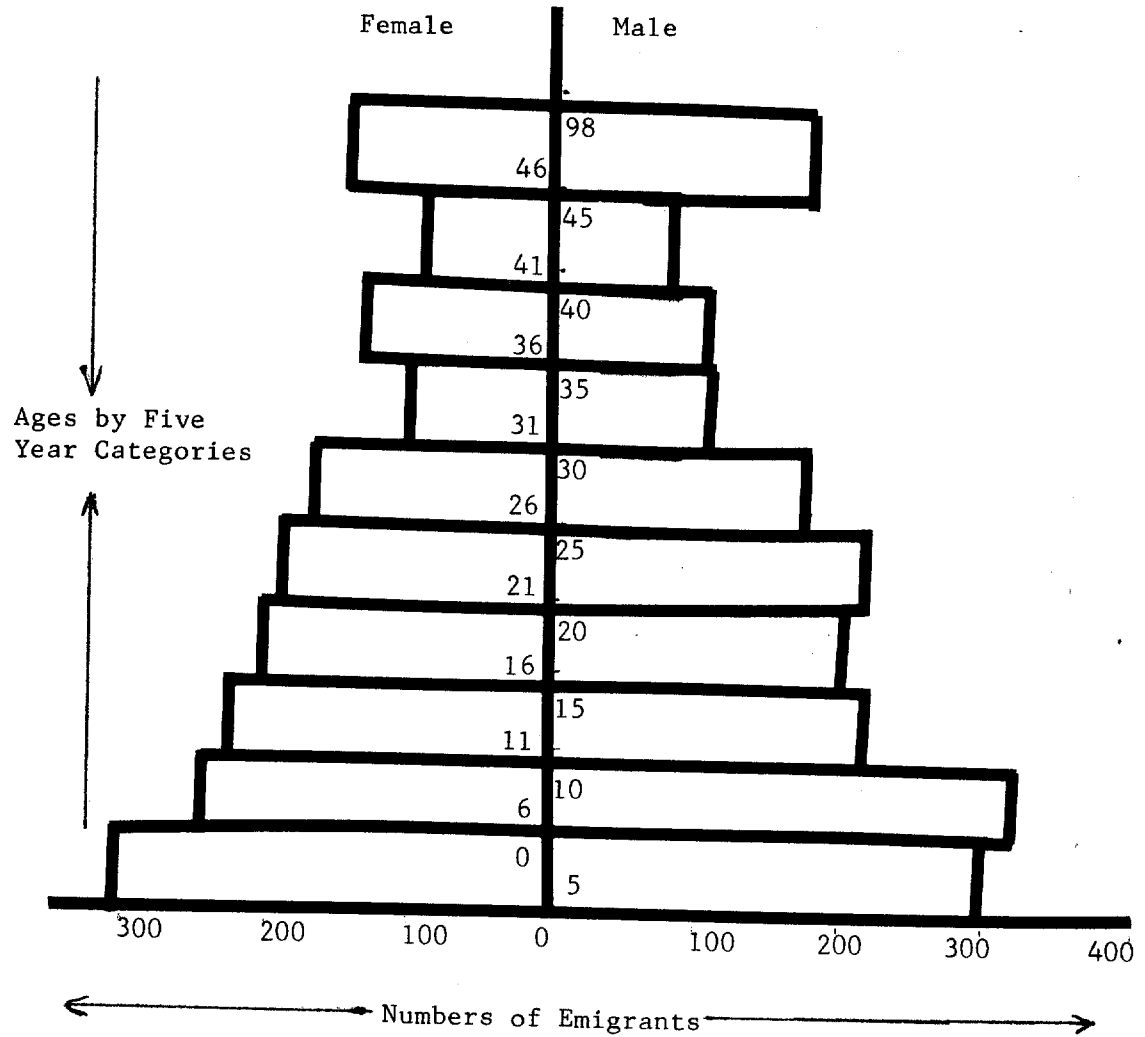


Table 1

## Emigration to Liberia in Each Year, 1820-1842

Years	No.	%
1820	87	1.9
1821	33	.7
1822	37	.8
1823	64	1.4
1824	103	2.3
1825	65	1.4
1826	177	3.9
1827	236	5.2
1828	302	6.6
1829	146	3.2
1830	325	7.1
1831	165	3.6
1832	676	14.8
1833	718	15.7
1834	237	5.2
1835	207	4.5
1836	242	5.3
1837	38	.8
1838	208	4.6
1839	56	1.2

1840	113	2.5
1841	87	1.9
1842	249	5.5
Total	4,571	100.00

Table 2

## Point of Origin for Liberian Emigrants, 1820-1842

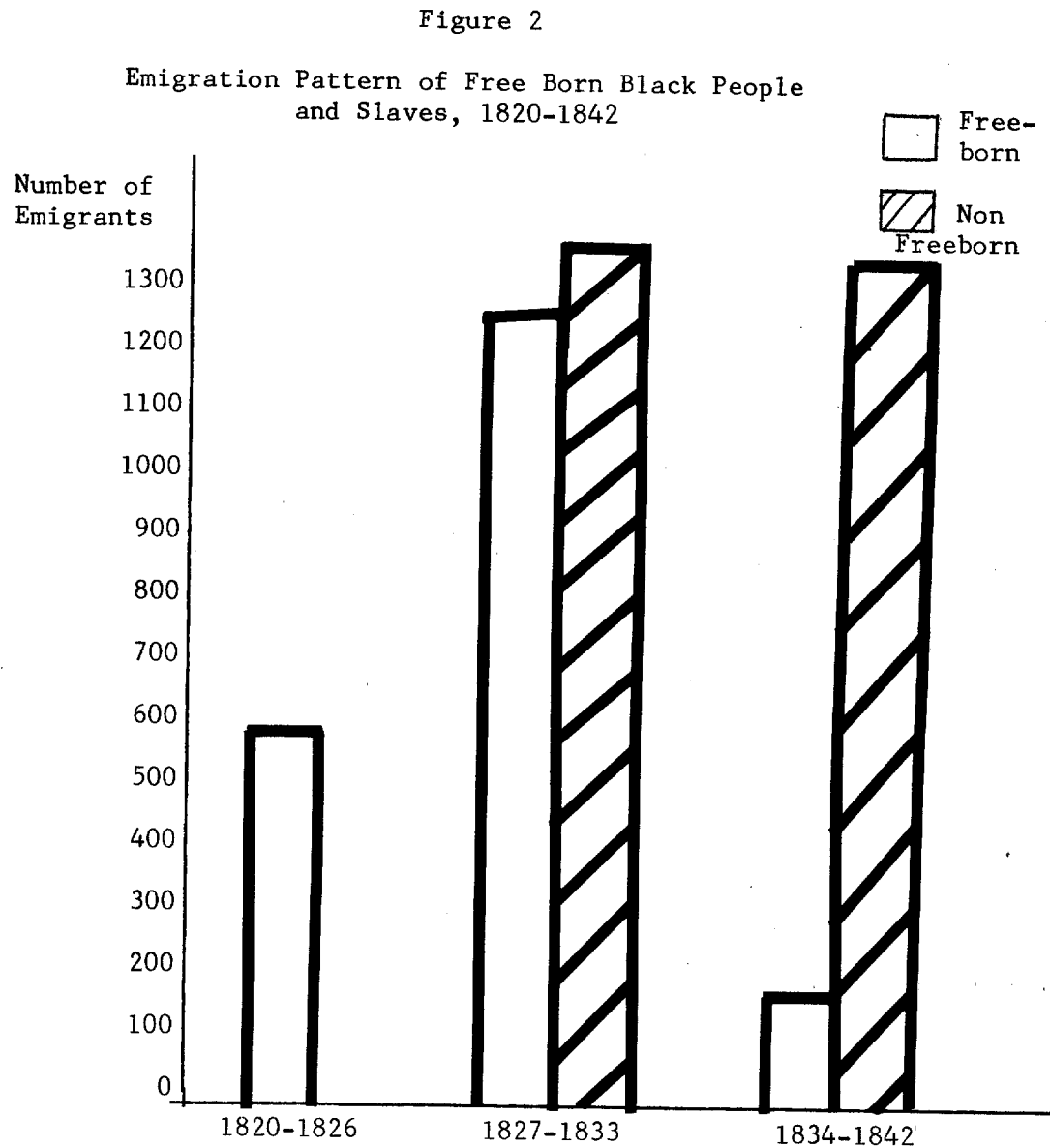
Origin	No.	%
<u>Free States</u>	270	6.0
New York	78	1.7
Pennsylvania	69	1.5
Rhode Island	5	.1
Washington, D.C.	28	.6
Ohio	56	1.3
Iowa	17	.4
Illinois	3	.1
<u>Slave States</u>	3,927	87.5
Missouri	2	.1
Virginia	1,603	35.7
Maryland	478	10.7
So. Carolina	160	3.6
No. Carolina	750	16.7
Delaware	2	.1
Tennessee	185	4.1
Kentucky	193	4.3
Georgia	253	5.6
Louisiana	116	2.6
Alabama	7	.2
Mississippi	178	4.0
<u>Miscellaneous</u>	288	6.5
Port au Prince	1	.1
At Large*	287	6.4
Total	4,485	100.00

\*Slaves seized at sea by the United States Naval Squadron and turned over to the American Colonization Society.



The data from Table 2 (see preceding page) shows the frequency count and percentages of people that emigrated from each state. The greatest number came from Virginia, North Carolina and Maryland with 1,603, 750 and 478 people respectively. Although most emigrants came from southern states, eight northern states were also represented. Despite the lack of strong data one might suggest that the relative strengths and weaknesses of the individual auxiliaries was a major factor. As early as 1817 a national officer of the Society, Francis S. Key, was successful in organizing an auxiliary in Maryland. He succeeded in arousing public support for colonization which eventually turned the state into a stronghold for the movement.<sup>5</sup> The actual emigration figures from the state clearly reflect the fruits of this effort. It is possible, however, to see other determinants for emigration from particular states at certain times. Attitudes among the black population and conditions in America dominated these other factors. The legal status of the emigrants before they left America provides one effective means of exploring these determinants.

The ACS classified emigrants as freeborn or otherwise. The 'otherwise' classification refers to slaves that were freed for the express purpose of deportation to Liberia, and a small number of those slaves that had purchased their freedom. An interesting pattern emerges when emigration of freeborn people is compared to that of freed slaves. (see fig. 2) For the first seven years 560 freeborn emigrants arrived in Liberia. There were no freed slaves



sent during this period. From 1827-1833, a total of 1,249 freeborn people and 1,302 freed slaves emigrated. After 1834 the freed slave rate of emigration remained almost constant but the freeborn rate dropped sharply with only 161 people emigrating over the nine years to 1843. Public attitudes, both black and white, towards the goals

of the ACS played an important role in the pattern found in Figure 2.

The period 1820-1826, when no freed slaves left for Liberia, is explicable by the development of the Society as a national organization. The initial aim of the ACS was expressed by one of its founders, Robert Finley:

"Could not the rich and benevolent devise means to form a colony on some part of the Coast of Africa, similar to the one at Sierra Leone, which might gradually induce many free blacks to go there and settle, devising for them the means of getting there, and of protection and support till they were established?"<sup>6</sup>

Coupled with the early focus on free black emigration was the slow development of support from slaveholders. The years immediately after the formation of the organization were spent bringing the cause of black colonization in Africa before the public. Once slave states recognized the activities of the ACS as a possible answer to the growing black population, the pattern of emigration changed. The period from 1827 to 1833 reflects the impact of this change.

The phase of involuntary emigration began in 1827 with the arrival of the Brig Doris bringing slaves from North Carolina and Virginia. Provisions were made in the wills of some slave owners for the release of slaves who were then sent to Liberia. In many cases slaves were freed while the master was still living on the express condition that they leave for Liberia.<sup>7</sup> By 1829 Francis S. Key was able to state that the national office in Washington "was processing

offers totaling six hundred slaves for removal to Liberia."<sup>7</sup> Support for the colonization scheme also came from certain political areas, both federal and state. James Monroe favored the idea and even argued to his cabinet in 1819 that free blacks constituted:

"... a class of very dangerous people who lived by thievery and corrupted the slaves. Colonization would encourage manumission and eventually remove the entire black population of Virginia."<sup>8</sup>

The state of Virginia subsequently made all freeing of slaves contingent on immediate removal.<sup>9</sup> The data shows that Virginia was the state of origin for 35.7% of all emigrants.

The final period for Figure 2 from 1834 to 1842 clearly shows a strikingly rapid reversal in free black emigration. From a high of 495 emigrants in 1832 the numbers fell to the point where in 1837, 1839, 1840 and 1841 no freeborn emigrants went to Liberia; while in all other years of the period the numbers never exceeded sixty. Unlike freed slaves, the majority of free blacks could choose either to leave America or remain. Therefore changes in the rate of freeborn emigration can serve as an indicator both of black attitudes towards colonization and of conditions in America as they affected black people.

From the very outset free blacks looked suspiciously upon the activities of the American Colonization Society. As early as 1817 a meeting was held in Richmond where the ACS was publicly opposed.<sup>10</sup> The opposition quickly spread to many northern cities, Philadelphia in particular. Statements were made by various groups of free blacks; generally expressing the attitude that:

"Because their ancestors not of their own accord were the first successful cultivators of the wilds of America, they felt themselves entitled to participate in the blessings of its 'luxuriant soil' which their blood and sweat had moistened."<sup>11</sup>

Where possible, organizations were formed to dissuade blacks from leaving the country.<sup>12</sup> Most of the educated elite within the black communities remained unalterably opposed to colonization and used their position to influence the opinions of others on the subject. They rejected the idea because they believed that removing free blacks would perpetuate the slave system in America. Colonization, in their view, would raise the price of slaves as well as remove a possible ally for slaves in any rebellions.<sup>13</sup> The actual free black population compared to the total freeborn emigration points out the effectiveness of this and similar arguments. As of 1830 the free black population had reached the level of 319,000<sup>14</sup> while only 1,970 freeborn people emigrated to Liberia during the entire twenty-three years of this study.

In spite of the fact that only a small segment of the free black population saw colonization as a practical alternative, it is still useful to consider possible parallels between emigration and conditions in America. Although blacks generally opposed the colonization scheme, the sudden drop in freeborn emigrants from 1834 to 1842 can be linked to the abolitionist movement. It attacked the idea of black deportation in general and the American Colonization Society in particular. The most fiery of its numbers during this period was William Lloyd Garrison. In a pamphlet entitled Garrison's Thoughts on African

Colonization ... that appeared in 1832, he attacked the ACS:

"The Colonization Society ... instead of being a philanthropic and religious institution, is anti-republican and anti-christian in its tendency. Its pretenses are false, its doctrines odious, its means contemptible."<sup>15</sup>

The pamphlet had a wide circulation in Northern localities, especially among free blacks.

A close examination of table 3 shows another significant change in freeborn emigration. Before 1832, the number of freeborn emigrants remained consistently below two hundred per year. In 1832 and 1833 the numbers rose to 495 and 344 respectively. Here again it is possible to look to conditions in America to explain this change, at least in part. Between August 21 and August 23 of 1832 Nat Turner led an insurrection in Southampton, Virginia which was to have ramifications throughout all of the slave states. The immediate reaction was expressed by the Norfolk Herald in September of that same year:

" ... judging from the excitement produced by the Southampton murders on the minds of the whites in that and adjacent counties, any future outrage of the blacks of a similar character would be retaliated by their indiscriminate destruction. The arm of law would be inadequate to protect even the innocent from the general flood of vengeance and extermination."<sup>16</sup>

Aside from such threats of severe retribution there was also a body of repressive legislation passed which was aimed at both the free blacks and the slaves.<sup>17</sup> All of this served to increase the appeal of the ACS. Not only were slaveholders now more inclined to use the ACS, the aftermath of the rebellion also made emigration to

Table 3

Emigration to Liberia of Freeborn Blacks and Freed Slaves,  
1820-1842

Years	Freeborn		Non Freeborn	
	No.	%	No.	%
<u>1820-1826</u>	<u>560</u>	<u>28.4</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>.0</u>
1820	86	4.4	0	.0
1821	33	2.1	0	.0
1822	34	1.7	0	.0
1823	63	3.2	0	.0
1824	103	5.2	0	.0
1825	65	3.3	0	.0
1826	176	9.0	0	.0
<u>1827-1833</u>	<u>1,249</u>	<u>63.5</u>	<u>1,302</u>	<u>50.6</u>
1827	42	2.1	194	6.0
1828	68	3.5	233	9.1
1829	101	5.1	33	1.3
1830	62	3.2	262	10.2
1831	137	7.1	27	1.1
1832	495	25.1	181	7.0
1833	344	17.5	372	14.4
<u>1834-1842</u>	<u>161</u>	<u>8.9</u>	<u>1,274</u>	<u>49.4</u>
1834	23	1.2	213	8.3
1835	39	2.1	168	6.5
1836	35	2.1	207	8.0
1837	0	.0	38	1.5
1838	7	.4	201	7.8
1839	0	.0	56	2.2
1840	0	.0	112	4.4
1841	0	.0	87	3.4
1842	57	3.1	192	7.5
Total	1,970	100.0	2,576	100.0

Liberia more desirable to free blacks in southern states.<sup>18</sup> Clearly emigration rose in this case as a reaction to the extreme repression of black people. There is no quantitative way of gauging the degree of emigration sentiment among blacks that did not leave. The

argument that such sentiment was increased by conflict and uncertainty at home is substantiated by the support that came to the Garveyite Movement after the Red Summer of 1918.<sup>19</sup>

One fact about the emigrants indicating their ability to understand the affairs around them was the very large proportion of literacy; far more than one might have suspected to be the case among either freed blacks or slaves in that period. Table Four represents literacy by region and state. Some elementary forms of instruction were given to slaves in certain areas while free blacks had more opportunities for education. The types of instruction given to free blacks varied from school facilities in the North to tutorial activities in the South.<sup>20</sup> The emigrants to Liberia included a surprisingly large percentage of people with the fundamentals of literacy. The ACS system of recruitment among free blacks tended to generally reach those that could read the literature published by the Society which may have been a somewhat selective mechanism.

Though the total number of emigrants sent to Liberia between 1820 and 1843 was 4,571, the numbers living in the settlement in 1843 were only 1,819. Removals from the settlements might provide part of the answer, but only 11% of the emigrants actually left once they settled in Liberia. (see Table 5) There must, therefore, have been serious impediments to population growth that might have been expected on grounds of the sex ratio and pattern of family emigration. Another possible answer might come from the conflicts between the settlers and the neighboring African people. Such population losses appear not to



Table 4  
Literacy Among Emigrants to Liberia By Point of Origin  
1820-1842

Origin	Some Literacy		Illiteracy*	
	No.	%	No.	%
<u>Northern States</u>	<u>356</u>	<u>47.3</u>	<u>396</u>	<u>52.7</u>
New York	44	56.4	34	43.6
Pennsylvania	29	42.0	40	58.0
Connecticut	3	60.0	2	40.0
Rhode Island	10	35.7	18	64.3
Washington, D.C.	25	44.6	31	55.4
Ohio	0	.0	17	100.0
Iowa	0	.0	3	100.0
Illinois	1	7.1	13	92.9
Maryland	242	50.6	236	49.4
Delaware	2	100.0	0	.0
Missouri	0	.0	2	100.0
<u>Southern States</u>	<u>632</u>	<u>17.3</u>	<u>2,813</u>	<u>82.7</u>
Virginia	272	17.0	1,331	83.0
So. Carolina	83	51.9	77	48.1
No. Carolina	125	16.7	625	83.3
Tennessee	28	15.1	157	84.9
Kentucky	0	.0	193	100.0
Georgia	52	21.0	201	79.0
Louisiana	52	44.8	64	55.2
Alabama	5	71.4	2	28.6
Mississippi	15	8.4	163	91.6
Total	988	32.0	3,209	68.0

\* All unknowns included in this category.

Table 5  
Removal From The Liberian Settlements During The Period  
1820 to 1842

Place of Removal	No.	%
Other Parts of Africa	401	8.8
United States	117	2.6
Other	11	.2

have been very great.<sup>21</sup> The emigrants, although few in numbers, were much better armed and after the first attack by Africans they were able to protect their settlements. Only 74 people were recorded during the entire period as having died as a result of military action. The real impediment to population growth was the mortality rate of the emigrants, the major cause being disease, particularly malaria or 'fever.' (see Table 6)

Table 6  
Principal Causes of Death Among Liberian Emigrants

Causes	No.	%
Fever*	896	45.7
Drowning	67	3.4
Childbirth	13	.7
Female disease	45	2.3
Decline	192	9.8
Old age	36	1.8
Diseased brain	93	4.8
Diseased lung	106	5.4
Consumption	192	9.8
Pleurisy	88	4.5
Casualty	79	4.0
Anasarca	95	4.9
Whooping Cough	11	.6
Cholera	3	.2
Worms	2	.1
Total	1,918	100.0

\*This designation probably refers to malaria.

The data presented in Tables 7-9 reflect several problems. One is the small size represented in certain categories. Significant generalizations can be made about the mortality rate of all males (2,419) but little can be said about the mortality rate of emigrants from the

Table 7  
 Central Death Rate For Emigrants By Region and State\*  
 Of Origin

Age	North	South	Virginia	Maryland	No. Carolina
0-5	145	97	120	126	59
6-25	74	63	68	68	46
26-45	87	77	78	90	65
46-98	268	159	156	319	167
Total	95	78	84	88	56

\*Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina represent the only states where the population sample was large enough to be meaningful:

Number of Emigrants during the period 1820-1843

Virginia - 1,603  
 Maryland - 478  
 North  
 Carolina - 750

Table 8  
 Central Death Rate For Emigrants By Sex And Age

Age	Males	Females	Total
0-5	101	100	100
6-25	75	59	67
26-45	72	89	79
46-98	201	153	178
Total	85	78	82

Table 9  
 Central Death Rate For Emigrants By Region  
 And Place of Landing

Age	<u>Coastal</u> *	Monrovia	Caldwell	<u>Interior</u>	Millsbuurg
0-5	<u>118</u>	107	92	<u>96</u>	101
6-25†	<u>68</u>	61	61	<u>63</u>	75
26-45	<u>73</u>	70	98	<u>90</u>	73
46-98	<u>164</u>	154	194	<u>185</u>	155
Total	<u>83</u>	77	80	<u>81</u>	85

\*The Coastal and Interior central death rates include all emigrants; while Monrovia, Caldwell and Millsburg are the only settlements which had populations large enough to be represented individually.

state of Connecticut because the total number is just five. The size of the population sample must be reasonably large in order to have statistical value. Expected high mortality for certain age groups must also be taken into account. Infants represent one such group, and in the nineteenth century one could anticipate high infant mortality. Therefore age categories have been used as a way of minimizing possible false interpretations.

Two related problems are also involved when dealing with mortality records of the past. In most situations of high mortality, records are poorly kept. This becomes particularly significant when the recorded

causes of death are examined. In the first half of the nineteenth century medical knowledge of tropical diseases was very limited.<sup>22</sup> The Liberian emigrants had few if any men with medical knowledge available which further reduces the reliability of the data concerning the causes of death. This study will only be concerned with the incidence of death which are the most reliable data. The American Colonization Society records also gives no information about the morbidity of the population. Here it is only possible to make inferences about morbidity from the mortality rate. If mortality is found to be high then one would expect a correspondency with morbidity.

The mortality figures for Liberian emigrants was computed as a Central Death Rate from the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Sum of Death}}{\text{Date of Death (if applicable)} \\ \text{or Date of Removal (if applicable)} \\ \text{or 1843}} \times 1000$$

[expressed in terms of deaths per thousand per year]

The record includes people that enter the population at different ages and in different years. This formula provides a means of capturing the mortality experience of the Liberian emigrants during the period. The Central Death Rate calculation has been used when combining variables such as sex, place of landing and the like. This procedure makes it possible to analyze mortality patterns while at

the same time reducing the effect of built-in biases. Tables 7 through 9 contain the results of such cross tabulations. A clear pattern of mortality persists throughout the tables. The first age category of 0 to 5 and the last category of 46 to 98 has the highest incidence of mortality in both tables while the two age categories of 6 to 25 and 26 to 45 shows a significantly lower mortality level. This pattern is expected for any population. Infant mortality can be expected to be high with mortality dropping off in the middle years and rising again from the impact of adult diseases and old age.

As a basis for comparison between the Liberian example and other cases, Table 10 represents the mortality expectations of a society with a very low life expectancy -- in this case limited to just twenty years. For any stable society which continues through time this life expectancy represents the gravest mortality experience on which there is available data. The difference between the age categories of Coale and Demeny and this study is statistically trivial.<sup>23</sup> It is important to note, however, that the 0 to 1 category of Table 9 is probably not included in the Liberian tables. Figure 3 shows the pattern of infant mortality. We can assume that the Liberian records would report infant mortality somewhere after the first months of life. Consequently the 1 to 4 category probably reflects the Liberian category of 0 to 5. Similar reasoning applies to the upper age category as well; the age distribution of the emigrants would be younger than that of a general population, within that age range, and therefore the death rate, *ceteris paribus*, somewhat lower.<sup>24</sup> Useful comparisons can be made only

Table 10

## MORTALITY RATES BY AGE, FOR HIGH MORTALITY SITUATIONS\*

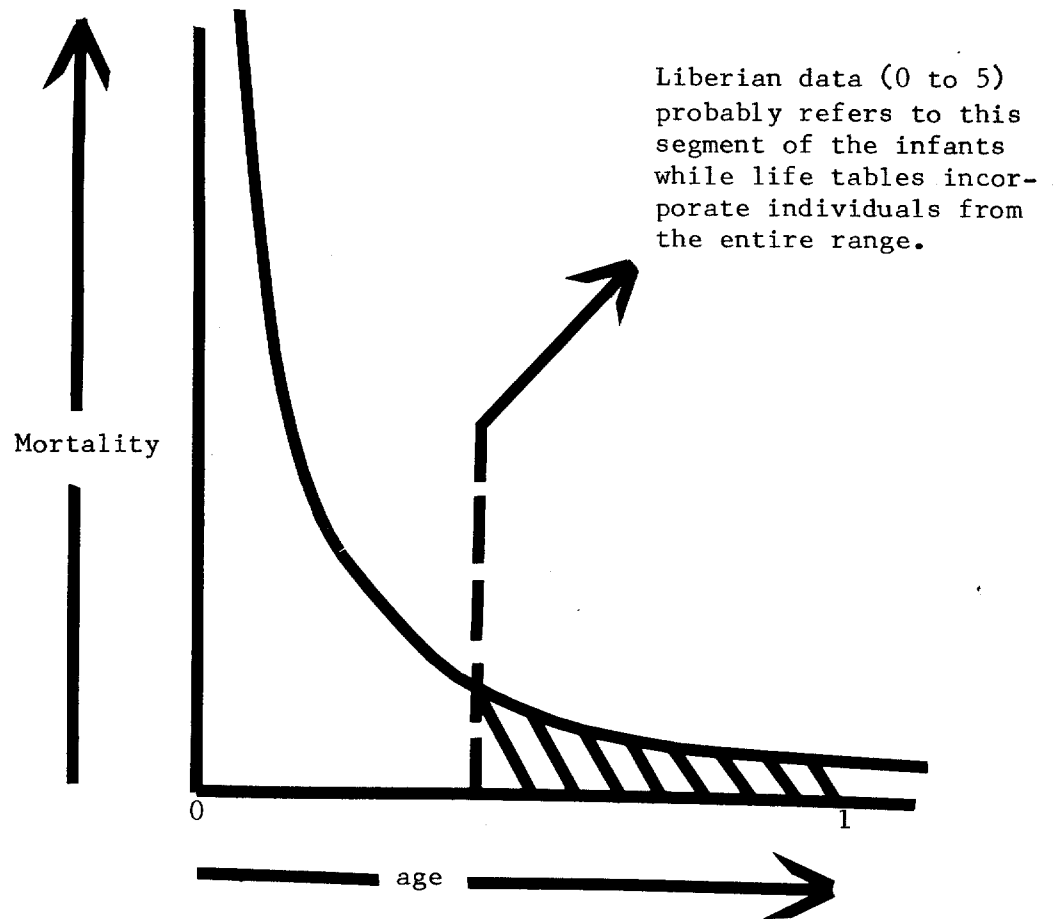
Life expectancy at birth = 20		Males				
Mortality Pattern <sup>1</sup>	0-1	1-4	5-24	25-44	45-up	
West	595	75	11	28	68	
North	503	93	19	25	65	
East	784	71	11	19	58	
South	441	107	14	19	57	

Life expectancy at birth = 20		Females				
Mortality Pattern	0-1	1-4	5-24	25-44	45-up	
West	492	76	15	25	59	
North	413	88	18	23	58	
East	613	70	12	20	56	
South	393	114	15	20	54	

\*The source of these data is: Coale, Ansley, J., & Demeny, Paul, REGIONAL MODEL LIFE TABLES AND STABLE POPULATIONS (New Jersey:

<sup>1</sup>These mortality patterns refer generally to populations found in Europe. These mortality rates represent the worse conditions for demographic growth found in stable societies that continue through time.

Figure 3  
General Pattern of Infant Mortality\*



\* Emigration parallels infancy in that both represent the hazards of the transformation from one life to another. Mortality as a likely consequence for both experiences that decreases the longer an individual survives in the new life.



in the middle categories.

Once the Liberian emigrant mortality tables are compared to the life table for high mortality situations the appalling mortality figures of the emigrants becomes more meaningful. In most cases the emigrant mortality rate is three times as great as the life table rates. In the life tables, people between the ages 5 and 24 have the lowest mortality rate, between 10 and 20 deaths per thousand. Among the Liberian emigrants within this age range the Central Death Rate was never below 50 deaths per thousand. Clearly the emigrants were experiencing very high mortality; even in age ranges generally considered the most healthy for any population. Without the constant emigration through the years it would be impossible to imagine any population growth at all.

It was universally believed at this time that the immunities now known to be based on epidemiological factors were based on race. Existing statistics indeed do indicate that the white death rate was high. A comparison with mortality for whites in West Africa will clarify this assumption. Professor Philip D. Curtin has previously examined the mortality data of Major Alexander Tulloch on British soldiers serving overseas.<sup>25</sup> Tulloch's data, however, cannot be compared directly with the Liberian case. Service in the military suggests a selective health process which is not found for the Liberian emigrants. His population was also in constant flux with new recruits arriving and others leaving their overseas' assignment. The British posts in West Africa were rarely larger than a garrison force. Therefore the data

on mortality rates represented in Tulloch's survey are not calculated on the same basis as the Central Death Rate calculated from the Liberian data.

Tulloch calculated a crude death rate using the mean strength of the British troops as the basis of his analysis. Table 10 shows some of the results of his study. The mortality rates for male emigrants to Liberia appear to be most in line with the mortality for British soldiers serving in the tropical Indian Ocean and the American tropics. (see Table 8 and 11) One possible explanation is that many of the Liberian emigrants came from the south where ~~fal-~~  
**VIVAX**  
~~ciparum~~ malaria was endemic. This would have given the emigrants some degree of immunity to falciparum malaria of West Africa that was not available to soldiers recruited in Britain. Nevertheless the Liberian society formed from black people sent from America could not sustain itself from internal growth alone. The general assumption

Table 11

Mortality Rates for British Soldiers Serving Overseas,  
1817 To 1836\*

Area of Service	Mortality (Per Thousand Mean Strength Per Annum)
Mediterranean	12-20
Tropical Indian Ocean	30-75
American Tropics	85-138
West Africa	483-668

\*This information was taken from Curtin, P.D., "Epidemiology and the Slave Trade," POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY, 83:2, June, 1968, pp. 202-3.

in the early nineteenth century that black people by virtue of their race should have certain advantages for survival in Africa is not supported by the Liberian example.<sup>26</sup> Their mortality rate, although never as high as those of British soldiers in West Africa, was clearly not representative of an advantaged population.

The problem of survival among the emigrants to Liberia was definitely a major concern that could not be ignored by the American Colonization Society. The officers of the organization received a letter from London in 1820 reporting the outcome of the first attempt to settle black emigrants in West Africa.<sup>27</sup> Of the 87 emigrants, 15 died in the first year, including all but one of the whites that accompanied them. The attitude of the ACS managers was stated during an executive meeting when the letter was read into the minutes:

"At present we would request our friends not to be discouraged. The Board laments the unfortunate issue of this first effort, but they had no right to calculate upon the absence of those disasters, difficulties, and disappointments, which attend all human affairs, and which are ordered, or permitted, to attend them, for purposes the wisdom and goodness of which, though we may not see, we cannot doubt. We lament also the loss sustained by the society and our country, and the cause of humanity, in the death of those who so freely offered themselves in the Service of God ... their example and fate we rejoice to know, instead of deterring has encouraged others to assume their posts. To these dispensations of the Almighty we bow in submission and at the same time resolve to go in the path of duty."<sup>28</sup>

The problem of survival, however, did not disappear after this self-righteous proclamation. In fact, the Society, faced with continuing reports of high death tolls among emigrants, ordered a medical investigation to determine the causes for the high mortality and the possible ways that the same could be reduced. The report was presented to the Board of Managers by Dr. Henderson in May of 1832.

The medical report was not sophisticated but it did attempt to isolate the possible causes for high mortality. Acclimatization or 'seasoning' was expected to produce a high death rate initially. Dr. Henderson linked certain circumstances to the high mortality during acclimatization. Emigrants who came from non-malarial regions of the United States were said to have experienced the worst mortality. Locating emigrants on the coast immediately and landing in the wet season were considered the next two most unfavorable conditions for survival. The medical report advised a correction of the conditions as the best method for removing the problem of high mortality:

"The emigrants should leave America in November, say the 21st, so as to arrive about the first of January. If suitable receptacles, at suitable places, be erected, and Physicians reside at these places, any number can be received and attended to. The committee thinks that emigrants from Georgia, and probably South Carolina and similar latitudes, may go safely at any season. It is, however, essential to give the emigrants from the other states every advantage of season, especially as this can be done without detriment or difficulty."<sup>25</sup>

The data from this study enables an examination of the validity of these assumptions.

The 'seasoning' theory is supported by the data. Table 12 shows the percentages of deaths for all emigrants in the first year after arrival and every year thereafter. Twenty-one percent of all emigrants died in their first year of colonization. Of those that survived the first year, 6.1% of that group died in the second year. For those emigrants who lived through their first and second year of settlement in Liberia a new pattern developed. Each new year of survival tended to decrease the likelihood of death. The experiences of the emigrants did in fact include a period of acclimatization. The pattern is found among European settlers in Sierra Leone. In the first year of settlement they had a 49% death rate which then dropped to 10% in the second year.<sup>30</sup>

Table 12  
The Percentages of Deaths For All Emigrants By Each  
Year of Survival in Liberia

Years of Survival	Percentages of Deaths
1	21.4
2	6.1
3	3.4
4	3.1
5	4.2
6	3.1
7	3.1
8	3.1
9	2.2
10	3.1 <sup>r</sup>
11	2.4
12	2.2
13	2.1
14	1.2
15	.9
16	1.2
17	.6
18	.3
19	.4
20	.4
21	.0

The actual suggestions set forth in Dr. Henderson's medical report for reducing mortality are not substantiated by the mortality rate. Table 13 contains the Central Death Rate for two different forms of emigrations. People who emigrated from malarial regions in America (South) and were sent to the interior settlements of Liberia during the dry season were believed to have the best possible chances for survival. Emigrants from non-malarial regions (North) who were settled on the coast in the wet season were believed

Table 13

CENTRAL DEATH RATE FOR LIBERIAN EMIGRANTS BY REGION OF ORIGIN,  
SETTLEMENT AND SEASON OF LANDING

Age	Dry Season	Wet Season
	South-Interior	North-Coast
0-5	87	116
6-25	61	54
26-45	89	48
46-98	178	185
Total	78	63

to be the least likely to survive. Table 13 does not show, however, any major differences between the mortality patterns of these two groups. Both categories remain in line with the other mortality rates of Liberian emigrants.

The Society developed a propaganda system both to encourage black colonization in Africa and to alleviate fears of harsh conditions in Liberia. Under the guidance of Ralph Gurley, the African Repository and Colonial Journal was printed as the publicity organ of the society. In the pages of the Journal, Gurley argued that disease and death were not as severe as in some parts of America. He often blamed fatalities on the settlers themselves:

"In case after case the colonial agent attributed death to foolish mistakes, such as leaving bed too soon after the initial attack, taking too much sun, or eating too much raw fruit. He insisted that the climate at Liberia was basically healthful ..."<sup>31</sup>

These arguments and explanations were inadequate to counter the obvious. The most interesting aspect is not that the Society failed to solve the problem of disease and deaths, medical science had yet to provide the answers, but that the organization continued to send people to Liberia while very much aware of the chances for survival.

The organizers of the ACS considered themselves to be humanitarians performing the work of God. This attitude prevented them from accepting certain realities of their crusade. Any problems, including those of disease and deaths, were viewed as the trials and tribulations that God provides as a means of testing the fortitude of man. After every report of disaster in Liberia the managers simply renewed their efforts. Once the organization was formed and the auxiliaries established, a new force developed which also prevented the Society from admitting the seriousness of the mortality

problem. The desire to perpetuate the existence of the corporate body became a factor. To have admitted that the mortality rate made the price of emigration far too high to be continued would have meant the end of the organization. The managers were seemingly unprepared to advise the termination of their project and by extension, their own jobs.

Many black leaders of the period as well as the white abolitionists believed that Liberian colonization represented a terrible scheme organized by racists. Some historians have since considered the effort to have been the work of idealists convinced that their plan was the most humane answer to America's race problem. The mortality rates and the Society's response during the period hardly represents a humane answer to any problem. This study has demonstrated that the colonization of black people in Liberia between 1820 and 1843 was extremely costly; so costly that it came closer to being a death sentence than the start of a new life.



## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>John H. Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1967), pp. 184-5.

<sup>2</sup>Charles I. Foster, "The Colonization of Free Negroes in Liberia, 1816-1835," The Journal of Negro History, 38:41, 1953.

<sup>3</sup>Two major works on the American Colonization Society: Early L. Fox, "The American Colonization Society, 1817-1840," John Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, V. 37, 1919. P. J. Staudenraus, The African Colonization Movement (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

<sup>4</sup>This figure of 4,571 black emigrants and all other statistical data, unless otherwise stated, comes from: U.S., Congress, Senate, Roll of Emigrants That Have Been Sent To The Colony of Liberia, Western Africa, By the American Colonization Society and Its Auxiliaries, To September, 1843,&c., 28th Cong., 2nd sess., 1844, V. IX. The data from this table has been key-punched and run through a computer for purposes of recapitulation and statistical analysis.

<sup>5</sup>Staudenraus, African Colonization, p. 39.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted by H. N. Sherwood, "The Formation of the American Colonization Society," The Journal of Negro History, 2:213-14 (1917).

<sup>7</sup>Staudenraus, African Colonization, p. 114.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted by Staudenraus, African Colonization, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup>Staudenraus, African Colonization, p. 113.

<sup>10</sup>Louis R. Mehlinger, "The Attitude of the Free Negro Toward African Colonization," The Journal of Negro History, 1: 276(1916).

<sup>11</sup>Mehlinger, "The Attitudes of Free Negroes ...," p. 277.

<sup>12</sup>The opposition to colonization was an important issue for early conventions of free blacks. Numerous resolutions were passed: "In September, 1830, a convention of free Negroes meeting in Philadelphia launched the American Society of Free Persons of Colour, for Improving their Condition in the United States; for Purchasing Lands; and for the Establishing of a Settlement in Upper Canada. Led by James Forten, Hezekiah Grice, the Rev. Samuel Cornish, and the Rev. Peter Williams, the forty delegates publicly condemned African Colonization." (Staudenraus, African Colonization, p. 192-3).

<sup>13</sup>Benjamin Quarles, Black Abolitionists (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 5-6.

<sup>14</sup>Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 217.

<sup>15</sup>William L. Garrison, Thoughts on African Colonization (Boston: Garrison & Knapp, 1832), p. 14.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted by William S. Drewry, The Southampton Insurrection (Washington: The Neale Co., 1900), p. 160.

<sup>17</sup>See Herbert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts (New York: International Publishers, 1963) and Aptheker, Nat Turner's Slave Rebellion (New York: Grove Press, 1966) for detailed accounts of the legislative measures taken in the wake of the Turner insurrection.

<sup>18</sup>Foster, "The Colonization of Free Negroes ...," p. 55.

<sup>19</sup>Edmund D. Cronon, Black Moses (Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 1968), p. 189. Black sentiment for Africa is traced in the following source: Adelaide Hill and Martin Kilson, Apropos of Africa (London: Cass & Co., 1969).

<sup>20</sup>Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, pp. 202-3, 228-9.

<sup>21</sup>For military details see: Harry Johnston, Liberia (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1906), V. I, pp. 136-40. William Innes, Liberia (Edinburgh: Waugh & Innes, 1831).

<sup>22</sup>The best general account of the level of medical knowledge concerning African tropical diseases is: Philip D. Curtin, The Image of Africa (London: MacMillan & Co., 1965), pp. 177-197.

<sup>23</sup>Personal communication from Professor Norman Ryder, University of Wisconsin, Sociology Department.

<sup>24</sup>Personal communication from Professor Norman Ryder.

<sup>25</sup>Philip Curtin, "Epidemiology and the Slave Trade," Political Science Quarterly, 83:2 (June, 1968).

<sup>26</sup>See Curtin, Image of Africa, Ch. 14.

<sup>27</sup>Minutes of the Board of Managers of the American Colonization Society, MS, October 16, 1820, proceedings 1817-1828. The papers of the American Colonization Society are located in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress.

<sup>28</sup>Minutes of the Board of Managers of the American Colonization Society, MS, October 16, 1820, proceedings 1817-1828.

<sup>29</sup>Minutes of the Board of Managers, MS, Monday, May 14, 1832, pp. 273 ff.

<sup>30</sup>Curtin, Image of Africa, pp. 483-4.

<sup>31</sup>Staudenraus, African Colonization, pp. 102-3.

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