



Crimes against the flesh are not simply crimes against the corporeal self: the wounded flesh, rather, was the personhood and social positionality of the African. The wounding is the process of blackening and necessarily of subjugation, a wound from which Black people and “Blackness” writ large have yet to recover. Black exclusion from the social contract is existence within a heavily surveilled and heavily regulated state of subjection. We are carriers of the coveted blue passport still trapped in the zone of citizen non-being. We are simultaneously subjugated and teased with promises of liberation via individualized neoliberal self-betterment and swallowing of a long-soured American Dream whilst choking back dissonances and forcibly reconciling irreconcilable double consciousnesses.

Whiteness has long sought to grapple with the existential threat posed by Black freedom. Black repatriation to Africa, or “colonization,” has long been floated as one potential solution. Founded in 1816 and driven by a variety of ultimately complementary motivations, the American Colonization Society helped to found the colony of Liberia in 1822. The abolitionist contingents within the society believed that because of the insurmountable discriminations free-born Black people and freedmen and their families experienced, Black people would fare far better organizing themselves in their African “homelands.”

Slaveholders within American society were concerned that the presence of free Blacks would inspire enslaved Blacks to revolt and thus compromise the stability (both economic stability and the stability of the anti-Black racial order) of the southern slaveocracy, and other openly racist members outright refused Black people the opportunity to integrate into American society. Others still were concerned that Black families would burden state welfare systems and that interracial labor competition would ultimately compromise wages for white workers.

A lesser known proponent of colonization was the “Great Emancipator” himself, Abraham Lincoln, who entertained a far lesser known and quickly abandoned plan for Black colonization in Panama — one decried by Frederick Douglass as “ridiculous” — which would also play a role in the expansion of American trade influence in the Caribbean. The “Back to Africa” project was subsequently taken up by Black thinkers like Marcus Garvey in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries following the failures of Reconstruction in the South, the first attempt to meaningfully extend citizenship to newly emancipated Blacks, to protect them from white supremacist violence and also the social and political disillusionment of Blacks who had migrated to northern states. It is no coincidence that interest in repatriation peaked during the period.

