

Those that are well off do have the natives as Slaves:

Humanitarian ‘Compromises’ with Slavery in Sierra Leone and Liberia

by

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Abstract

Shifting alliances between slaveholders, people of African descent and self-identified humanitarians throughout the Atlantic World in the first half of the nineteenth century have proved problematic for a straightforward, Whig narrative of the abolition of slavery. Odd alliances between these groups reveal that they were often willing to work together on the basis that this would promote longer-term personal and public goals. In the case of the British antislavery movement, apprenticeship was tolerated as a means of assimilating and ‘civilising’ Liberated Africans who would eventually take up the antislavery cause as part of their British identity, while indigenous domestic slavery was allowed as a means of creating legitimate commerce as an alternative to slave trading as a source of wealth for African and European traders. The American antislavery movement saw an equally strange system of alliances: the ACS was made up of both virulent antislavery campaigners and slaveholders such as Henry Clay; the relationship between master and formerly enslaved Liberian settlers could develop into one of patronage, emulation, and respect; and the ACS chose to ignore or underreport rumours of the participation in slavery and the slave trade in Liberia in order to prevent the mischaracterization of free African Americans as immoral or unintelligent. The colonies demonstrate that the often misunderstood alliance between colonizationists and slaveholders were not a compromise of principle: they were a combination of colonial practicalities, including slow communication networks, and true conviction that these alliances were the best way to gradually end the slave trade.

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