The Colonization Societies: Middletown’s Forgotten Movement

The American Colonization Movement, advocating the removal of free blacks to Africa, traced its roots back to the early years of the union. For example, when protesting slavery in 1781 Thomas Jefferson wrote: “The slave...with us...[w]hen freed...is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture.”¹ His problems with the slavery stemmed not from humane concerns about the alleged cruelty of slave owners (of which he was one), but from a fear of the mixing of the two races and a conceived necessity of therefore sending all freed slaves out of the country. His fear was one of the many which inspired the American Colonization Society. While some Americans viewed it as a simple middle ground to pacify both abolitionists and slave supporters, others saw a movement of genuine Christian kindness and sympathetic intentions. As Henry Clay observed at the first meeting of the American Colonization Society in December 21, 1816, free blacks “neither enjoyed the immunities of freemen, nor were they subject to the incapacities of slaves.”²

Clay said this because he believed that the prejudice practiced against the blacks by the white community ensured their continual degradation, while removing them to Africa, specifically Liberia, would guarantee the freed slaves a fair opportunity for success. D.D. Whedon, professor of languages at Wesleyan University, even stressed the noble character of Africans, in his speech to the Middletown Colonization Society in 1834. He detailed “the susceptibility of the African character to the influences of

² Staudenraus, African Colonization, 28.
civilization,” and proclaimed that having experienced white civilization while slaves, the freed, civilized Africans would return to Africa through colonization and create a productive, Christianized civilization, enhanced by their living among their own race.\(^3\) Professor Whedon’s perspective was typical of that which the American Colonization Society presented to the world. It was foremost a movement of separation, but based on the days before Brown vs. Board of Ed. made separate synonymous with unequal. As Wilbur Fisk, president of Wesleyan University and another member of the Middletown Colonization Society believed, the (white) public mind had a natural aversion to the equalization of the two races. In the minds of the colonizationalists, the work of the abolitionists was pointless, because the day would not come when the white society of America would accept the black section of society as their equals.\(^4\) Therefore, elevation of the black race could succeed only if done far out of the reach of the racial prejudices of white, American society. Although colonization was based on dividing society into racial sections, its goal was to elevate the black race while still keeping the country united.

The views of the colonizationalists certainly held some validity. The general white American populace at the time was very averse to accepting former slaves into their ranks, prejudice that echoes into hate crimes and more subtle discrimination today. Furthermore, the issue of slavery and its implications did ultimately lead to war between the Northern free and Southern slave owning states, as well as an equally divisive period of Southern reconstruction.

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However, despite these proofs of the validity of colonizationalist thought, the movement cannot be considered a success. It may have been right in its intents, but by the 1840s the abolitionists, advocating immediate emancipation and an integrated union, held the upper hand and the majority of support among those combating slavery.\textsuperscript{5} On the national level the American Colonization Society continued to send small groups of colonists to Liberia until the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, but had essentially died when the fourteenth amendment gave citizenship to all free men regardless of race, after being significantly weakened by the ardor of the abolitionists and their supporters.\textsuperscript{6} Today, despite the prominent names that espoused its inception, few even know that the Colonizationalist Movement existed.

Unsurprisingly, the same storyline is followed in the American Colonization Society’s smaller auxiliary chapters. Of these the Middletown Colonization Society, to which D.D. Whedon and Wilbur Fisk belonged, is typical. An initial survey of the resources available does little to present the society as either active or influential. While the Middlesex Historical Society contains a detailed file of clippings and letters by abolitionists and about emancipation, there is not a single article filed under the heading “colonization.” The only newspaper from the time, the Middlesex Gazette, barely deigns to discuss the slavery issue at all, and rarely contains reminders of colonization meetings, as opposed to the frequent ads for gatherings to discuss temperance, elections, Masonic topics, and a variety of other social and political topics. Horatio Strother devoted a full chapter in his book, The Underground Railroad in Connecticut, to the origins of the abolitionist movement in Middletown, and her role as a way station in the Underground

\textsuperscript{5} Staudenraus, African Colonization, 240.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 248-251.
Railroad. His chapter briefly mentions that before the popularity of abolition, colonization was a big movement in the town.\textsuperscript{7} But details about this movement are virtually nonexistent in professional publications.

Therefore, this paper endeavors to recreate the Middletown Colonization Society with the scant resources available. Despite the little in the Historical Society and the scarce mention in Horatio Strother’s otherwise admirable work, there was quite a vigorous colonization group—or rather several groups—in Middletown. This should not be surprising, considering the general character of Middletown, CT. Middletown was a typical New England town, with a small free black population. In 1830 this consisted of 209 blacks in a population of 6683 whites; of which the majority of blacks were seamen, laborer and paupers.\textsuperscript{8} Such a small number of blacks holding such separate societal positions from the white majority could only have furthered the national rhetoric of the day led by prominent men such as Henry Clay, Bushrod Washington, John Randolph, and Daniel Webster. This situation would have certainly encouraged the formation of a Middletown Colonization Society.\textsuperscript{9}

Another colonization society friendly characteristic of Middletown was the political attitude of the time. The only recorded newspaper, the \textit{Middlesex Gazette}, proclaimed in 1830: “So far as we understand the principles of the National Republican party of the United States, we accord with them entirely.”\textsuperscript{10} The National Republican movement was one which, like colonization, was neither known as the champion of the oppressed or the defender of equality. National Republicans supported a government of

\textsuperscript{7} Horatio Strother, \textit{The Underground Railroad in CT}, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), 153.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 150-3.
\textsuperscript{9} Staudenraus, \textit{African Colonization}, 27.
\textsuperscript{10} “Middletown,” \textit{Middlesex Gazette}, December 22, 1830: 2.
educated and virtuous gentlemen. In 1832 Henry Clay, ardent colonizationalist and National Republican, ran against Andrew Jackson, known champion of the people and fierce opponent of anything that might "undermine popular sovereignty and majority rule," such as the Bank of the United States, which Clay strongly supported. Not surprisingly, during this election Middletown came out in overwhelming support of Clay (461 votes for Clay, versus 287 for Jackson and 24 for Curt, the third party candidate). Like the small proportion of blacks in Middletown, the elitist National Republican aura of the area makes it even more likely that colonization was also a passion of the town.

And indeed upon investigation I have found little reason to doubt the unexplained assertions of Horatio Strother and his cohorts, briefly mentioning the popularity of colonization in the area. Although I can give no exact figures, the records that remain point to an astonishing degree of colonizationalist fervor. Even outside of the society the people of Middletown in general supported colonization. Not only was there a very active Middletown Colonization Society, but also three other dynamic auxiliary societies: The Middletown Female Colonization Society, The Middletown Juvenile Colonization Society, and the Wesleyan Colonization Society, made up of students from neighboring Wesleyan University.

All three of the Middletown Societies were established by at least 1829, five years before the creation of the Middletown Anti-Slavery Society, a local abolitionist body, in

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12 ibid., 361-8.
14 Donald M. Bishop, "Middletown people had a major Role in ACS," The Middletown (Conn.) Press, Friday Evening, June 20, 1969: 4-5x.
1834. And even the Wesleyan Colonization Society was running by 1833. The later date of its conception can be attributed to the young age of the college, which itself was established only shortly before. Each of the four auxiliary societies contributed to the colonizationalist fervor of Middletown during 1829 and the early 1830s.

Ironically, the Middletown Colonization Society, otherwise known as the American Colonization Society in Middletown, is the one that is least referenced among the available sources. It is never mentioned in the Gazette, where even the Female and Juvenile Colonization Societies occasionally advertised their larger events. The closest reference to it found in this paper is a May 11, 1831 article credited to Chauncey Whittlesey, "for the American Colonization Society." Its inception is known due to an 1829 letter which Elizabeth Warner quotes in A Pictorial History of Middletown, referencing the "newly formed American Colonization Society in Middletown." The only other proofs of its existence are in the titles of the speeches given by D.D. Whedon and Wilbur Fisk, the Wesleyan faculty quoted earlier. Both men gave speeches whose titles cite that they were presented to the Middletown Colonization Society at their annual meeting, thus firmly establishing that the society existed and met annually on July 4.

Due to its low profile, the influence of the Middletown Colonization Society can best be directly illustrated through the influences of its individual members, as opposed to

19 Whedon, "Address." Fisk, "Address."
the group as a whole. There were several prominent members within its ranks. The most recognized member of the Middletown Colonization Society was Wilbur Fisk. Before becoming the first president of Wesleyan University Fisk was a widely known Methodist minister. He was an ardent colonization supporter who was not a fan of slavery, but believed that immediate emancipation would be dangerous and ineffectual at improving the lives of those it purported to benefit. Fisk also saw colonization as a way to keep the Methodist church united despite different opinions about slavery. Fisk’s opinions on the subject were open to the world through his multiple articles supporting colonization in *Zion’s Herald*, the national Methodist publication.\(^{20}\) On a smaller scale, he was influential in Middletown through his prominent role as president of the local college and his speech before the Middletown Colonization Society on July 4, 1835, which discussed colonization’s superiority over abolition.\(^{21}\) In addition to this, his influence was heard through his local religious preaching, which even included occasional visits to the local black church.\(^{22}\)

Although less well known, D. D. Wheddon, professor of languages at Wesleyan University, performed similar actions for the Colonization Society. Like Fisk, Wheddon published articles praising colonization in *Zion’s Herald*.\(^{23}\) He gave a speech before the Middletown Colonization Society a year before Fisk, and concentrated on the great potential of the free blacks to colonize and Christianize Liberia while gaining personal self respect far from the prejudices of white America.\(^{24}\) Even though Wheddon was not

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\(^{21}\) Fisk, “Address,” 4-5.

\(^{22}\) Maybeck, *Colonization Controversy*, 34.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 40.

\(^{24}\) Wheddon, “Address,” 5-7.
as prominent as Fisk on a national scale, his ardor for the colonization cause surely
impacted its reception in Middletown.

While Fisk and Whedon worked through the university, the Methodist movement,
and the Middletown society, Chauncey Whittlesey was a purely Middletown man. He
was born in Middletown, educated at Yale, and went on to marry Sally Lathrop Tracy,
the daughter of a prominent Connecticut family which included the famous revolutionary
war general, Artemis Ward.25 Whittlesey, previously mentioned as the writer of an
article about colonization, did more then his share for promoting colonization in
Middletown. He was known to promote the cause through spontaneous speeches while
traveling on stagecoaches and steamboats, and also circulated a library of colonization
material through the Middletown community as a whole and the black Middletown
community in particular.26 The main publication of the National Colonization
Movement, the African Repository and Colonial Journal, wrote about Whittlesey on his
death as an “early, intelligent, and active friend of the American Colonization Society...
whose endeavors helped to lay the foundation of the Colonization Society.”27 His
passion for the movement is what is thought to have stimulated interest in Middletown,
and prompted the creation of the subsequent three societies, which each did their own
part towards promoting the Colonization Movement in Middletown.28

The Middletown Juvenile Colonization Society was perhaps one of the first of its
kind, having been inspired by Chauncey Whittlesey and his son Charles. Young

25 Charles Barcey Whittelsey, Genealogy of the Whittelsey-Whittlesey Family, (Hartford: Press of the
Case, & Bainard Company: 1898), 148.
26 Bishop, Middletown People in ACS.
27 “Obituary,” African Repository and Colonial Journal (1825-1849), (July 1835): 213, APS Online,
9November 2, 2005).
28 Bishop, Middletown People in the ACS.
Whittlesey told his father that he too wanted to aid Liberia, which prompted both the formation of the Middletown Juvenile Colonization Society and a letter about it from Chauncey Whittlesey to the National American Colonization Society. His vision is probably that attributed by the *African Repository and Colonial Journal* to “a highly respected friend in Connecticut.” The article proclaims that in twenty years when the present children have matured, their participation in colonization will enable them to govern the nation free from prejudice and with the “right” opinions regarding the slave trade, the black population, and Africa.  As expected, some of the Juvenile members were following in the footsteps of their colonizationalist parents, such as Charles Whittlesey and James Crane, both of whose fathers were active in the movement. However many others such as Horace Beebee, Samuel J. Blinsdale, Robert Finlay, Frederick and George Gill, Richard Hubbard, and Samuel and William Mather, came from families whose names are not otherwise associated with the movement, suggesting the possibility that the Juvenile Society was also a way to get the parents involved in the larger movement.  

In terms of activism and press, though, none of the other Colonization Societies can compete with the Female Colonization Society. The *African Repository and Colonial Journal* wrote that they were especially pleased with the efforts of ladies. Although none of the four societies were widely publicized, the women’s auxiliary was the most press-conscious of the group. The Middletown society apparently started off in

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29 Ibid.
30 Bishop, *Middletown People in the ACS*.
1829 with an open meeting in the house of Ebenezer Tracy, which was publicized through the *Middlesex Gazette*. In this way the entire town both knew of their inception and presence, and also had the option to participate.

The society went on to organize several large, important events. To start of during the year of their inception, the Female and Juvenile Colonization Societies cosponsored the 1829 Middletown July fourth celebration featuring a speech by Rev. Smith Pyne of the local Christ Church. Although another celebration was held in Middletown by the “Franklin Society,” this second event concluded their program by joining the Colonization Societies. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that most of the town attended the colonization lecture.

The following year the ladies of the Female Colonization Society hosted another Fourth of July speaker, Mr. Horton, and followed his address with a fair to raise money for the Society. The fair raised over 240 dollars (a great deal of money for the time), which it then used to make six prominent men life members of the American Colonization Society. One of these men was their speaker, VB Horton, and the other five were Middletown ministers: Rev. John Crane of the First Congregational Church, Rev. Smith Pyne (their speaker from the previous year) of the Episcopal Church, Rev. Edward Tyler of the South Congregational Church, Rev. John Cookson of the Baptist Church, and Rev. Thomas Burch of the Methodist Church.

The fourth Colonization Society, at Wesleyan University, was the latest of the Middletown societies to form. We owe our knowledge of its creation to an article

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33 "Middletown," *Middlesex Gazette*, Wednesday, July 8, 1829: 3.
Bishop, *Middletown People in ACS*. 
published about it in the *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, which simply mentions that it was formed as an auxiliary to the American Colonization Society, under the name of "the Colonization Society of the Wesleyan University," with a list of the officers. Significantly, the list of officers covers ten names from three classes, while the total number of students in the three classes numbered only forty one, in other words at least 24%, and probably significantly more, of the student body belonged to the society.\(^{35}\)

To support the belief that Wesleyan University was very pro-colonization are the already mentioned prominent colonizationalist faculty members, D.D. Whedon and Wilbur Fisk, and the records from the Wesleyan debate societies, the Adelphian, Philorhetorian and Peithologian. Although one can conclude little from the Peithologian, which debated only twice about slavery and then phrased the question with an only slightly pro-colonizationalist bent, and the Adelphian, which debated three times and had a slight abolitionist bend, the Philorhetorian debated the topic a total of eighteen times. Of these eighteen debates, thirteen used topic questions that were pro-colonizationalist in their wording.\(^{36}\)

Likewise, the local newspaper must have influenced the colonizationalist fervor of Middletown. Although, as previously mentioned, the *Middlesex Gazette* published comparatively little about slavery in relation to its publications about other social movements and potential national reforms, what it did publish had a pro-colonizationalist tilt. The *Middlesex Gazette* actually published an editorial in 1830 describing how the editors intended to run their paper, which included a list of what issues the editors were in


favor of and their intention to “firmly and zealously support HENRY CLAY for the office of president of the United States” (their emphasis). The article also included an affirmation for support of the National Republican party in general. This affirms that the editors ran the Gazette with the same political leanings as most of Middletown, and colonizationalist National Republican candidate Henry Clay.\(^{37}\) This trend continued throughout the early 1830’s, even though the paper went through major editorial changes after 1832.\(^{38}\)

The newspaper’s pro-colonizationalist slant can be seen almost every time the slavery issue was mentioned. While there were articles from 1829 on reporting the arrival of blacks to Liberia, praising that country’s commerce and first newspaper attempt, and soliciting donations, little was published about abolition before 1833.\(^{39}\) These articles were praiseworthy of the work of the colonizationalists, stressing the “good condition” of the black immigrants, “the eagerness with which Christianity was first received” among the African colonists, and the “noble design” of the American Colonization Society “which merits liberal and universal patronage.”\(^{40}\) In fact, one philosophical piece published in 1833 about geography, politics, and the condition of the mind ends with the hope that slavery will be abolished through legislation, and without the “mad schemes of the abolitionists.”\(^{41}\) Abolition was further disparaged in pieces condemning William Lloyd Garrison, the prominent abolition leader. Upon the

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\(^{38}\) History of Middlesex County, Conn., with Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men, (NY: J. B. Beers & Co., 1884), 89.

\(^{39}\) “Commerce of Liberia,” from the American Spectator, Middlesex Gazette, November 23, 1831:1.

\(^{40}\) Robert S. Finley, “Expedition to Liberia,” Middlesex Gazette, October 16, 1833: 3.

\(^{41}\) “Late and Interesting from Liberia,” Middlesex Gazette, July 1, 1829: 2.


“Fourth of July: From the American Spectator,” Middlesex Gazette, June 30, 1830: 3.

“Retrospect,” Middlesex Gazette, October 30, 1833: 3.
commencement of his publication of the *Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper, the *Middlesex Gazette* wrote that Garrison would do no good for either humanity in general or the slaves by his violent attacks on slave-owners.\(^{42}\) Besides being anti-abolition, the attitude that peace must be kept with the South before any emancipation progress can be made is clearly colonizationist. The newspaper even poked fun at Garrison when he tried to get the state law prohibiting interracial marriage repealed, saying: "the Legislature of Massachusetts will probably think it expedient to let the statute alone; but if Mr. G. has a penchant, which the law prohibits him from gratifying, we doubt not that a special dispensation might be obtained in his behalf."\(^{43}\) The tone changed from joking to harsh when Massachusetts did pass an amendment to the state Marriage Bill allowing Negroes, Mulattos, and Indians to marry whites and the *Gazette* republished an article from the *Penn Inquirer* stating it looks upon the amendment as one of the most "revolting and derogatory" that an intelligent government could produce.\(^{44}\) Clearly by this time abolition was becoming a threat, and the paper wanted to hold on to its colonizationist, anti-abolitionist views.

Not only did the *Middlesex Gazette* commend Liberia and disparage Garrison and his cause, it openly supported colonization. When the paper heard about a South Carolina Independence Day celebration condemning Charles Carroll, the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence, for his role as president of the Colonization Society, it rushed to a speedy defense with assurances that "Pluto would smile" at the colonizationist plan given birth to by "the magnanimous Virginia" and supported by prominent men such as Jefferson, Clay, Bushrod Washington, Wm. H. Crawford, and

\(^{42}\) *Middlesex Gazette*, January 26, 1831: 3.

\(^{43}\) *Middlesex Gazette*, February 9, 1831: 3.

John Randolph. 45 Furthermore, one of the articles it published about the colonizationalist expeditions to Liberia included a footnote asking editors friendly to the colonizationalist cause to insert it. 46 That they included not only the notice, but the footnote as well shows a clear political leaning.

Although nothing near the publicity about temperance, the Middlesex Gazette also published a series of articles about colonization in 1829, which resembled later series in 1830 about public libraries and small majorities, and in 1831 about lay preachers. The importance of these series when analyzing the newspaper and town’s view of colonization is heightened by the editors’ promise that they would be sure to include anything that would help the progress of “the great benevolent enterprises of the day.” 47 Colonization was therefore deemed worthy of being among these benevolent institutions. The series consisted of six articles, published weekly from February 2, 1829 to March 11, 1829. Each article outlined a different aspect of the society and why it should be supported. Besides stressing the colonizationalist slant of the paper, these articles are prime examples of what the Middletown people were hearing and thinking about colonization.

The first article introduces the society to those who may not know its object, which is, with their consent, to bring the free blacks of America as colonists to the Western Coast of Africa. It condemns the community for not caring more about the condition of “our African population” and reminds them how noble it is to rescue the black heathens from the vice and degradation in which they live in the United States. After all, as the article states, the free slaves escaping north are often poor, idle, ignorant,

46 Finley, “Expedition,” Middlesex Gazette, October 16, 1833: 3.
debased, faithless and mischievous. Without an asylum beyond the influence of the whites they will continue to commit crimes and crowd the prisons, thus necessitating support of the American Colonization Society’s plan, which the article suggest as the only and last humane one which will serve the purpose. This article thus introduces the society and establishes and defends its main goals.\footnote{48} 

The second article discusses a bit more about the society’s history and where it stands in comparison to other, similar experiments. It seems that the beginning few years at the inception of the colony, when many colonists were sickening and dieing, was already generally known among the readers. Therefore, this article stresses that these disasters were of the sort that always occurs at the inception of colonial projects. The comparison of people sent and money invested in colonial America and Liberia shows the new African colony to be the obviously more successful and cheaper experiment. As the article states, the African Colony, progressed at a rate unimaginably superior to that of the English Colonies in Virginia. And lest people forget the goal of the propaganda, it concludes with a reminder that beyond being successful and cheap, this experiment is the most beneficial way to help America’s free blacks. A free colony in their own land is all that is needed to improve the African character and race, and make them worthy of and able successfully exercise freedom.\footnote{49}

Having spent two articles discussing the history of and philosophies behind the African colonization movement, the third article of the series is a plea for help and a call to the consciences of the readers. It reminds them that the situation is not hopeless, as through colonization Providence has supplied a way of facilitating the destruction of

slavery. However, the actual accomplishment of this goal will not be achieved until people choose to embrace this cause. The main argument is that people are expanding huge amounts of effort to help those in Greece who are in bondage to the Turks, but very little effort into colonization, although the issue of African slavery is the responsibility of Americans, having been caused by them. It adds that the debt of the American people to their slaves cannot be cancelled by helping the oppressed of other nations. Additionally, the article notes that slavery cannot be blamed on a specific region, and New England is just as responsible as the South due to her significant role in the early years of the slave trade and failure to prohibit its continuance during the Constitutional Convention. As a final point, the article mentions the financial benefits of colonization, in comparison to the costs which Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York have incurred due to their black convicts. After all, the article concludes, those who support Liberia not only redress the wrongs done to the African race, but they also benefit themselves, their children, and their country.\(^{50}\)

To further encourage actual action towards colonization, the fourth article discusses the economics of colonization, lest the people of Middletown think it beyond the country’s means. The reassurance is that the process can be done gradually, to lessen the economic burden, and that much can be paid for by the immigrants themselves, once Liberia is built up enough to attract them. The idea, as they state it, is that a successful trade network should spring up between the Liberian colony and America in order to attract the wealthier free blacks, who could pay for their own passage in the same manner that many European immigrants pay to come to America. Significantly, the article also ends with the familiar refrain about the dangers of allowing free blacks to stay in

America, saying “Reflect, fellow citizens, on the consequences of having here so large a number of Africans...and judge ye, whether it is not politic to expend a few millions of dollars to drain our country in part at least, of that population.”

Although the previous articles mentioned the regional differences in regards to why the people of New England should support colonization, the fifth article is the first to completely confront the regional aspects of America’s attitudes towards slavery, and in doing so clarifies the Society’s official stance on slavery. To do so the article rejects the idea that colonization is a Southern scheme to get rid of the free blacks and thus more easily control the slaves and instead asserts that most slave holders would gladly emancipate their slaves if they were confident that to do so would be for the common good. It stresses colonization as a national movement by avowing that the movement does not have as its object the goal to destroy the system of domestic slavery, because the slave system is sanctioned by the independent states over which Congress does not have jurisdiction. Rather, the society’s goal is to play a key part in hastening abolition, and in a manner helpful to both slaves and slave-owners. This goal is in order to prevent the predicted catastrophe that would result if the free blacks, in ever increasing numbers, are left to their own devices in America. This article summarizes the key ideology of the movement, and its attraction to the patriotic, well-intentioned population of Middletown which largely supported colonization for the perceived benefits it purported towards both the blacks and the country as a whole.

The final article in the series of six returns again to using guilt to encourage the people of Middletown to actively support colonization. It does so by telling how England

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went through a swift change from pro-slavery to pro-abolition due the energies of a dedicated few individuals and then adding that if enough support is received the Colonization Society has the potential to make most of the United States regard domestic slavery with the same horror with which the slave trade is seen. The article also stresses that no significant government sponsored change will happen unless the people demand it. But if the people work together and make colonization into a success it will revolutionize not only the public sentiment about the character and capacities of the African race, but also render slavery odious and be the means to destroy it. Having already convinced the well-meaning people of the importance of colonization, this article concentrates on urging them to turn their sentiments into actions.

Although these six articles make up the Colonization Society series published in 1829, there is also a seventh article, from 1833, that speaks along the same lines. Attributed to “A” instead of “Sharp,” this article focuses less on the background of colonization, and more on its superiority to the abolition movement. It lists four reasons to be cautious of immediate abolition and cautions the readers as patriots and Christians that patience is necessary to terminate the “curse” of slavery. The change in tone from supporting colonization to disparaging abolition can easily be interpreted as a reflection of the times. Although the people of Middletown were still generally supportive of colonization, this was the time when the abolition movement was beginning to pick up speed, a year before an abolition society was officially established in Middletown. As abolition gained support, colonizationists became more defensive, probably because it was difficult for colonization to tread such a tenuous middle line between supporting and

55 Warner, Pictorial History, 59-60.
disapproving of slavery. An example of this defensiveness is also seen in Fisk’s address to the Middletown Colonization Society in 1835, which stressed the difference between the American Colonization Society and the American anti-Slavery Society, and then proceeded to point by point justify the former over the latter.56

Also significant in the latest article is the appeal to the readers as Christians and Patriots. Patriotism obviously had strong connections to the Colonization Movement, as one of the biggest justifications of colonization was the manumitted would otherwise be a public problem. Likewise, the Southern slave owner felt bound by a responsibility towards his country to not emancipate his slaves.57 There is also a connection between Christianity and colonization, which is less distinct but was often made to elicit support. This was probably highly effective, because religion was such a fundamental part of life in the mid 1800s.

The connection between Christianity and the Colonization Movement was mainly established through the missionary aspect of the religion. There was an especially strong connection in New England, where missionary work was a top priority. National advocates such as George Washington Parke Custis advertised colonization as a way to spreads the gospel among the “pagan tribes” of Africa.58 As Professor Whedon expressed in his speech to the Middletown Colonization Society, colonization was supposed to lead to the Christianization of Africa, as the colonists would bring their adopted Christianity back with them and spread it to their own people.59 Therefore Sharp appealed to the Middletown people as citizens of the land “which yearly sends forth her

56 Fisk, “Address,”
57 Sharp, Colonization No. V.
58 Staunton, African Colonization, 119.
Christian missionaries to civilize and evangelize a heathen world.” By playing on perceived religious responsibilities, the Colonization Society was able to further their success.

Another religious tactic used in Middletown was that of acting directly through the churches. The Female Auxiliary of the Middletown Colonization Society was especially keen on this. It brought in speakers such as Rev. Smith Pyne and Rev. T. H. Galiaudet and raised money, as previously mentioned, to make five local ministers life members of the Colonization Society. It is also known that at least Rev. Crane and two of the other ministers, Rev. Cookson and Rev. Byrd, brought colonization to their churches, because all three are listed as having done collections to garner monetary aid for the Society. It can be assumed that this is the very least that these ministers did to support colonization. It is fairly likely that they also incorporated colonization into their sermons. Such a thing would not be hard to do. For example, Wilbur Fisk, president of Wesleyan University and a well-known Methodist minister, justified colonization by saying that the Apostle Paul of the gospels believed in the gradual mitigation of slavery. Fisk was a well known orator who preached widely, so his message would certainly have been heard in Middletown. Regardless of whether the other ministers were as strongly attached to the topic as him, their indications of support doubtlessly encouraged their constituents to likewise support colonization.

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60 Sharp, *Colonization No. VI.*
61 “Middletown,” *Middlesex Gazette,* July 8, 1829.
Bishop, *Middletown People in ACS.*
64 Maybeck, *Colonization Controversy,* 12.
Beyond the churches, newspaper, and societies, there were also a fair number of individuals in Middletown who were active in the movement outside of Middletown. For example, the Honorable John Alsop was a manager of the Connecticut Colonization Society, as well as a senator.\(^{65}\) John Smith, sent penknives, scissors and needles to Liberia, and Mrs. Dorothy Powers left a $20 legacy to the Society.\(^{66}\) J.J. Matthias, the governor of the colony in Bassa Cove, Wes Africa, even had a close, unnamed Middletown friend with whom he corresponded.\(^{67}\) These specific names and people are in addition to the many others who contributed monetarily to the Colonization Society. The number of active participants, especially in such a small town, does much to sustain the idea that Middletown was indeed a colonizationist hub.

The mass evidence to support this supposition that Middletown was very active in the Colonizationist Movement may lead one once to again question why this activism is so little known today. Beyond the obvious fact that colonization did not have effects lasting enough to make it venerated, there are a variety of other explanations that are particularly applicable to Middletown.

The first of these involves the people of Middletown. Besides being predominantly Protestant and white, it seems that Middletown was very similar to the quintessential New England town in its homogeneity, size, and the presence of several important, prominent people. Once the support of a sufficient number of these people


had been garnered for colonization, there would have been no reason to physically advertise movement. And the Colonization Movement certainly did manage to solicit the support of some of the town’s most respected citizens. For example, John Alsop, who was previously mentioned as a manager of the Connecticut Colonization Society, had such a high degree of public support that he was nominated and elected as a state senator.\textsuperscript{68} Ebenezer Jackson, who contributed $100 to the society in 1838, was a very popular man who was elected to the General Assembly in Hartford in 1834, and represented Middletown there three times between 1829 and 1846.\textsuperscript{69} Samuel Russell also contributed $100 to the American Colonization Society, and additionally agreed to serve as a manager in 1844. Russell was well known not just in Middletown, but as a prominent businessman world wide, due to the success of Russell & Co. in Canton, China.\textsuperscript{70} C. Woodward, who was the treasurer of the Middletown Colonization Society in 1835, was also elected to the state legislature, senate, and a position on the board of trustees of Wesleyan.\textsuperscript{71} The John Smith who sent penknives to Liberia on behalf of the society was likewise politically active, serving in numerous elected town positions, including that of town treasurer for several terms.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{68} Green, 45.
Beers, Commemorative Biographical, 16.
\textsuperscript{71} Beers, Commemorative Biographical, 6.
\textsuperscript{72} Beers, Commemorative Biographical, 80.
Furthermore, some of the children involved in the Juvenile Colonization Society came from the most prominent families, such as the Mather boys, who were distantly related to the late Increase Mather and Cotton Mather, and Richard Hubbard, whose family is mentioned as one of the prominent Middletown families in Beer’s *Commemorative Biographical Record.* Another prominent family active in the movement was that descending from General Artemis Ward, a well known Revolutionary War lieutenant colonel. At least three of Ward’s grandchildren and two of his great-grandchildren are mentioned as being active in the Middletown Colonization Society.

Beyond enlisting the support of the top section of Middletown society, the colonization movement’s need of active publicity would have also been lessened by the familial ties often found among its members. These include the obvious ties of having children in the Juvenile Colonization Society whose parents were active in the colonization in general, and also more unusual relationships. For example, not only were five of Artemis Wards descendents in the various movements, but these cousins and siblings were some of the most active members. Eliza Tracy Ward and Emily Tracy, who were sisters, were the women at the forefront of the Female Colonization Society, serving, respectively, as secretary and treasurer before 1834, and treasurer after 1835. Even more significant is that a third sister, Sarah (Sally), was married to Chauncey

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74 Beers, *Commemorative Biographical.* 160.

Whittlesey, the organizer of the Middletown Colonization Society.\textsuperscript{76} Chauncey and Sally’s son, Charles, was in the Juvenile Colonization Society, thereby linking all three of Middletown’s societies through one single family.\textsuperscript{77}

Beyond the interconnections of Middletown society decreasing the need for the Colonization Movement to actively publicize, its low profile can also be explained by acknowledging that it was not the only significant movement of the time. In fact, the early 1800s was the time of social movements, and some of these apparently took precedence over colonization. For example, temperance was a huge issue of the day that was mentioned numerous times in almost every issue of the *Middlesex Gazette*. Other societies mentioned as prominent in Middletown include various Masonic lodges and the bible society.\textsuperscript{78} Anti-Masonic societies and missionary work also come up frequently in the newspaper. People did not join just one society, either. The Colonization Society had to compete for funds, membership, and attention with various other societies that its members were equally supportive of. For example, Captain Daniel Hubbard and Samuel D. Hubbard, whose family member was in the Juvenile Colonization Society, were both part of the friends of Agriculture, Commerce, and Manufactures. Ebenezer Jackson, who donated significant amounts of money to the society, John Alsop, who served on the Connecticut Colonization Society board, and Dr. Henry Woodward, whose brother Charles was the secretary of the Middletown Colonization Society, were all also members of the Society of Freemens of the town of Middletown.\textsuperscript{79} Even Chauncey

\textsuperscript{76} White, *Barbour II*, 320.
\textsuperscript{77} Bishop, *Middletown People in ACS*.
\textsuperscript{78} Beers, *History of Middlesex*, 110-118.
\textsuperscript{79} "Middletown," *Middlesex Gazette*, March 24, 1830: 3.
Whittlesey was a member of a local Masonic Lodge. Wilbur Fisk, in fact, only became publicly involved in the Colonization Movement after becoming incited by a misrepresentation of an article that he had published about temperance. With so much competition for attention even among its own members it is no surprise that the Colonization Society was so little mentioned.

But despite the scarcity of obvious resources to document the Middletown Colonization Society, there can be no doubts that it existed and furthermore played a significant role in the lives of its members and the aura of Middletown. The Middletown Colonization Society, which can be expanded to include the Female Auxiliary, the Juvenile Colonization Society, and the Wesleyan Colonization Society enlisted a significant amount of support from the town’s most prominent members and religious leaders. It held public events which were well received in Middletown, published informative propaganda, and donated a significant amount of money towards the national society’s colony in Liberia. Despite what first glances may say, Middletown was indeed a hub of colonization. In fact, its success at garnering support leaves one to wonder what might have happened if the Colonization Movement had picked up speed earlier in the country’s history, when the black proportion of the United States and the racial makeup of most cities and town resembled Middletown more closely and before Eli Whitney’s cotton gin necessitated the continuance of slave labor. Would the abolition movement become such a general cause? Or would America’s black population have been silently shipped to the shores of Africa, leaving the United States of today bereft of both racial diversity and the aftereffects of a bloody civil war?

80 “Correction to the Favor of the Middletown Gazette,” Middlesex Gazette, August 3, 1831: 3.
81 Maybeck, Colonization Controversy, 25.
Further Research:

Although I tried to be as thorough as possible in my examination of the Middletown Colonization Societies, there are many facets of the story that I did not have the time or resources to investigate.

The most under-researched society of the four mentioned is the Wesleyan Colonization Society, which may have even sent records to the American Colonization Society in Washington. If the records of the national society can be traced they would doubtless reveal a plethora of information about the Wesleyan Society, and perhaps even about the other Middletown societies, as well.

Another source that was not adequately utilized is the religious journals of the time. Although I briefly mention articles in Zion’s Herald, the Methodist publication, there were also periodicals published by the other prominent religious groups. Neither Zion’s Herald nor the other publications were carefully examined for the light they might shed on Middletown’s movements.

Temperance, which is mentioned briefly in the paper, was a huge movement at the time both in Middletown and the surrounding area. The connection between the temperance and colonizationalist movements, in terms of member overlap and communication between the two societies, would be fascinating to investigate.

A fourth suggestion for further research is concentrating on the later period of colonization in Middletown. While this paper concentrates on its peak in the late 1820s and early 1830s, it would be interesting to examine the progression of the societies during the rise of the abolitionist movement in Middletown and eventually the civil war. When did the Colonizationalist Societies of Middletown eventually shut down? Why?
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