

## Colonization Society Address of John Finley Crowe, June 20, 1845

*In 1845, John Finley Crowe delivered an address on behalf of the American Colonization Society. The purpose of the Society was to provide funds for free blacks to relocate to Africa. The Society ultimately aimed to abolish slavery and the slave trade. Crowe discusses what he believes to be the advantage of the colonization, as opposed to other methods of abolition, as well as some of the actual practical successes of the project. Crowe closes his address by refuting some of the criticisms of the Society, claiming that the colonization of the free blacks from America is of benefit to both continents, additionally it is the duty of Americans to ensure that others experience the "blessings of freedom."*

I rise my friends as the humble advocate of the Col. Soc. (Colonization Society). For altho there is no enterprise of this age of benevolent effort which can compare with this, in the moral sublimity of its conception, or in the benign results of its consummation [sic]; yet it labours under the weight of a deep & chilling prejudice. A prejudice confined not to the ignorant & narrow minded bigot, but cherished by many, very many whose philanthropy & public spirit are an honor to their country & to their age.

It is no part of my design to enter the lists of controversy on this subject—I would simply endeavor to divest it of those extraneous appendages & distorted features, by which partizen [sic] zeal has disfigured it, and set it before you in the benevolence, the simplicity & the grandeur of its character.

What are the objects of the Colonization Soc.?<sup>?</sup> The great ultimate objects are the salvation of a continent of 150,000,000 of immortal beings & the annihilation [sic] of the slave trade with all its unutterable horrors. The immediate, though secondary & incidental objects are the providing a home (a ?) an honorable home for the expatriated colored man and at the same time furnishing a favourable theater for the development of his mental powers, and for giving a demonstration of his capacity for self government. Let no one suppose that I have either mistaken or misstated the objects of the society. For whatever prominence interested & partizen orators & writers may have given to secondary & incidental objects, the great objects which inspired the minds of Finley & Mills & and their coadjutors [sic] who originated the scheme, were as I have stated; and such are the objects of its enlightened friends now.

Africa, the native land of the black-man is an immense continent 4300 miles long & 4100 broad—containing a population estimated at 150,000,000; seven or eight times the population of the whole U. States. And altho it has for many ages been sunk in ignorance & barbarism, and altho its inhabitants are sometimes represented as being incapable of high intellectual attainments; yet it is undeniable that it was the cradle of science, and that to it, under God, Europe and America are indebted for much of the knowledge which gives them their proud pre-eminence among the nations of the earth. To the Egyptians & Carthaginians were the Greeks & Romans indebted for the arts and sciences

which gave them the empire of the world. Nor was Africa shorn of all her glory, until the same hoards [sic] of barbarians who overran the Roman Empire, swept like its own Sirocco over the northern parts of Africa.

But for the last thousand years, a despotism as cruel & relentless as the very deamon [sic] of slavery himself has presided over that devoted country. And the only merchandise in which its merchants have trafficked [sic] is the souls & bodies of men. The petty chiefs have been armed by the slavers against each other, and whole towns desolated in order to furnish the slave ship with its cargo of human bones & sinews [sic]. Hundreds of thousands of the ignorant & unoffending inhabitants of Africa, torn from their homes & their friends, have either perished amid the perils of the middle passage, or have been sold into absolute, unconditional & perpetual slavery in foreign lands. And we as a nation have shared deeply in the guilt & the infamy of this unnatural trafic [sic], having been the first to denounce the slave trade as piracy on the high seas.

But intelligent [sic] men long ago soon became convinced that the slave trade could never be abolished, while the slave market was kept open, & those barbarous people were tempted to sell each other for rum & tobacco. Consequently the establishment of Christian colonies, on the coasts of Africa, became a favorite project with philanthropists both of Europe & America. The first colony was established by the British after the close of the American Revolution at Sierra Leone, on the western coast of Africa. The immediate object was an asylum for the slaves who had joined the British standard during the war & for those who should be rescued from slave ships; and the ultimate object, through them to extend the blessing of the gospel & of civilization to the surrounding nations. But in the consequence of an unhealthy location & a strong anti-republican prejudice in the minds of the Directors the colony has never flourished.

We have a much more interesting establishment in the colony of Liberia—More interesting because the fruits of American philanthropy, & because it promises to be more, much more extensively useful in promoting the cause of humanity. \* The Society for colonizing the poor people of colour in the U.S. with their own consent on the coasts of Africa, was organized in Dec. 1816, at the city of Washington. But altho patronized by the first men of the nation, nothing of importance was done, until the fall of 1819, when the Society appointed the Rev. Saml. J. Mills & Mr. Ebenezer Burgess to proceed to Africa & make the necessary explorations & inquiries as to a suitable location for a settlement. These agents visited & explored the western coasts of Af. And though the lamented Mills fell a victim to the African fever yet the survivor returned & reported favorably of the country southeast of Sierra Leone. Consequently the year following—viz. in 1820, the first emigrants—80 in number, were sent to Africa under the direction of three agents. But the agents found it impossible to obtain a suitable place for the location of the Colony & were compelled to make a temporary establishment on the low & unhealthy island of Sherbro, a little south of Sierra Leone. There they were detained, endeavoring to purchase land until they were attract [sic]

by a fatal disease, which carried off the three agents & one fourth of the whole number of the colonists.

The year following, four new agents & 28 emigrants were sent out. But in the course of the summer, two of these agents died & one returned to the U. States. The survivor with all the emigrants found a temporary settlement near Free-town in the Colony of Sierra Leone. In the meantime Dr. Ayres, a new agent appointed by (the) Society in conjunction with Lieutenant Stockton on the part of the U. States, purchased the country called Montserado for three hundred dollars, payable in fire-arms, ammunition, tobacco & clothing. They immediately sent for their colonists at Sierra Leone, commenced their settlement—changed the name of the country to Liberia, and called their first town Monrovia in honor of exPresident Monroe who was a warm & an efficient patron of the colony.

But they had scarcely provided shelters for their families when a difficulty arose with one of the petty Kings which threatened the extinction of the infant colony. Their whole number of effective men now was only 35, when an army of 800 natives made a furious attack upon them, resolved on their extermination. The barbarians were, with the blessing of God, repulsed with great loss. In the course of a month the enemy, 1500 strong, renewed the attack. But the colonists had so far completed their fortifications, that with their diminished number of less than 30 they again defeated the enemy with great loss. A treaty, signed by all the native princes in the neighborhood, which has remained unbroken until the present time.

A regular government was not adopted until the year 1824. Since that time the colony has been gradually rising in numbers, wealth, & political importance. And now the commonwealth of Liberia consists of between 3 & 4000 American colonists & some 5000 natives who have enroaled [sic] themselves under their government, and voluntarily placed themselves under the protection & control of their laws. To these may be added from 60,000 to 100,000 more of the natives who have entered into treaties of amnesty with the colony, binding themselves by solemn compact to renounce the slave trade and other barbarous usages.

In fine I feel bold to say that in the history of colonization Liberia stands alone in the wisdom & the success of its plans. Without entering into details on this subject, I state, without fear or contradiction that it has accomplished more, with less expense of life & treasure, than any other colony on record, either in ancient or modern times—during a like period of its incipient existence. And while it is the only means by which everything has been accomplished in the way of Christianizing & civilizing Africa & of abolishing the slave trade; it furnishes a home for the expatriated coloured man, and a noble theater on which to exhibit demonstrative evidence that his mental & moral capabilities are not inferior to those of his brethren of Caucasian origin. I surely need not here undertake to prove by argument that the colored man labors under disadvantages from the aristocracy of colour in this country that must create a chilling nay a paralyzing influence on his intellectual energies. But then an asylum is proviend (?) when he may enjoy social equality, civil immunity & political rights & privileges in a wide

& well ordered republican government, and where he has all the advantages for the development of his intellect, and all the stimulants to his hopes of eminence & distinction, which under God have made such men as Gov. Roberts, Judge Benedict & other leading minds in the commonwealth of Liberia.

This is not theory. In the language of another—"There stands the Commonwealth of Liberia, just of age & able to speak for itself. There it is on the western coast of Africa in the very central regions of barbarism & the slave trade. There are laid the foundation of a free & happy government with all the appliances of education & religion. There is the germ of a rising, a prosperous & a mighty empire. There are some three thousand persons removed from this country, organized into a regular republican government, on a model like our own, where all the offices are filled & all the power is held by coloured men. There are laws, & courts of justice, & civil institutions and all the accompaniments of advanced civilization. There are churches, & schools & Sabbath remembered & hallowed, & sanctuaries well filled with worshippers. There is the public press & two newspapers regularly issued. There are towns, & villages, agriculture & commerce, comfortable houses & increasing wealth. There the slave trade has been abolished. Wherever they could obtain the right to the soil, they beat down the barracoons, dispersed the wretches that kept them & knocked off the chains from the slave & set the captives free. The nations around, beginning to understand the nature of the colonial institutions, and regarding the colony as an asylum, have sought refuge within its borders by thousands. The colonists hail them as an accession to their strength, & encourage them in all the pursuits of an honorable life. IN this way the minds of the nations have been changed in regard to the slave trade, and more has been done to remove this scourge of Africa, by the little colony of Liberia, than by the British nation with her Spanish treaty and all the world put together.

I am aware my friends that a very different picture of the colony of Liberia has been given. That picture many of you may have seen, and may consequently feel some difficulty in determining what to believe. No wise man would be willing to take anything on trust in a case like this; when partizan [sic] zeal has been called forth on both sides. And I remark that the friends of colonization invite investigation, & confidently appeal to testimony. Its history proves incontestable that amid all the opposition & discouragements with which it has to contend, its course has been onward & upward. But as many are unwilling to receive the most undoubted documentary evidence drawn from the archives of the Colony, I beg leave here to present the testimony of some disinterested persons, who have visited the colony & who speak from personal observation. The first is from Cap. Wm. M. Hornbury of N. O. Hear him. "that the present colonies of Liberia are destined to become a great, flourishing & powerful nation I am fully convinced. I have dined frequently with the inhabitants in company with the officers of the American Navy, the Governor of the Colony & other respectable citizens of Monrovia. They live well, and have plenty of everything around them."

Comodore [sic] Perry in a letter addressed to the Sec. of the Navy about a year since says: -- "It is gratifying to witness the comforts that most of these people have gathered about them. Many of them are familiar with luxuries which were unknown to the early settlers of America. Want would seem to be a stranger among them. If any suffer, it must be the consequence of their own idleness.

"At all the settlements the established laws are faithfully administered, the morals of the people are good and the houses of religion are well attended. In truth the settlers as a community appear to be strongly imbued with religious feelings. On the whole, Sir, I cannot but think most favourably of these settlements. The experiment of establishing the free coloured people of the U. States upon this coast has succeeded beyond the expectation of many of the warmest friends of Colonization; and I may venture to predict that the descendants of the present settlers are destined to become an intelligent [sic] & thriving people.

"Increasing attention has been given to the education of the rising generation. The Colonial council are concerting measure for establishing a general system of public schools in which efficient & competent teachers shall be employed, & a thorough course of instruction given."

So far Com. Perry. And his statements are corroborated, especially as to the moral & religious character of the colony, by all who have visited it. There are but two dram shops in the whole Col. & these are closed on the Sab. They have 23 churches, Methodist, Presbyterian & Baptist; and 1482 communicants—upward of 450 of whom are native Africans. And here we may remark that Christian missions have uniformly succeeded under the protection of the colonies which have been established on the coasts of Africa. There are consequently at this time in Liberia proper, Cape Palmas, Sierra Leone & Gambia more than 100 missionaries & assistant missionaries most of them of African descent, & some of them Native Africans, who are engaged in successful labours for the regeneration of Africa—More than 5000 regular communicants in Christian churches—More than 12,000 regular attendants on the preaching of the gospel, and many tens of thousands of the natives perfectly accessible to missionary labours—All done within the last fifty years & most since 1822.

Now in view of the whole subject, we are surely prepared to come to the following conclusions—1. That Africa, humanly speaking, can never be converted to God by sending solitary missionaries among its savage inhabitants. The labours, & prayers, & sufferings of hundreds of missionaries continued for more than 100 years have failed to make any impression on the dark mass on which they attempted to operate—They emphatically labored in vain & spent their strength for naught.

2. That the combined operation of colonization & missions may be depended on as an effectual means, with the blessing of God, to enlighten and regenerate even dark & degraded Africa, & consequently to annihilate the slave trade with all its untold horrors.

And now, who that believes this, can withhold either his contributions or his

prayers from the enterprise in which the Col. Soc. is engaged. The Society claims on your benevolence are founded:

1. On the benefits which it proposes to confer on the free people of colour in the United States. This is a very large & unfortunate class of our population—About 400,000 people nominally free, but really striped [sic] of many of the dearest rights of freedom—Crushed under weight of prejudice against their colour from which there is no hope of their rising while they remain among us. And the Col. Soc. has not only provided them a home in the land of their fathers, where, under a republican government, administered by themselves, they may rise in all the majesty of men to the enjoyment of all the privileges & immunities of citizens, & to the highest stations of honor & influence; but also provides the means of transporting them there & providing for them during their first year.

Objections—The prejudices are wicked. The people won't go &c.

2. On the benefits which it proposes to confer on the slave population in the U.S. One of the most plausible objections to the emancipation of slaves is the difficulty of making such a disposition of them as will be really an advantage to them & safe to the community. – All such objections removed by the Col. Soc. More than 2000 have been actually emancipated & sent to Liberia.

3. The benefits which it promises to Africa. Poor despised trodden-down Africa. For ages give up to the domination of Satan & all the horrors of those intestine & interminable & bloody wars, which have been instigated by slave trade. This infamous, this horrid trade lies at the root of the evil, and all attempts to Christianize & to civilize Africa must prove utterly unavailing while it exists. And how will you destroy it? By naval force? The combined fleets of the whole Christian world would prove insufficient while the slave market is kept open. What has the power of the British navy effected? Nothing unless it be to increase the horrors& sufferings of the middle passage. This is now generally admitted, & Capt. Harris who was sent to Africa & charged especially by the British government to investigate the matter & report the best method of extinguishing the slave trade, gives it as his deliberate conviction, & his matured, decided opinion that the remedy lies not in armed squadrons on the seas, but must be one of the kind which can be applied to Af. herself. He declaims in the most unequivocal terms, that the slave trade can never be abolished, while the barbarous & pagan spirit of Africa herself is in its favor. The only remedy which he thinks at all adapted to remove the evil is the civilization & Christianization of the native Africans themselves. A work which all experience has shown can be done only by colonization, and which one colony is actually effecting a distance of 300 miles, it has abolished the inhuman trafic [sic] with the exception of one or two points. And here is the present emergency. It is of vital importance to the success of the enterprise that they should secure title to the unbroken coast from C. Mount to C. Palmas. They have twelve settlements scattered along the coast between these points & the integrity of their government & the success of their plans, depend on their securing the intervening country. For this purpose \$15,000 is necessary. &c. 1, or 2 thoughts more.

1. No Christian nation so much indebted to Africa as ours. As a evidence of this point, there are at this moment more than 4,000,000 of black faces in the U. S. while it is a rare thing to meet one of them in any country of Europe. And be it remembered that they are here not as voluntary immigrants, but draged [sic] as slaves by the hand of violence from their country, their friends, & all that the heart holds dear. They have for us converted the forest into fruitful fields, have borne the extremes of heat & cold, & most of our luxuries are the product of their sweat and tears. And how is this debt to Af. To be paid, but by sending back her long oppressed sons laden with all the rich blessings of Christianity?

2. Gratitude for our own inestimable civil & ecclesiastical privileges. Sixty nine times has the 4 of July proclaimed to the world by the thunder of 10,000 cannon & the shouts of 1,000,000s of freemen that we as a nation are emancipated from a foreign yoke. And while we exalt in the blessings of freedom, shall we make no effort to secure for others the same privileges?