

Lincoln, Colonization, and Evidentiary Standards

A response to Allen C. Guelzo's criticisms of *Colonization after Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* in the *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Winter 2013

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On June 13, 1863 John Hodge arrived at the White House for a meeting several months in the making. The English-born merchant was the manager of a crown-backed land company in the British West Indies and had been in Washington since April, bearing credentials from the highest levels of the British government. He also carried a note from Postmaster General Montgomery Blair that morning, which doubled as his admission pass to an appointment with President Lincoln.¹ Hodge had come to seek the president's approval for a plan to colonize freed African-Americans, with their own consent, on his company's land in British Honduras, or modern-day Belize.

Though Hodge had met with Lincoln in April, obtaining verbal intimations of support at the time, his negotiations with Interior Secretary John P. Usher – the cabinet secretary responsible for overseeing the government's colonization projects – had recently stalled. Hodge explained the difficulty and shared his correspondence with Usher since their previous meeting, at which point the president weighed in. The policy of colonization, Lincoln insisted, "was his honest desire." As Hodge's description of the meeting to his British supervisors continued, "after some other remarks relative to the emigration of the negro race, he handed me the authority which had been drawn up by the Govt. Emigration Commissioner," James Mitchell, and "signed by himself ... to canvass and hire persons of color in the U.S as emigrants for British Honduras, and British Guiana."²

Hodge returned to the British Legation with the long-sought approval in hand, where Lord Lyons, British minister to the United States, directed him "to inform the Secretary of the Interior of the permission from the President."³ Humbled by Lincoln's order, Usher answered that "as the President had given his sanction he was agreeable to it."⁴ Though the project would eventually founder, as had other colonization schemes before it, this little-known meeting illustrates Lincoln's pursuit of a "second wave" of colonization ventures that has largely escaped historical notice, and that extends the policy well into the latter half of his presidency.

¹ Montgomery Blair to Abraham Lincoln and accompanying pass, June 12, 1863, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

² John Hodge to Lord Lyons, July 9, 1863, CO 318/239, National Archives (UK), Kew, Richmond, Surrey.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Hodge to Lyons, June 16, 1863, enclosed in Earl Russell to Lyons, No. 567, June 19, 1863, FO 5/934, National Archives (UK).

The question of “exactly when – or even if – the president relinquished his idea of settling black people outside the country” is surely among the most hotly contested issues in the crowded field of Lincoln scholarship.⁵ The rediscovery of the British project adds to this discussion insofar as it extends the timeline for the initiation of new projects by a year or so, and attests to a more active presidential interest than previously thought. With this in mind, the authors of this note have offered the argument that Lincoln’s colonization “hobby,” as he reportedly called it, never really dissipated from his thought, even as the policy failed to gain a foothold despite multiple attempts that likely represented – as he told Hodge – his “honest desire.”⁶ Though perhaps not the majority view in recent decades, ours is far from unique, and a burgeoning number of other Lincoln scholars give serious attention to the likelihood that he never shed his colonization interest.⁷ Indeed, it shares a striking commonality with Gideon Welles’ own assessment of the colonization policy over a century ago.⁸

While other historians have offered widely differing interpretations of colonization and Lincoln’s attachment to the concept, the scholarly discussion around the issue in the last decade has revealed an active area for ongoing research. Indeed, that events such as Hodge’s meeting and its associated project are largely recent additions to the Lincoln record suggests a certain amount of prematurity to any claim wherein the matter of his colonization interest is somewhat dismissively deemed to be “settled” at mid-presidency, and surely so for those that self-referentially echo those parts of the literature that show few signs of having moved on from the historiographical influences of the civil rights era. But far from purporting to offer an authoritative solution to the questions thus far raised, we have always maintained and continue to maintain that colonization is a subject in need of further dialogue and investigation. It is accordingly an unsettling reflection of a state of open inquiry to find an eminent historian engaged in the peddling of what can only be described as abject denial where new colonization source material is concerned.

Recently in the pages of the *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Allen C. Guelzo vigorously contested the persistence of colonization into the final years of Abraham Lincoln’s presidency, including – it appears – the entirety of the aforementioned British Honduras project as brought to light in our 2011 book, *Colonization after Emancipation*.⁹ In a notable break from other scholarly appraisals of this topic, both supportive and critical, Guelzo presses his

⁵ Michael Vorenberg, “Slavery Reparations in Theory and Practice,” in *Lincoln Emancipated: The President and the Politics of Race*, ed. Brian R. Dirck (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 119.

⁶ C. Edwards Lester, *Life and Public Services of Charles Sumner* (New York: United States, 1874), 386; Adam Gurowski to John A. Andrew, August 28, 1862, reel 14, John A. Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁷ Recent examples include Paul D. Escott, *“What Shall We Do with the Negro?”: Lincoln, White Racism, and Civil War America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 222-25, 241-42, 248-49; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Donald Yacovone, *Lincoln on Race and Slavery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), lxiv; Brian R. Dirck, *Lincoln and White America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 126-29; and Nicholas Guyatt, “A Topic Best Avoided,” *London Review of Books*, December 1, 2011, 27-31. Also note the shift in Vorenberg’s thinking from his “Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 14 (1993), 24-25, 42-44, to his “Slavery Reparations in Theory and Practice,” 119-22.

⁸ Gideon Welles, “Administration of Abraham Lincoln,” *Galaxy* 24 (1877), 439, 443-44.

⁹ Allen C. Guelzo, “Review: *Colonization after Emancipation*,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 34 (2013), 78-87; Phillip W. Magness and Sebastian N. Page, *Colonization after Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011).

skepticism well beyond interpretive differences or even sincere disagreement about the state of colonization in Lincoln's final years. Instead he disputes and disparages the primary body of evidence generated by Lincoln's "second wave" of colonization in the British Empire and concludes with a blanket dismissal of its historical significance.

His choice of language leaves little uncertainty insofar as our argument is concerned, first querying of our work "on what evidence, then, do Magness and Page build their indictment?" This alleged "indictment" makes for a curious line of description, considering it is applied to a book that explicitly and repeatedly rejects the very same judgmental and condemnatory motives that Guelzo imputes to us. Yet from an evidentiary stance, it is also a question that he unabashedly answers with "*none at all*" (emphasis original), and to which he appends many unsubtle insinuations of intentional transgression in our presentation of the relevant sources.¹⁰

The severity of Guelzo's language warrants our attention, if only for the hazard it illustrates in proclaiming a strong conclusion from a fundamentally careless assessment of the documentation before him. As historical criticism, however, it is both wanting in fact and guilty of gross misrepresentation. The heart of Guelzo's challenge is predicated upon contesting the very occurrence of the aforementioned meeting of June 13, 1863, wherein Lincoln gave his approval to the heretofore little-known plan for colonization in British Honduras. In our book and subsequent research we uncovered the details of this meeting from sources left behind by its participants. Among these is a copy made from the original document handed to Hodge by the president, carrying the following endorsement: "I approve the within. A. LINCOLN. June 13, 1863."¹¹

This item was unknown when Roy Basler compiled *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, having only survived in a series of copies made from the originals, in turn largely distributed to foreign repositories of then-unrealized connection to the Lincoln presidency. While the endorsement in Lincoln's own pen has since succumbed to the realm of attics and autograph hunters, its authenticity is established by no fewer than five handwritten copies that were logged in June of 1863, all bearing Lincoln's name and note of approval.

It is useful to trace the document's dissemination, if only to show the verifiable breadth of its provenance. The first of these copies was delivered to Lord Lyons at the British Legation immediately after the meeting. It has remained in the British diplomatic files ever since, and was eventually transferred to London where it resides today in the National Archives at Kew.¹² A second copy was delivered by Hodge to Frederick Seymour, the lieutenant governor of British Honduras, upon his return to Belize City in August 1863 and presently resides in the government archives of Belize.¹³ A third was supplied by Lyons to Edward Eyre, lieutenant governor of Jamaica, who had administrative oversight of colonization projects in the British West Indies. It is held by the National Archives of Jamaica.¹⁴ A fourth, drawn from Lyons' communications with London, was officially transmitted to Seymour in a packet of instructions

¹⁰ Guelzo, "Review," 83. We would particularly draw attention to "History has the license of poetry but not the liberty of manufacture," *ibid.*, 85.

¹¹ Lincoln, pass for Hodge and S.R. Dickson (copy), June 13, 1863, FO 115/394, National Archives (UK).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, box 79, Letters Inward, Belize Archives and Records Service, Belmopan, Belize.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1B/5/53/10, Jamaica Archives and Records Department, Archives Unit, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

from the British Colonial Office in late 1863. It too resides in Belize.¹⁵ And a fifth – a later secretarial transcription of an original that Mitchell retained in his possession – sits in the U.S. National Archives.¹⁶ Furthermore, it bears noting that at least one of two believed originals in Lincoln’s pen survived into the early 20th century when a reporter from the *Macon Telegraph* inspected it as part of the estate of James Mitchell upon his death.¹⁷

With such thorough attestation behind this document, it is exceedingly curious that Guelzo would build a challenge thereto on which he stakes his entire case against our work, and indeed against all evidence of Lincoln’s personal involvement in the colonization project that the document authorized. Yet he does just that, putting far-fetched claims of “conspiracy” in our mouths regarding the accidental loss of the original, and coupling that charge with a highly creative rendering of the surviving copy’s actual text. In what can only be described as a negligent or willful misreading of our work, Guelzo mistakenly asserts that the approving paper is only “*supposed to carry an endorsement by Lincoln*” (emphasis original). He then accuses us of “supply[ing]” this endorsement as though it were derived from the hearsay of Hodge’s testimonials and appended a century and a half *post hoc* to an unendorsed surviving scrap of Mitchell’s text, and concludes in no uncertain terms that we must have “cite[d] documents that do not exist.”¹⁸

This would make for a very serious charge against our research, except that Guelzo neglected the Lincoln endorsement’s clear presence in the source material that we made fully available to him and to any other reader of our work. A photograph of the Lyons copy appears on page 72 of *Colonization after Emancipation*, Lincoln’s transcribed signature intact and accounted for as with every other copy made in 1863. We shall leave it to the reader to determine whether any reasonable explanation can be offered as to why an allegedly “non-existent” paper bearing a presidential endorsement would be generated, replicated, and formally distributed across the British Empire.

This all brings us to a rather curious doctrine wherein the accidental loss of a well-documented original that nonetheless survives in multiple verified copies from the time of its creation is seemingly sufficient to withdraw its contents from the evidentiary record of Lincoln’s presidency. Through this act of unilateral and counterfactual disqualification Guelzo thereby boldly proclaims a “lack of evidence,” having just discarded the very same evidence that would otherwise complicate the version of Lincoln he has thus far portrayed – a Lincoln who quickly and quietly abandons colonization at mid-presidency, “having never returned to it afterwards.”¹⁹ The obvious convenience of this sleight of hand aside, one is left to wonder whether Guelzo similarly questions the authenticity of the Emancipation Proclamation on account of the loss of its original in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. After all, to borrow his own words, “no one alive today seems ever to have seen” this famous document, though it was widely copied in its day.²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid., in September 3, 1863, box 85, Despatches Inward, Belize Archives and Records Service.

¹⁶ Ibid., Communications Relating to James Mitchell, U.S. Department of the Interior, Slave Trade and Negro Colonization Records, RG 48, M160, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

¹⁷ “Lincoln and Segregation,” *The Macon Telegraph*, September 13, 1904.

¹⁸ Guelzo, “Review,” 84.

¹⁹ Ibid., 87.

²⁰ Ibid., 85.

We suspect that any reasonable and discerning historian would find problems in such shifty evidentiary standards. Yet this is not the only circumstance where Guelzo's dismissive take on Lincoln's colonization advocacy strains credibility. If indeed the aforementioned terms of the project were reached between Mitchell and Hodge without Lincoln's full support and endorsement, Guelzo still fails to account for why William Seward formally notified the British government on August 10, 1863 of the very same colonization agreement that he denies.²¹ He offers no explanation for what was not a stand-alone event on June 13, but in fact a continuum of presidential negotiations begun in January on Lincoln's own initiative and entailing his direct solicitation of a colonization partnership with the British government on more than one prior occasion.²² He has no answer for why a delegation of African-Americans visited the proposed site in Belize the same summer on a fact-finding mission for the Interior Department.²³ Or why a similar arrangement with the Dutch colony of Suriname was being simultaneously hammered out in nothing less than treaty form by Lincoln's minister to The Hague, James Shepherd Pike.²⁴ Policy does not simply create itself *ex nihilo* and advance unattended into complex formal arrangements with foreign governments, and certainly not in spite of the president's true wishes.

More importantly, these oversights in Guelzo's analysis highlight an all-too common lapse of the wartime colonization literature. Lincoln scholarship has long suffered from a tendency to evaluate the entirety of colonization through a core, fixed body of well-known speeches and public proclamations; the president's private actions and statements suffer comparative neglect, mostly not through lack of documentation but rather through omission of that which *is* documented. This selective and partial focus produces an approach to history that is particularly susceptible to what we have dubbed the "lullaby thesis" of colonization, wherein a policy that strikes the modern reader as somewhat less-than-enlightened is excused as a rhetorical ploy to lull an unready public into the greater goal of emancipation. While some forms of the "lullaby" rely upon extreme esoteric readings of Lincoln's words that, perhaps intentionally, place its touchy subject matter beyond the realm of empirical scrutiny, a deceptively simple variant uses the public nature of his colonization speeches as its own "proof" of the hypothesized palliative for the masses, given that he dropped the matter from public discourse after late 1862, or once the Emancipation Proclamation was settled policy.

²¹ William H. Seward to Lyons, August 10, 1863, in *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1863), 1:688-89.

²² British diplomats and colonial agents held meetings concerning black resettlement within the empire, to say nothing of discussions with the U.S. government about colonization schemes elsewhere (excluded here), both with Lincoln, reported in dispatches or similar communications of January 23, January 27, and July 9, 1863, and with other members of the administration, reported in the same, of September 4, September 15, September 28, December 26, 1862, January 23, February 10, February 24, March 10, and March 30, 1863. James J. Barnes and Patience P. Barnes, *The American Civil War Through British Eyes* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2005), 2:168-70, 175-77, 189-90, 277-81, 305, 306-08, 328, 3:7, 20-21, 29-30; idem., *Private and Confidential: Letters from British Ministers in Washington to the Foreign Secretaries in London, 1844-67* (Selinsgrove, Penn.: Susquehanna University Press, 1993), 315; Hodge to Lyons, July 9, 1863, CO 318/239, National Archives (UK).

²³ Charles Babcock, *British Honduras, Central America: A Plain Statement to the Colored People of the U.S. Who Contemplate Emigration* (Salem: C. Babcock, 1863).

²⁴ Robert F. Durden, *James Shepherd Pike: Republicanism and the American Negro, 1850-1882* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1957), 85-93; Magness and Page, *Colonization after Emancipation*, 73-81.

Yet, as Phillip S. Paludan suggested in 2004, it is hardly a groundbreaking insight to acknowledge that political speeches by a president are intended for public consumption, or are linked to specific policy goals.²⁵ Lincoln spoke out about colonization when he desired congressional and political support for the scheme in 1862, yet the potential gains of such public campaigning are simply not in evidence when the conversation shifts to the negotiating tables of international diplomacy – as it did with the British and Dutch efforts in 1863 – and when the audience is not the electorate or wavering unionists in the border states, but a cadre of foreign diplomats and land agents. Absent any specific evidence to attest to a conscious colonization ruse on Lincoln’s part, a calculated stratagem of lullabies, palliatives, and placebos, each offered up to prepare and soothe public consumption of emancipation, is at once too clever by half and profoundly problematic. Just how much of an exercise in appeasing racist sentiment could Lincoln’s pursuit of colonization have been, when, both privately and publicly, he made it clear that he would only send a small initial party of settlers to any single colonization site until it had proved its suitability; openly chided deportationists, who knew as well as he did the limits that black voluntarism had placed on half a century of colonization efforts; dispatched and maintained in near-total public silence the one colonization expedition to ultimately go ahead; and saw fit to drop his colonization message with effect from December 1, 1862, before an electorate that he had absolutely no reason to presume reconciled to emancipation?²⁶

We know quite a bit about colonization from Lincoln’s public statements and the political reactions they generated, be it his “compensated emancipation and colonization” overtures to the border states, his Second Annual Message – which actually provides something of a roadmap to the very same course of action he took with Britain and the Netherlands over the following year – or even his notorious “colonization address” at the White House before an audience of African Americans on August 14, 1862. These speeches and documents were indeed recorded and widely reported for public consumption. But what did the public know of another presidential encounter with a black delegation on April 17, 1862? Even as Frederick Milnes Edge proffered his dismissive speculation from afar about the colonization provisions of the recently adopted District of Columbia Emancipation Act, Lincoln was busy promoting the

²⁵ Phillip S. Paludan, “Lincoln and Colonization: Policy or Propaganda?”, *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 25 (2004), 23-30.

²⁶ We would make a similar case concerning another valid, but likewise analytically limited point that also risks being overstretched through wishful, false dichotomization: the argument, which has perhaps rather predictably emerged in recent commentary, that the “second wave” of colonization primarily marked an attempt to win over potentially hostile European neutrals with offers of black labor for their American colonies. As with the lullaby thesis, a few contemporaries indeed expressed that thought; in a similar vein, however, their very ability to see through the veil of such a would-be ruse necessarily casts doubts on the explanatory power of that argument, especially where Lincoln personally conceded the legitimacy of Lord Lyons’s fears of diplomatic entanglement from co-operation on black resettlement. Likewise, many aspects of wartime colonization diplomacy positively clash with the notion of careful orchestration, such as when Lincoln sparked a crisis with several Central American governments by failing either to specify Chiriqui as the mooted isthmian resettlement location, or to avoid the insensitive, peculiarly American idiom of “colonization,” in his address of August 14, 1862; or to take another example, Secretary of State Seward’s ongoing dismissal and semi-sabotage of colonization policy, even in front of foreign diplomats. Above all, though, it is the failure of both arguments to explain Lincoln’s longstanding attachment to colonization outside the timeframe of c. 1861-63 that weakens them.

very same clauses in a wholly private and unpublicized meeting with two black emigrationists serving as emissaries of the Republic of Liberia.²⁷ It defies reasonable interpretation to conclude that this gesture was anything but genuine.

Or what should we make of the week in mid-September 1862 over which Lincoln personally drafted and edited a proposed colonization contract for the Chiriqui region of Panama, only days before he publicly reaffirmed the policy in his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation? What of the late-night events at the White House on December 31, 1862? Lincoln spent the better part of that evening in careful discussion with Sen. James R. Doolittle of Wisconsin, Francis P. Blair, Sr., and Bernard Kock, the manager of a colonization project on the Île à Vache, Haiti. Doolittle and Kock returned to the White House the next morning to collect a presidential autograph on their finalized colonization contract only hours before Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, though public announcements of their activities were at best muted.²⁸

Indeed, there is evidence of multiple similar instances where Lincoln pressed for colonization behind closed doors, both in periods of open political advocacy and public silence. Included among these are the aforementioned conferences with Lyons and Hodge on the British West Indies; with investor Charles K. Tuckerman in March 1863 to overcome a stall in the Haitian project; with the promoter of an internal colonization scheme in the western plains, arranged and subsequently noted by Treasury Department official Lucius Chittenden, in the winter of 1862-63; with multiple representatives of the American Colonization Society over several months, and with Treasury clerk Donald MacLeod, about Liberia; with Mitchell as the British project progressed throughout 1863; and with other groups of African-Americans, including Rev. Chauncey Leonard of Washington, D.C. in January 1863 and with a delegation sent to the White House by Rev. Henry Highland Garnet to discuss emigration that November.²⁹

The public attention engendered by each of these events ranged from minimal to nonexistent, and yet they happened, and they left documentation of varying detail as to what transpired. They also invariably, and necessarily, entailed agents with vested stakes in the outcome of colonization: contractors pitching a specific scheme or locale, diplomats and land

²⁷ This little-noticed conference of April 17, 1862 included Lincoln, J.D. Johnson, and Rev. Alexander Crummell, the noted pan-Africanist who was at the time serving as a commissioner of the Liberian government. See Johnson to Lincoln, March 3, 1863, Miscellaneous Letters, reel 8, Slave Trade and Negro Colonization Records; "An Agent of the Government of Liberia...", *The Pine and Palm*, April 24, 1862; Lincoln to Crummell and Johnson, May 5, and Crummell and Johnson to the editor, May 10, 1862, *Boston Herald*, May 15, 1862.

²⁸ Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, December 31, 1862, in Elizabeth Blair Lee, *Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee*, ed. Virginia Jeans Laas (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 223; Bernard Kock, *Statement of Facts in Relation to the Settlement on the Island of A'Vache, near Hayti, W.I., of a Colony under Bernard Kock, with Documentary Evidence and Affidavits* (New York: William C. Bryant, 1864), 4-5.

²⁹ Charles K. Tuckerman, "President Lincoln and Colonization," *Magazine of American History* 16 (Oct. 1886), 40-44; Lucius E. Chittenden, *Recollections of President Lincoln and His Administration* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891), 336-40; Joseph Jenkins Roberts to William McLain, August 30, 1862, reel 93, John Orcutt to William Coppinger, April 28, 1865, reel 97, McLain to Joseph Tracy, April 22, 1862, McLain to Franklin Butler, August 16, 1862, reel 203, Ralph R. Gurley to Coppinger, October 18, 1862, reel 235, American Colonization Society Records, Library of Congress; entry for October 23, 1862, Donald MacLeod Diary, MacLeod Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society; "Lincoln and the Negro," *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, August 26, 1894; Thomas S. Malcom to James Hall, January 5, 1864, Orcutt to McLain, November 17, 1863, reel 95, ACS Records; African Civilization Society to Lincoln, November 5, 1863, Lincoln Papers.

agents of foreign governments approached for a colonization partnership, administrators and bureaucrats who would implement the particulars of any project that proceeded, and free African-Americans whom Lincoln hoped to persuade. Far from consisting of vague and scattered anecdotes of passing familiarity to Lincoln scholars, these neglected but certain encounters actually attest to a pattern wherein Lincoln was genuinely experimenting with multiple overlapping and concurrent colonization ventures, generally removed from public eye.

The very consistency of that evidentiary record raises wider issues about Guelzo's critique that, again, merit exposition before a broader audience of scholars, some of whom may find themselves in agreement with aspects of his thought and certain lines of argument, even if not with his tone or with how he has arrived at his stance. It seems that for Guelzo, there can be no "special pleading" for any form of colonization, and no meaningful distinction between "those who only used the idea as a pacifier, and those who were in repulsive earnest"; in the end, it all boiled down to a sellout of black rights.³⁰ Noting only the importance of affording a fair and contextualized reading of past events and ideas even as we find them noxious, we would certainly agree more than disagree with Guelzo's observation; ditto, his warning against blithely treating 19th century attitudes to race and slavery as coterminous.

Rather, it is the next step in Guelzo's argument that renders it untenable. Here, the inherent defects of colonization that he has identified become a constructed disqualifier, in turn inserted into Lincoln's own thinking. Accordingly, Guelzo really has only one argument to make, and it is that Lincoln must have abandoned colonization, because Lincoln abandoned colonization, because – if one had to make an attempt at breaking through the elusive circularity of Guelzo's reasoning – colonization was just that wrong. As certain of Lincoln's transition from a one-time interest in colonization, to its abandonment at his hands, as the keenest proponent of the president's personal "growth," yet with nothing but scorn for that school of thought – with so little charity toward Lincoln's pursuit of colonization, that he can offer nothing but defensiveness – it is no wonder that Guelzo must attack our work on the recklessly narrow front that he does.³¹ The unenviable upshot is a review that has managed to end up in the double digits for number of pages, while containing absolutely no suggestion of what colonization positively meant to Lincoln.

There are other aspects to Guelzo's review of *Colonization after Emancipation* that explain why his assessment has ended up such an outlier, in terms of both the range and the severity of its fallacies, misconceptions, and inconsistencies. First is the idea that historical questions can or should be assessed by judicial standards, specifically a burden of proof on the "prosecution." Between his references to "indictments," "Exhibit A," and "the smoking gun," it would be impossible for anyone to deny Guelzo's overall air of defensiveness, since he so enthusiastically embraces the role of defense lawyer.³² The problem is that such standards just do not work in history. Who is on trial – and thus entitled to the benefit of the doubt – and for what: the president, for pursuing colonization, or one of his contemporaries, for "libeling" him by publishing recollections of his affinity for the same? Do we gain anything by trying to

³⁰ Guelzo, "Review," 80.

³¹ Idem., "The Path to Proclamation" (review of Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*), *The Wall Street Journal*, October 7, 2010.

³² Idem., "Review," 83-84.

understand a common response to the presumed problem of racial incompatibility by placing an individual on posthumous pseudo-trial? And assuming that we should not condemn historical figures, might not the payoff be that we do not cross the line into advocacy either?

The overwhelming problem here is that all history ends up, as Guelzo puts it, “not proven” when dissected by such standards.³³ The question is not whether we can concoct a defense case, since it is clear that we always can – but *why* we seek to do so, and whether that provides the best fit for the overall body of evidence.

Doubtless there will be those who can find a reason why a crowd as diverse as James Mitchell, John Hodge, Lord Lyons, Gideon Welles, Benjamin Butler, Lucius Chittenden, Edward Bates, George Julian, Carl Schurz, Samuel Pomeroy, William Seward, the Blair family, and Danforth Nichols was bent on besmirching Lincoln’s reputation by recording his sincere and persistent attachment to a policy to which the president himself had always claimed to be sincerely attached.³⁴ If we step back a moment, however, we might recall the warnings of the better offerings of the secondary literature that Lincoln’s presumed rejection of colonization has nevertheless apparently gone unrecorded in the primary evidence, bar an awkwardly timed and ambiguously phrased diary entry from John Hay, or even that it must be inferred from silence, or from a presumption of unyielding mutual exclusion with the government’s alternative dispositions of the large, diverse African-American population.³⁵ Those who manage to take a further step back might also discern the uncomfortable reality that historians only started to dismiss the evidence for Lincoln’s pursuit of a policy incongruous with the would-be standards of mid-late 20th century race relations during the very same period. While we do not claim that everyone would read the full primary source record in the same way that we do, we would suggest that it might be time to at least hit the “reset” button on the arguments that have prevailed for the past four or five decades, and to see what we are left with.

The existing tendencies of the debate make it tempting to call for something akin to “the benefit of the doubt” on this score, but there is no historical insight whatsoever to be gained from slurring over the question of whether Lincoln “abandoned” or “dropped” colonization because he had dispensed with a lullaby, changed his beliefs about race, come to a harsh assessment about the practicality of colonization under any circumstances, or had just encountered too many setbacks to contemplate carrying on during the distractions of wartime.³⁶ Tellingly, it furnishes another of those screaming silences in Guelzo’s review that he

³³ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁴ Allen T. Rice, ed., *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time* (New York: North American, 1886), 61-62, 149-54; Benjamin F. Butler, *Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences of Major-General Benjamin F. Butler* (Boston: A.M. Thayer, 1892), 578, 903-08; Carl Schurz, “Abraham Lincoln,” *Atlantic Monthly* 67 (1891), 734, and *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz*, ed. Frederic Bancroft and William A. Dunning (New York: McClure, 1907-08), 2:324; “New Stories of Lincoln,” *The Washington Post*, April 14, 1889; Francis B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Hurd & Houghton, 1867), 291; Gaillard Hunt, *Israel, Elihu and Cadwallader Washburn: A Chapter in American Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 116; Danforth B. Nichols to Seward, April 5, 1872, reel 110, William H. Seward Papers, University of Rochester.

³⁵ George M. Fredrickson, *Big Enough to Be Inconsistent: Abraham Lincoln Confronts Slavery and Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 113-14.

³⁶ Indeed, even as strident an advocate of colonization as Mitchell preferred to wait for peace before incurring what he envisaged as a larger, more expensive phase of emigration, while he also seems to have agreed with Lincoln in a conversation of late 1864 or very early 1865 that the Confederacy’s mooted slave recruitment plans

does not spell out the process by which the experience of wartime colonization policy made Lincoln drop the idea, except to vaguely chalk it up to the failure of the Île à Vache expedition. In his own work, Guelzo has previously cited a recollection published in 1907 of Lincoln's distress at that fiasco, which – while something that we also deem authentic – clearly neither meets his own standards of evidentiary certification nor explains why the president gave the settlement another seven months before recalling it.³⁷

We have found no evidence that Lincoln ever rejected colonization, though more than enough that he grew somewhat frustrated at the corruption, diplomatic complications, congressional reticence (from December 1862), and underlying lack of willing African-African emigrants that the plan attracted.³⁸ Yet it is the number of attempts that he made to overcome those very problems that stands out, especially in the wider context of his thin record on race proper, as distinct from slavery; it is now clear that colonization was, by quite some way, Lincoln's most developed attempt at a solution to the aftermath of emancipation and to the "race question" that was supposed to outlive the institution of slavery. Besides which, politicians grow frustrated about plans that they hope will work, not those that they do not, which they simply do not pursue in the first place. We believe that those readers who can suppress the defense lawyer instinct will agree that, given all that we know about the history of Lincoln's attachment to colonization, it is far likelier that administration policy stalled through political circumstances rather than through his personal proclivities.³⁹

We accordingly view administration colonization policy as probably "on ice" from early 1864, which would best explain the president's stony silence following a direct, widely-disseminated challenge from the floor of the House that February to publicly repudiate the policy or hasten a breach with radical congressmen; his inquiries to Attorney-General Edward Bates as to whether he could retain Mitchell's services and continue to promote colonization even after Congress had repealed the appropriations in an "unfriendly" rider to an otherwise needful budget bill of July 1864; the recollections of Gideon Welles that Lincoln still adhered to colonization, which actually chafed with the Navy Secretary's avowed fondness for

provided a sufficient practical rationale for the administration to delay resuming colonization efforts in the immediate future. (Mitchell to Lincoln, July 1, July 3, 1862, Lincoln Papers; Mitchell to Lincoln, February 1, 1865, enclosed in Mitchell to Hugh McCulloch, August 1865, Miscellaneous Letters of the Department of the Treasury, RG 56, National Archives and Records Administration.)

³⁷ Allen C. Guelzo, *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 182; John Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen: Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Longmans & Green, 1907), 91-92.

³⁸ Welles, "Administration of Abraham Lincoln," 441; Chittenden, *Recollections of President Lincoln*, 336; John Hay, *Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay*, ed. Michael Burlingame and John R.T. Ettliger (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 217; "Lincoln and the Negro"; entry for October 23, 1862, Donald MacLeod Diary; Thomas H. Hicks to Montgomery Blair, April 9, 1863, box 72, Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁹ That said, some recent counterarguments have indeed tended toward the rather flat, individual-centered analysis that Lincoln would have singlehandedly made colonization work in spite of other obstructions, somehow, had he been truly committed thereto. We would answer that Lincoln did intervene to revive the stalled colonization policy on numerous documented occasions, although equally, that it represents an unrealistic notion of executive bureaucracy to demand that the president arrange the minutiae of every administration project, rather than delegating them to trusted, personally appointed officers, before scholars should give credit to the idea that the policy in question might have enjoyed presidential support.

remembering the pragmatic qualities of the late president; and Benjamin Butler's account of two April 1865 conversations with Lincoln, the low reputation of which – itself only a truism of recent times – has yet to be matched by a commensurately persuasive or consistent explanation as to why that “favorite with the President” would have chosen to fabricate it.⁴⁰ Guelzo brushes off such evidence as “long-published testimonies” that we have managed to draw into a single narrative. Given his apparent aversion to recent Lincoln discoveries, we struggle to see how he could also dislike well-known material so much, but the point is that these later sources have suffered neglect, and even dismissal, because many historians had thought them too far removed from the initiation of known colonization schemes to be credible. Having filled that presumed gap, we present an evidentiary record on Lincoln and colonization that is consistent throughout his life, even where the paper trail thins during his last year for a stymied policy that we have positively established to have undergone the loss of many of its pertinent records. Inadvertently, Guelzo concedes the consistency of that corpus when he acknowledges our ability to “knit together ... many [sources] about Lincoln's interest in colonization in general.”⁴¹

Moreover, Guelzo evinces strong signs of what is actually a more widespread struggle amongst scholars to take colonization seriously, one that persists in the literature even alongside frequent authorial assurances to the opposite effect. Incredulous that, even against the backdrop of the mass migrations and improved transportation of the 19th century, anyone could have thought the removal of four million African-Americans viable, Guelzo can only shake his head at the “dreary little settlements of Liberia,” at the insidious “verisimilitude” of a “hare-brained” scheme's aura of feasibility, at the lengthy roster of worthies who supported colonization, and, for good measure, at the “folly” and “humbug” of it all.⁴² That is all very well and good, but beating one's breast that history was not as it ought to have been, or that people did not act or think as they should have done, is not the province of the historian, and not of anyone. Guelzo's reflections on this score also make for odd reading alongside the charges of presentism and judgmentalism that he levels at us.

Rather, it is our job as historians to explain why so many white and black Americans did discern, in resettlement, a solution to squaring the inalienable promises of the Declaration of Independence with the realities of intractable racism; why politicians like Lincoln could recur to colonization so often, *despite* being as familiar as modern scholars with its underwhelming track record in Africa, especially whenever based on voluntary recruitment, and with its wartime tendency to incur swindle and diplomatic complication; and why even radicals such as Jim Lane could spend the better part of 1864 promoting a domestic black colonization scheme

⁴⁰ *Hon. H. Winter Davis, of Maryland, on the President's Colonization and Compensation Scheme* (Washington, D.C.: L. Towers, 1864); James Hughes and J.W. Denver to Andrew Johnson, June 16, 1865, Miscellaneous Letters of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives and Records Administration; entries for Lincoln to Edward Bates, September 9, 1864, enclosing Mitchell to Lincoln, September 6, 1864, Register of Letters Received, Records of the Attorney General's Office, RG 60, National Archives and Records Administration; Mitchell to Lincoln, October 20, 1864, Bates to Lincoln, November 30, 1864, Lincoln Papers; Welles, “Administration of Abraham Lincoln,” 439; Phillip W. Magness, “Benjamin Butler's Colonization Testimony Reevaluated,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 29 (2008), 1-28; William O. Stoddard, *Inside the White House in War Times: Memoirs and Reports of Lincoln's Secretary*, ed. Michael Burlingame (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 83.

⁴¹ Guelzo, “Review,” 85.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 78-80, 85, 87.

on western lands, or Thaddeus Stevens offer to reestablish part of the repealed colonization funding the day after the Thirteenth Amendment passed the House in 1865.⁴³ Is it really that far-fetched to place Lincoln, a longstanding supporter of colonization dating to his early days as a Henry Clay Whig on the Illinois frontier, in such company? Or to acknowledge that what we know of colonization's outcome may not have been so obvious to politicians amidst the uncertainty that accompanied the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, even as we find vindication for its critics of the day?

Otherwise, argument down this avenue ends up as nothing more than a case of misdirected incredulity; of holding the history against the historian, or vainly asserting that Lincoln, or anybody else for that matter, simply could not have persisted with a certain business in the face of evidence that they did. That is an untenable approach, and even Guelzo manages to evince some such awareness, unexpectedly offering a handful of qualifications and near-defenses of colonization at the end of his review, which curiously echo some of the arguments that formed the substance of our "indictment." But again, this is only one example of a wider tendency in the literature to cover the bases on Lincoln and colonization at the expense of argumentative consistency. All too frequently, the situation emerges whereby certain sources are deemed "untruthful," but even if they were truthful, they would just reflect Lincoln doing his level best for African-Americans; where colonization was only ever about the persistence of other whites' racism – "even when you cease to be slaves, you are yet far removed from being placed on an equality with the white race" – but also where Lincoln supposedly shed the policy through personal growth by a certain point in his presidency; and so on.⁴⁴

We appreciate that we have challenged a dominant narrative, although strikingly, in a way that other historians, who had not made the same discoveries as us, had also come to do over the past few years. We know that our fellow scholars would like access to the evidence that we have used, and we are happy to subject ourselves to such scrutiny, having just started work on a multi-volume primary source compilation on colonization during the Civil War era, which will fully cover administration policy as well as all other facets of the movement. While it is true to some extent that we are searching in what might recently have been deemed unexpected and distant archives, it is truer – and probably to the broader nature of discoveries in history, not just to this instance – to state that the better part of our material was always there for the researcher who was willing to overcome his or her incredulity about colonization and just to look harder; to stop arguing against the evidence, and to start collating it. For instance, who knew that there was a thoroughly updated history of the Chiriqui scheme waiting to be written on the strength of manuscript accessions from half a century ago?⁴⁵ Who had

⁴³ Wendell H. Stephenson, *The Political Career of General James H. Lane* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1930), 132-33; Mitchell to Lincoln, February 1, 1865, enclosed in Mitchell to McCulloch, August 1865, Miscellaneous Letters of the Department of the Treasury; Lemuel D. Evans, *Speech of Hon. L.D. Evans: On the Condition of Texas, and the Formation of New States* (n.p., 1869), 4.

⁴⁴ A notable example would be William Lee Miller, *President Lincoln: The Duty of a Statesman* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 296-305.

⁴⁵ Sebastian N. Page, "Lincoln and Chiriqui Colonization Revisited," *American Nineteenth Century History* 12 (2011), 289-325. The article is based on the very dispersal of one-time government records, amongst collections of private papers, that Guelzo dismisses as the stuff of conspiracy-mongering on our part.

ever read the personal account of the Île à Vache settlement by its manager, Bernard Kock, in which he reveals that Lincoln signed the original contract on New Year's Day, 1863?⁴⁶

In the end, the strongest argument that our project makes for Lincoln's attachment to colonization may well be its exposition of the seriousness with which many of his contemporaries also regarded the possibility of African-American removal, as much as its collection of material on the man himself. Nevertheless, the latter assemblage is likely to leave the reader wondering not whether Lincoln persisted with colonization beyond the midpoint of his presidency, but how the debate ever got so skewed in that direction. And just as we hope to make an eventual contribution to the scholarly community through improved access to a dispersed body of material, so we must first invite its assistance in sourcing potentially overlooked evidence of any kind – but especially any for the frequently asserted, yet hitherto thinly attested, diminution of colonization from Lincoln's thought.

⁴⁶ Kock, *Statement*, 5.

Lincoln's endorsement of Hodge pass, June 13, 1863

James Mitchell
Com. of Emigration
I approve the within
A. Lincoln
June 13th 1863

Endorsed on the back

(A) Lyons Copy
National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, UK

Agents all the rest possible in
this work!
(B)
James Mitchell
Com. of Emigration
Endorsed on the back
I approve the within
(B) A. Lincoln
June 13th 1863.

(B) Seymour Copy
Belize Archives & Records Service, Belmopan, Belize

(A) James Mitchell
Commissioner of Emigration
(Endorsed on the back)
I approve the within
(B) Abraham Lincoln
June 13th 1863

(C) Eyre Copy
Jamaica Archives & Records Department, Spanish Town, Jamaica

(A) James Mitchell
Commissioner of Emigration
(Endorsed on the back)
I approve the within
(B) Abraham Lincoln
June 13th 1863

(D) Colonial Office Dispatch Copy
Belize Archives & Records Service, Belmopan, Belize

the word.
James Mitchell
Commissioner of Emigration
(Enclosed)
I approve the within
A. Lincoln
June 13th 1863

(E) Mitchell Copy
National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD