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# DEFYING CONVENTION: ATYPICAL PERSPECTIVES OF SLAVERY IN ANTEBELLUM NEW ORLEANS

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# DEFYING CONVENTION: ATYPICAL PERSPECTIVES OF SLAVERY IN ANTEBELLUM NEW ORLEANS

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DEFYING CONVENTION:  
ATYPICAL PERSPECTIVES OF SLAVERY IN ANTEBELLUM NEW ORLEANS

By

AMANDA N. CARR, B.A.

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
Stephen F. Austin State University  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements

For the Degree of  
Master of Arts, History

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

December, 2016

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## ABSTRACT

During the first half of the nineteenth century, slavery became a vital economic component upon which the success of the southern states in America rested. Cotton was king, and slavery was the peculiar institution that ensured its dominance in the domestic and international markets of America. Popular portrayals, however, often neglect the complicated dynamics of American slavery and instead depict the institution in simplistic terms. The traditional view has emphasized an image of white southerners as slaveholders and blacks as slaves. In New Orleans, the lives of three men—all of whom were tied to slavery in varying capacities—reveal a much more nuanced picture of American slavery. John McDonogh, a white slaveowner and member of the American Colonization Society (ACS), proposed an emancipation plan to his slaves by which they could gradually purchase their freedom on the condition that, once freed, they were repatriated to Liberia. Andrew Durnford, a *homme de couleur libre* (free man of color) and slaveowner, was a business associate and friend of McDonogh who showed little to no interest in emancipating his slaves. Washington Watts McDonogh, a college-educated former slave of John McDonogh, was a minister in Liberia who supported the ACS repatriation plan at a time when many free blacks in America did not support the African colonization movement, preferring to remain in the United States. The experiences of three men reveal how slavery in nineteenth-century New Orleans was a much more

nuanced institution that did not resemble the traditional narrative that the public has come to know.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Any errors, omissions, and mistakes in this work remain solely my responsibility. Nevertheless, I have put forth my best effort in detailing the experiences of three men who were tied to slavery in varying capacities in nineteenth-century New Orleans. Their stories reveal a much more complicated version of slavery than is often presented in popular portrayals and accepted by the public, thus their stories are worth telling.

The piney woods of Nacogdoches, Texas and Natchitoches, Louisiana are wonderful places to write a thesis. The oldest towns in their respective states are small, charming, and full of interesting folks. Coming home to the region for graduate school was one of the best decisions I ever made. I am grateful to Sonny and Dr. Connie Melder as well as L.J. and Gay Melder, whose warm hospitality, evening invitations to visit, and general willingness to help me any way possible made my stay in Natchitoches a wonderful experience.

Whenever a person accomplishes something worthwhile, they never do it alone. Their achievement is the result of many people conspiring and collaborating to see them through to their success. This project has been a source of great satisfaction for me, and I have many of those wonderful, supportive people to thank.

To begin, I thank Dr. Scott Sosebee and the East Texas Historical Association for the Ottis Lock Grant presented to me, which helped fund my travel expenses to research in New Orleans. I thank the staff at Louisiana Research Collection at Tulane University

as well as the staff at the Historic New Orleans Collection (HNOC)—particularly Mary Lou Eichhorn—for their assistance during my research process. Additionally, I owe a debt of gratitude to Robert Ticknor at HNOC, who provided valuable information related to the *African Repository*, the journal of the American Colonization Society (ACS). Dr. Jeffrey A. Mullins at St. Cloud State University recommended various books over the ACS that proved crucial to my research. Additionally, Susannah Carroll at the Franklin Institute in Pennsylvania was kind enough to send information to me concerning Elliott Cresson.

To my friends and fellow graduate students at Stephen F. Austin State University: please know that you all have been a constant source of inspiration and comradery. I (mostly) refrain from individually naming you because, well, you know who you are. Nevertheless, I thank Kurt A. Terry for being in the right place at the right time. Also, I extend special thanks to Hayley M. Hasik, whose assistance at the Tulane Archives was gratefully appreciated. I could not have done it without you. Lastly, I thank Conor E. Herterich for lending an ear to listen, providing encouragement along the way, and for making sure there was always a balance.

To my thesis committee: I thank you all for your support during the writing and editing process. I give my heartfelt thanks to my mentor, Dr. Mark Barringer, whose sound advice, constructive criticisms, and steadfast patience are appreciated beyond measure. There were just enough Girl Scout cookies.



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Amanda N. Carr  
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## Introduction

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From the late 1790s through the 1860s, cotton and sugar cane farming sustained America's agricultural sector, largely replacing the former cash crops of tobacco and indigo. With the advent of Eli Whitney's cotton gin in 1793, slavery in America and its perceived downward, unsustainable trajectory was transformed into a lucrative, exploitative economic institution. Predominately confined to the coastal areas of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia before 1820, by 1860 white cotton fields bloomed in every state in the South. In the same decade as Whitney's invention, the Haitian Revolution—a rebellion against French rule led by Toussaint L'Ouverture that established the first black republic—opened the doors for sugar cane cultivation in the costal South when France lost its most profitable sugar colony. Louisianans seized the opportunity to supply France's demand, and sugar cane became the cash crop of choice thanks to the state's humid environment better suited to the water-dependent crop than most places in America. The immense profit from cotton and sugar cane, however, came at an equally great cost. The forced labor demanded by the crops' cultivation entrenched a caste-based system in the South that left a legacy of racial discrimination enduring for generations after slavery's demise.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014). See the set of maps before the Introduction on page x titled "Distribution of Cotton Production by County, 1800, 1840, and 1860." Lawrence N. Powell, *The Accidental City: Improving New Orleans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 249, 258.

The caste system of slavery in New Orleans, however, differed from that of the rest of the South. New Orleans entrepreneur and slave owner John McDonogh was one notable example of these differences. Unusual in his charitable efforts during the first half of the nineteenth century, McDonogh was a self-made businessman and savvy land speculator who owned much of the land around New Orleans and lived on a plantation across the Mississippi River overlooking the city. Some of his philanthropic deeds included the establishment of free public education, the creation of a public cemetery, and the repatriation of his slaves to Liberia. The relationship John McDonogh had with his slaves, free people of color, and the general public of New Orleans was one in which *race* was a secondary concern, *status* instead conferring the most consideration.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Louisiana's distinct history in which Native American, African, French, and Spanish people contributed to a shared culture and history, race was not always a polarizing factor as traditionally assigned to relations in the Southern states. The status of a person—i.e. free, indentured, enslaved—was much more influential in relationships.

McDonogh provided a college education to one of his slaves, Washington Watts McDonogh. Washington's gift of higher education, however, was conditional: he was to immigrate to Liberia via the American Colonization Society once his studies were complete as his college courses prepared him for ministerial work in Liberia.

McDonogh's slaves, therefore, functioned in (or, in Washington's case, outside of) New

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<sup>2</sup> I give credit to Dr. Hiram "Pete" Gregory at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, LA for first suggesting to me the idea that "status" conferred more importance than "race" in Louisiana's colonial period.

Orleans society with a certain amount of freedom and autonomy not usually entrusted to those in bondage.<sup>3</sup>

The closest business associate of McDonogh was Andrew Durnford, a free man of color and fellow slave owner in Louisiana. Their frequent correspondence revealed not only a close business relationship but also a close personal one; Durnford named his eldest son—Thomas McDonogh Durnford—after his business partner and chose McDonogh as Thomas’s godfather. In return, McDonogh paid for Thomas’ college education in Pennsylvania at the same institution that Washington attended and entrusted Andrew Durnford with one of five copies of his secretive will. Durnford, however, showed little to no interest in African colonization as did McDonogh.<sup>4</sup>

Traditional narratives often neglect the nuances of slavery as demonstrated in these men’s lives. Only more recently has the traditional image of the antebellum South as popularized by *Gone With the Wind* been replaced with more visceral depictions, as seen in *Twelve Years a Slave* and the remake of *Roots*. Depictions of slavery from the mid-twentieth century generally provide only a brief mention of the *gens de couleur libre* (free people of color), and their slaveholding status is minimized or noticeably absent. Furthermore, while later portrayals of the peculiar institution mention the *gens de couleur*

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<sup>3</sup> William Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh* (1886; repr., Metairie, LA: Jefferson Parish Historical Commission, 1983), pp. 53n, 75; William Talbot Childs, *John McDonogh: His Life and Work*, pp. 101-102; Lane C. Kendall, “John McDonogh, slave owner,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 16 (January 1933): 131.

<sup>4</sup> David O. Whitten, *Andrew Durnford: A Black Sugar Planter in Antebellum Louisiana* (Natchitoches, LA: Northwestern State University Press, 1981), pp. 11, 13, 17, 102; William Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh* (1886; repr., Metairie, LA: Jefferson Parish Historical Commission, 1983), pp. 53n, 75; William Talbot Childs, *John McDonogh: His Life and Work*, pp. 101-102; Lane C. Kendall, “John McDonogh, slave owner,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 16 (January 1933): 131.

*libre*, their role as slaveholders is largely assigned to their benevolent purchase of relatives. Other depictions attribute free blacks' geographic location as the reason for their financial independence and ownership of slaves, many living "on the northern fringes of the slaveholding regions."<sup>5</sup> Less emphasis is placed on the select few free blacks who owned slaves as members of the planter class. Only in more recently published material are free black slaveholders like Durnford specifically named, but their attitudes toward the institution of slavery are only superficially analyzed. One college textbook published this year noted how William Ellison, the wealthiest free black man in the Antebellum South (and a slaveholder), "like other wealthy mulattoes, came to view himself as a 'brown aristocrat.'"<sup>6</sup> Comments such as these provide opportunities for further analysis, but an in-depth examination is still absent in many depictions of slavery.<sup>7</sup>

Among the 12,000 African Americans repatriated to Liberia between 1820 and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, 121 were former slaves of John McDonogh. Although he claimed a financial stake in the institution of slavery, McDonogh offered his

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<sup>5</sup> Alan Brinkley, *American History: A Survey*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill College, 1999), 388.

<sup>6</sup>David Emory Shi and George Brown Tindall, *America: A Narrative History*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. 1 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 484.

<sup>7</sup> George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., brief vol. 1 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), pp. 422-423; Joyce Appleby et al, *The American Republic to 1877* (New York: Glencoe McGraw-Hill, 2003), pp. 397-407; Shi and Tindall, *America: A Narrative History* (2016); Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of American People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965): 506; Thomas A. Bailey, *The American Pageant: A History of the Republic* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1956): 361. In *The American Republic to 1877*, The Metoyer family of Natchitoches, Louisiana is named as one of the few free African American families who owned slaves. See page 402. Additionally, William Ellison, Cyprien Ricard, and William Johnson were all free black slaveholders mentioned in *America: A Narrative History* (2016). See pages 482-484.

slaves a form of emancipation that both prepared them to lead independent, self-sufficient lives in West Africa and educated them in the doctrines of Protestant ideology.

McDonogh's investment in his slaves, however, was lucrative. Not only did he profit from their physical labor, but McDonogh's system of emancipation was designed so that he recouped his initial cost of purchasing the slaves, paid for the cost of their replacements, and profited an extra return on investment. McDonogh's profit from emancipating his slaves, therefore, was by design rather than by accident. McDonogh's objective was his slaves' "freedom and happiness in Liberia, without loss or the cost of a cent" on his part. Consequently, McDonogh was both an unlikely humanitarian and a shrewd businessman.<sup>8</sup>

Popular portrayals of American slavery depict a social and economic system in simplistic terms with a binary focus. The traditional view has emphasized an image of

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<sup>8</sup> John McDonogh, "Letter of John McDonogh on African Colonization," *New Orleans Commercial Bulletin*, New Orleans, 1842, Library of Congress and Archive.org, <https://archive.org/details/letterofjohnmcd00mcd0>, p. 10; Bell I. Wiley, ed., *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833-1869* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1980) pp. 1, 117. To calculate the number of repatriated slaves, Wiley cited a list found in the ACS Papers in the Library of Congress that McDonogh sent to William McLain. It contained the names of seventy-nine people and brief descriptions about the emancipated slaves that would be on board the *Mariposa* with their final destination being Liberia. These seventy-nine former slaves plus the forty-two emancipated slaves in 1859 total 121 persons that McDonogh repatriated. Author Early Lee Fox, however, offered a different number of McDonogh colonists. In *The American Colonization Society, 1817-1840*, Fox wrote that, in 1842, the first group of former McDonogh slaves sent to Liberia were eighty or eighty-five in number and valued at \$150,000. Fifty-five were adults with the remainder being children between the ages of six and twelve years. Fox cited the *African Repository and Colonial Journal*—the journal of the ACS—as his source for obtaining the value of McDonogh's slaves. See Early Lee Fox, *The American Colonization Society, 1817-1840* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1919), 168, 196-197. Also, see David O. Whitten's "Slave Buying in 1835 Virginia as Revealed by Letters of a Louisiana Negro Sugar Planter" in *Louisiana History* 11, no. 3 (1970): 234. Like Fox, Whitten also cited *The African Repository* for his claim of eighty-five former slaves being repatriated by McDonogh in the 1840s. Based on these figures, approximately eighty people completed the journey to Liberia in 1842 while about half that many made the voyage in 1859.

white southerners as slaveholders and blacks as slaves. But the stories of these three men—John McDonogh, a white member of the ACS, Andrew Durnford, a free man of color and southern planter, and Washington Watts McDonogh, a former slave who became a Liberian colonist—present a very different picture about the peculiar institution. The experiences of these three men reveal how slavery in nineteenth-century New Orleans was an intricately nuanced institution comprised of a variety of beliefs, attitudes, and interactions that did not resemble the traditional narrative that the public has come to know.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 44-45; John McDonogh papers, Manuscripts Collection 30, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, hereafter cited as MPTA.



## ***Chapter 1:*** **The Study of American Slavery**

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Even though popular portrayals of American slavery have failed to address many of its complicated dynamics, American historians have long dwelt upon the pivotal role that slavery played in shaping the history of the country. Their treatments of its impact, however, have been assessed in a variety of ways. One of the earliest monographs written exclusively on the topic of slavery was Ulrich B. Phillips' *American Negro Slavery*. By studying large plantation records, Phillips maintained that slavery was an unsustainable institution whose profits were dwindling on the eve of the Civil War. His research outline, and distinctly Southern apologist viewpoint that endorsed racist beliefs as "fact," later influenced numerous other scholars who came to similar conclusions. Other scholars—like John Hope Franklin, Joe Gray Taylor, and Kenneth Stampp—however, contested many of Phillips' findings and/or criticized his research methods.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1918). For a broad examination of African-American history, see John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967). Franklin traces the evolution of blacks in America from the ancient civilizations of Egypt through the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s (in his revised 3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Although the role of influential persons is highlighted, the primary goal of Franklin's work is to give a voice to "the strivings of the nameless millions who have sought adjustment in a new and sometimes hostile world." See also a compilation of Franklin's essays in *Race and History: Selected Essays 1938-1988* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989). Both works are examples of Franklin's opposition to many of Phillips' claims. Joe Gray Taylor refuted Phillips' claims regarding the economic profitability of slavery. In chapter four "Notes on the Economics of Slavery," in *Negro Slavery in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: The Louisiana Historical Association, 1963) pp. 92-105, Taylor discounts Phillips' assertion that slavery was not profitable. By carefully calculating the cost of a slave and the price of certain crops for specific years, Taylor concludes that there **was** a varying degree of return on investment for each slave hand. An excellent essay that discussed the influence of Ulrich B. Phillips' work is Bennett H. Wall's "African Slavery," in *Writing Southern History: Essays in Historiography in Honor of Fletcher M. Green*, eds. Arthur S. Link and Rembert W. Patrick (1965; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967): 175-197. Specifically, pages 182-186 addressed the impact of Phillips on numerous scholars—Kenneth Stampp among them. For an overview of the scholars who agreed with

Later in the twentieth century, other historians argued that slavery was in fact profitable and faced no danger of collapsing because of inefficiency. In *The Peculiar Institution*, Kenneth Stampp refuted earlier claims by Phillips. He reasoned that the institution of slavery was, in fact, lucrative, and its profitability was why southerners were willing to sacrifice themselves in the name of its defense. Stampp maintained that slavery could be *adapted* to suit various labor needs, i.e. utilizing the “gang system” of the large plantations, relying on extra hands in small-scale, single-family farming, or hiring out individual domestic or trade servants in towns and cities. Slavery’s adaptability, therefore, ensured that it could thrive beyond the demands of large-scale agriculture alone, and so it remained a viable economic model.<sup>2</sup>

Other historians, like Eugene Genovese, studied slavery from a sociological perspective. In *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, he discussed slavery in a way that examined slaves’ actions and attitudes within the confines of plantation life. Genovese noted how slaves capitalized on the inherent paternalism of plantation life to gain a modicum of autonomy and control to alleviate some of the harshness of slavery. Genovese analyzed how the plantation setting influenced slaves’ behavior—revolts, marriage rituals, work habits, religious/spiritual beliefs, etc.—and how relationships were cultivated in this atmosphere.

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Phillips’ research, see chapter four “Ulrich Bonnell Phillips: Slavery Through Southern Eyes,” in Burton M. Smith’s “A study of American historians and their interpretation of Negro slavery in the United States” (MA thesis, Washington State University, 1970), 61-76. Likewise, chapter five of Smith’s thesis, “The ‘Revisionists,’” (pp. 77-121) detailed countless scholars who challenged many of Phillips’ assertions—including W.E.B. DuBois, Carter Woodson, John Hope Franklin, and Kenneth Stampp.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956).

In his writing, Genovese highlighted the humanity of slaves, revealing how slaves created lives for themselves within the confines of bondage.<sup>3</sup>

Others grappled with slavery by reducing it to quantitative terms. In the same year that Genovese released his book, economists William Fogel and Stanley L. Engermann published a work that dramatically differed in its approach to the treatment of slavery and reignited a passionate discussion of the “peculiar institution.” In *Time on the Cross*, Fogel and Engermann attempted to reexamine the long-accepted truths about the institution of slavery through the use of “cliometrics”—a method that relied on computers to interpret quantitative data. Based on their results, Fogel and Engermann claimed that slavery was both profitable to planters and beneficial to slaves. They argued that slaves, in fact, *achieved advancement* under a system that most historians (and the general public) late in the twentieth century considered corrupt, exploitative, and at odds with the democratic foundation of the country. Not surprisingly, the authors received much criticism for their work. They attempted to reduce the complicated dynamics of slavery to unrealistic mathematical terms, which—instead of arguing for black advancement under adverse conditions—came across as almost advocating for slavery. By simplifying slavery into numbers, Fogel and Engermann ignored the human element, a grave mistake that prevented a true analysis of a people’s advancement in bondage.<sup>4</sup>

Historians of the American South cannot properly address any topic without confronting the influential role that slavery, and consequently race, played in society.

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<sup>3</sup> Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

<sup>4</sup> Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engermann, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, Inc., 1974).

Decades before the Civil War, the American Colonization Society (ACS) attempted to weaken southern defense of—and northern opposition to—slavery by proposing a scheme whereby free blacks were repatriated to Africa. Yet in nineteenth-century Louisiana, particularly the antebellum period in New Orleans, race functioned in a manner rarely seen elsewhere in the Southern states, which stood at odds with many of the ACS’ motives and justifications. This distinctiveness resulted in a dynamic society in which wealthy philanthropist John McDonogh exerted a great deal of influence.

While race played an integral role in Southern society in general during the early nineteenth century, the culture of Louisiana fostered a unique relationship between race and culture that was not common to the rest of the South. The caste system, in which people were assigned a phenotypical label based on the ratio of “white” or European blood to “black” or African ancestry, remained a predominant feature in New Orleans society. *Sacatra*, *griffe*, *mulatto*, *quadroon*, and *octoroon* were all terms that indicated the racial composition of a person which, in turn, reflected an inherent value assigned to “whiteness.” But in Louisiana, African ancestry did not guarantee a life of bondage. Many free people of color were successful businessmen and even slaveholders themselves. The *gens de couleur libre* in Louisiana, therefore, embodied this experience of “double consciousness,”—a term first introduced by W.E.B. DuBois. Paul Gilroy elaborated upon this idea in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Gilroy argued that “the black atlantic” experience is one of “double consciousness” whereby blacks’ and whites’ identities are often defined as a hybrid of each other, specifically within Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Cultural, political, and national

identifications, therefore, transcend perceived fixed racial boundaries that are in fact fluid and ever-changing.<sup>5</sup>

Even though the importation of slaves to the United States was abolished in 1808, the practice of slavery persisted. Natural reproduction ensured that the slave population continued to grow, thereby sustaining the domestic slave trade. Before the abolition of slavery, voices of dissent criticized the institution and fought for its end. Early in the nineteenth century, the Second Great Awakening spawned a renewed interest in removing moral ills from American society. Various Christian denominations formed benevolent societies focused on erasing specific evils, thus answering the evangelical call for a morally elevated America. Chief among these social ills was slavery. As a solution to the perceived “problem” of slavery, the ACS was established in 1816. The Society was comprised of a small, select group of men who were powerful businessmen, entrepreneurs, politicians, and other gentlemen who exercised considerable influence in American society. They created an ambitious organization through which to address the slavery question via “repatriation” and, simultaneously, sow the seeds of Christianity in Africa. The Society existed for one purpose: to “repatriate” thousands of free blacks in

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<sup>5</sup> For a more thorough analysis of the mixed racial categories in early nineteenth-century Louisiana, see the preface of Gary B. Mills’ *The Forgotten People: Cane River’s Creoles of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), in which the author provided an exact breakdown of “Negro” or African blood to “white” or European blood. A second work, H.E. Sterkx’s, “The Free Negro in the Social Life of Louisiana,” in *The Free-Negro in Ante-Bellum Louisiana* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1972) also provided a similar analysis on pages 247-248. Near Natchitoches, LA, generations of descendants from the union of an enslaved African woman named Marie Thérèse Coincoin and a Frenchman, Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer, operated successful cotton plantations. For a complete history of the dynasty, see Gary B. Mills’ *The Forgotten People*. Andrew Durnford, a free man of color in Louisiana, was friend and business partner to John McDonogh. Durnford owned a plantation serviced by numerous slaves in Plaquemines Parish. See Whitten’s *Andrew Durnford* and Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

America to West Africa—Liberia, specifically—to colonize a land of their own where they could benefit from the liberties and freedoms not guaranteed to them on American soil. Those who remained in bondage, however, were not figured in to this plan. Rather, free and recently manumitted blacks were the primary targets of colonizationists.

In recent years, a resurgence of scholarly interest in the ACS has occurred. Scholars in the twenty-first century have taken the position that the ACS' scheme was an honest effort to find a solution to slavery, with the hope that—by removing free and recently manumitted blacks to Africa—slavery would be contained where it already existed, cease to spread to new territories, and eventually die off in the South since it was neither profitable nor sustainable.<sup>6</sup> Historians who have examined the American Colonization Society and critiqued its efforts have generally placed its members' motivations in either one of two camps. Some historians suggested the ACS was an organization that existed, despite its mission of African colonization, to promote the *expansion* of American slavery. They argue that the Society's efforts—by seeking to remove an incendiary population of free blacks in America who they deemed biologically inferior—served to strengthen the institution of slavery. The ACS, therefore, has been portrayed as an organization that offered no threat to southern slaveholders' economic interests because the group was not promoting emancipation. Other historians, typically writing in the early-mid twentieth century, offered a drastically different interpretation of the ACS. They claim that the Society operated from a purely benevolent—albeit,

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<sup>6</sup> In an earlier work from 1958, Philip John Staudenraus details the history of the American Colonization Society and provides great detail about the roles of various individuals within the organization. See Philip John Staudenraus, "The History of the American Colonization Society" (MA thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1958).

prejudiced—standpoint in which the members’ good intentions were designed to ameliorate the condition of blacks by proposing an alternative vision of freedom.

Two scholars, in particular, have claimed that the ACS was motivated by noble reasons. John Seh David recently examined the influences of the Founding Fathers and American slavery upon the establishment of Liberia in his work *The American Colonization Society and The Founding of the First African Republic*. David claimed that, despite receiving much criticism since its inception, “the ACS had a humanitarian agenda, and it managed to remain largely true to its code mission of urging freed blacks to repatriate to Africa.” Despite the book’s title, the author failed to provide a detailed account of the ACS itself—David’s argument became lost in a massive chronological span and largely forgotten in a slew of topics unrelated to his stated thesis. In a similar vein, Allan Yarema claimed that the ACS was an organization with benevolent motives. In Yarema’s short book of only ninety pages, *The American Colonization Society: An Avenue to Freedom?*, the author detailed the history of the ACS and the many reasons for its ultimate demise despite the Society’s benevolent motives. Yarema provided an impressive account of the members of the Society, the arguments of those targeted by the ACS, the abolitionist response to the repatriation scheme, and the failures of the Society. Whereas David’s focus was too broad, Yarema limited his time span to the early nineteenth-century. Because he devoted certain years more attention than others, Yarema

created a large void in the story of the ACS. The years of 1816-1830s are detailed in great account, but the 1840s-1890s are given only a passing glance in the brief conclusion.<sup>7</sup>

Eric Burin differed from both David and Yarema in his research on the ACS. In *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution*, Burin provided a more complete account of the ACS and argued that African colonization undermined the institution of slavery through its encouragement of manumissions, which played a crucial role leading up to the Civil War. Burin's work is a comprehensive treatment of the ACS; he detailed the history of the Society, elaborated upon the arguments for/against its scheme of repatriation, and, like David, continued the story across the Atlantic to reveal the realities that the Americo-Liberian settlers endured and their paths to independence. The author centered his research on the relationship between the Society and slavery—in particular, ACS manumissions which granted freedom to slaves *only* if they emigrated to Liberia. Burin's approach differed from other scholars who focused strictly on ACS members, Southern planters, Northern abolitionists, and others.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Seh David. *The American Colonization Society and the Founding of the first African Republic* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse LLC, 2014), xv. Of David's 218-page-book, forty pages are dedicated to the ACS and roughly a third of the book detailed Liberia's transition from a colony to an independent republic. The author devoted much attention to the background of slavery in America, beginning with evidence of African presence in Mesoamerica in 1200 BC to slave relations of America's Founding Fathers in the nineteenth century. Notably, many citations are questionable and therefore not considered acceptable for scholarly research purposes. Allen Yarema. *The American Colonization Society: An Avenue to Freedom?* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 2006), viii. In William D. Hoyt, Jr.'s "John McDonogh and Maryland Colonization in Liberia, 1834-35," *The Journal of Negro History* 24, no. 4 (October 1939): 451, the author included a letter dated March 19, 1835 from the Maryland State Colonization Society addressed to McDonogh. The letter stated that at a recent meeting the Board of Managers voted to give McDonogh honorary membership thanks to his \$200 donation and plan to liberate his slaves to Liberia; G. Leighton Ciravolo, *The Legacy of John McDonogh* (Lafayette: The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2002), 6-7.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).



Biographies of Andrew Durnford are few and of Washington Watts McDonogh nonexistent. The lack of information on these two men is likely due to their status as, in the case of the former, a free man of color and slaveowner, and in the case of the latter, a college-educated former slave who supported and promoted African colonization. David O. Whitten, economics professor at Auburn University, wrote *Andrew Durnford: A Black Sugar Planter in Antebellum Louisiana* in 1981. In this book, Whitten compiled two decades of research to describe many facets of Durnford's life, including Durnford's relationship to McDonogh, the black slaveowner's interest in medical care, and the construction, finances, and people of St. Rosalie Plantation. Durnford's rare position as a black slaveowner was not a fact freely advertised during the nineteenth-century and a detail overlooked by many historians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Washington, likewise, represented a minority opinion among free and enslaved blacks in Antebellum America, so his perspective has been lost among the more vocal masses who criticized African colonization. Additionally, neither man was of the same economic station as John McDonogh. Wealthy white men tend to have their biographies told more often than others, so the stories of Durnford and Washington have not garnered as much attention as that of McDonogh.<sup>9</sup>

The earliest biographies of McDonogh were written by two former headmasters of the McDonogh School in Maryland, and both authors were naturally biased because of their positions at the school. In William Allan's *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, the author interviewed McDonogh's relatives, former slaves, and friends, and relied on

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<sup>9</sup> Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, (Natchitoches, LA: Northwestern State University Press, 1981).

archival records “to rescue from misconception and oblivion the character of a man against whom the severest criticism... is that he served subsequent generations better than his own.” Allan’s work is organized in a chronological fashion, and he interjects folklore as well as various passages from McDonogh’s letters to narrate the biography. Limited citations appeared throughout the book, and it rarely mentioned a critical word of McDonogh without a praiseworthy comment to follow. Allen’s position as first headmaster of the McDonogh School in Maryland was likely responsible for the author’s few negative comments about the school’s namesake. William Talbott Childs, headmaster from 1921-1925, authored *John McDonogh: His Life and Work*. In his book, Childs compiled a selected assortment of McDonogh’s correspondence, occasionally narrating to orient the reader. “A compilation and re-arrangement of much that has been written... about John McDonogh,” the work is assembled thematically instead of chronologically. Additionally, an in depth-analysis is lacking since Childs rarely contributes his own words. When he does, however, the author spoke “only good words of him, and assume[d] a skeptical view of adverse criticisms.” While the compilation of correspondence is impressive, the absence of references within the text itself poses a dilemma for scholars. Because of their professional titles at the McDonogh school, both Allan and Childs expressly refrained from any critical analysis of the school’s namesake. This lack of impartiality, therefore, left a void in the scholarship on McDonogh.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> William Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh* (1886; repr. Metairie, LA: Jefferson Parish Historical Commission, 1983), Preface; William Talbott Childs, *John McDonogh: His Life and Work* (Baltimore: Meyer & Thalheimer, 1939), Foreword, 192.

The most comprehensive attempt at a holistic biography of McDonogh was a lengthy article written in 1950 by Arthur G. Nuhrah. The article, “John McDonogh: Man of Many Facets,” was a compilation of several selected chapters from an unpublished research project by Nuhrah. The author studied various archival collections for five years to tease out the true story of McDonogh’s life which had been shrouded in legend and hyperbole for decades in New Orleans. Nuhrah “traced McDonogh’s movements month by month from 1817” until McDonogh’s death in 1850. Nuhrah covered such topics as McDonogh’s merchant trade in New Orleans, his land and plantation speculation endeavors as well as McDonogh’s own education plus that of numerous relatives, orphans, and slaves. The letters from his repatriated slaves in Liberia were also given adequate mention. Other areas in Nuhrah’s research, however, are lacking. Chapter three, “The Soldier, Politician and Man of Religion,” was notably heavy on McDonogh’s religious convictions but limited on his military and political ventures. Nevertheless, Nuhrah’s research was solidly grounded in primary source material, and he effectively incorporated contemporary events and explained how they impacted McDonogh’s personal and professional ambitions. Fortunately, Nuhrah contributed many details about McDonogh’s life that were absent from the biographies of Allan and Childs.<sup>11</sup>

Aside from biographies, the scholarly works that exist on McDonogh are a few articles focused on singular aspects of his life. Lewis E. Atherton detailed McDonogh’s early mercantile career in “John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist.”

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<sup>11</sup> Arthur Nuhrah, “John McDonogh: Man of Many Facets,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 33, no.1 (January 1950): 5-144.

Atherton focused on a short time span (from approximately 1800-1806) during which McDonogh relocated to New Orleans through the merchant trade where he engaged in such business before abandoning it to become a real estate speculator. The author provided an adequate amount of context—particularly regarding how national and international politics affected trade climates—as it applied to McDonogh’s business affairs. Atherton acknowledged that little research existed on this particular period of McDonogh’s life; this article, therefore, satisfied the author’s goal of addressing the missing scholarship on McDonogh’s brief mercantile career in New Orleans.

Furthermore, Lane C. Kendall, in two articles titled “John McDonogh, slave owner” detailed the philanthropist’s biography and the origins of his unique repatriation plan for his slaves. The first of Kendall’s articles, however, lacks any citations, and only one primary source is referenced for the second article. Despite contributions made by these researchers, absences still remain in the scholarship on McDonogh’s life due to narrow research scopes.<sup>12</sup>

The most thorough examination of the results of McDonogh’s philanthropic efforts is G. Leighton Ciravolo’s *The Legacy of John McDonogh*. Ciravolo maintained

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis E. Atherton, “John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist,” *The Journal of Southern History* 7, no. 4 (Nov. 1941), 453; Lane C. Kendall, “John McDonogh, slave owner” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 15 (Oct. 1932): 646-654; Lane C. Kendall, “John McDonogh, slave owner,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 16 (Jan. 1933): 125-134. Another scholarly article on McDonogh is William D. Hoyt, Jr.’s “John McDonogh and Maryland Colonization in Liberia, 1834-1835,”: 440-453. Prompted by the publication of William Talbott Childs’ *John McDonogh, His Life and His Work* in 1939—which generated interest in the colonization papers held by the Maryland Historical Society—Hoyt provided an introduction to a selected compilation of correspondence between John McDonogh and Reverend William McKenney and John H. B. Latrobe. Both McKenney and Latrobe held prominent positions in the Maryland State Colonization Society (MSCS): McKenney was the official agent while Latrobe was a founder (Latrobe later became President of MSCS and then President of the ACS). A drawback to this source is that it lacks any analysis of the content in the letters between the colonizationists; it is simply a transcription of the primary source documents with a limited amount of context and background provided in the introduction.

that McDonogh deserved remembrance because of his public altruism that transcended racial boundaries. The author sought to repair the tarnished name of John McDonogh in the New Orleans area by encouraging others to look beyond his status as a slaveholder and model themselves after his charitable example instead. Ciravolo's main focus is not on McDonogh's life but rather the complicated nature of adhering to the provisions of his will. Many legal obstacles prevented McDonogh's will from being fully executed—particularly in regard to maintaining his massive landholdings and honoring his wishes of granting public education to poor children regardless of sex or race. Like Allan and Childs, however, Ciravolo's research is conditioned by his effort to rehabilitate McDonogh's deteriorating image in New Orleans.<sup>13</sup>

The existing literature lacks a thorough analysis of McDonogh's actions. Scholarship does not emphasize how McDonogh, in addition to illegally educating his slaves, published his repatriation plans for local and national audiences. McDonogh, therefore, deliberately put himself at risk of fines or other punishments by encouraging others to adopt his repatriation plan for their slaves. His actions posed a threat to the economic and social order of the South. While McDonogh, a wealthy slaveowner, has received more attention than men like Durnford and Washington, research is still lacking. In short, the overall scholarship on McDonogh that exists is limited, not current, and does not offer a comprehensive assessment of his entire life.

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<sup>13</sup> G. Leighton Ciravolo, *The Legacy of John McDonogh* (Lafayette: The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2002).

## *Chapter 2:*

### **John McDonogh: Member of the American Colonization Society**

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Although misunderstood during his lifetime and largely forgotten since his death, McDonogh's various philanthropic deeds included aiding the destitute and establishing free public education. Prior to his death, however, none of his charitable endeavors received as much attention as the repatriation of his slaves to Liberia. A Baltimore merchant turned Louisiana planter and member of the American Colonization Society, McDonogh was well connected to a variety of influential persons. His correspondence sheds light on the varying opinions of slavery and its place in American society prior to its abolition with the Thirteenth Amendment. Specifically, McDonogh's relationships with Andrew Durnford and Washington Watts McDonogh were representative of the larger slavery conversation in America between approximately 1830 and 1850. While McDonogh promoted gradual emancipation and evangelical education, his closest business associate Durnford—a free person of color and Louisiana planter—remained indifferent to both. Washington Watts McDonogh, former slave turned Liberian colonist, was pro-colonization at a time when many free people of color, especially outspoken abolitionist Frederick Douglass, opposed the practice.

John McDonogh was heavily influenced by his parent's example, and the values they taught their son when he was a child remained with him throughout his life.

McDonogh was born on December 29, 1779 in Baltimore, Maryland, into a family of twelve children. He was the eldest son and sixth child of parents John McDonogh, Sr. and

Elizabeth Wilkins. McDonogh was raised in a strict, Protestant home, the influence of which manifested itself later in his life, especially in his treatment of orphans and slaves. McDonogh's father "strove to rear his children in the fear and love of the Most High" while his mother educated her children early on "to bend the knee and to love and worship the Almighty." The senior McDonogh was acquainted with George Washington, having served under him as a soldier in the Braddock expedition in 1755 and later in the Revolutionary War. According to McDonogh, George Washington "never visited Baltimore" without contacting his father. McDonogh later followed in his father's footsteps, serving under future president Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812.<sup>14</sup>

On December 9, 1795, days before his sixteenth birthday, McDonogh was indentured for five years as an apprentice to merchant William Taylor. Taylor's trade network included the West Indies, Spanish America, and Europe while Taylor's brother, John, operated his own affiliated London-based merchant house. Because of this connection to England, McDonogh travelled to London and was exposed to both domestic and international trade at the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1800, Taylor expanded his merchant business to Louisiana and sent McDonogh to New Orleans where the twenty-year-old became a Spanish citizen. In a few years' time, McDonogh witnessed the city transition from Spanish to French and finally to American rule in 1803 with the Louisiana Purchase.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Childs, *John McDonogh*, pp. 2-3; Ciravolo, *The Legacy of John McDonogh*, p. 1; Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> Childs, *John McDonogh*, pp. 4-5; Allan, *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, 8; Atherton, "McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," pp. 457-458. Atherton placed the date of McDonogh's journey to London as the summer of 1800 as based on an article in the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* dated August 10,

McDonogh's connection to, and financial support from, William Taylor proved beneficial during his first decade in New Orleans. In 1801, he began a brief trade partnership with W.O. Payne, who, like McDonogh, had been apprenticed to Taylor. When this partnership dissolved the following year, a third Taylor protégé, Rezin D. Shepherd, joined McDonogh in New Orleans. In the fall of 1802, McDonogh partnered with another merchant, Shepherd Brown, to create J. McDonogh, Jr. & Co. and Shepherd Brown & Co. While the partnership of McDonogh and Payne was brief, McDonogh continued his business ventures with Shepherd Brown in varying capacities for years. Throughout his merchant career, McDonogh and his partners imported dry goods, oil and lead, perishables such as groceries, and luxury items like wines and clothing. Their exports included sugar, molasses, indigo, and cotton. Late in 1804, McDonogh broke away from William Taylor due to disagreements over sugar exports from New Orleans. McDonogh operated in the merchant trade consistently until about 1806, at which point he partially abandoned it to engage in land speculation, an endeavor that proved much more lucrative.<sup>16</sup>

The city of New Orleans in the first half of the nineteenth century was a complex, hybrid place unlike any other in the United States. A strong French heritage with traces of a brief Spanish period and a legacy of West African influence characterized the city since its founding. Far from homogenous, the residents of New Orleans came from a variety of

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1873. Allan, in *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, referenced the same *Daily Picayune* article in footnote one on pages 12-13.

<sup>16</sup> Ciravolo, *The Legacy of John McDonogh*, 1; Atherton, "McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," pp. 459-460, 464-465, 468, 474-481.



backgrounds and experiences, which resulted in an intermixed, blended society that found no match anywhere else in America.

Like the other southern states, Louisiana was a slave state. New Orleans featured one of the largest slave markets in the country, and many plantation owners in the state regularly traveled to the slave market to increase their workforce. New Orleans society, however, was one in which free, indentured, and enslaved residents of all backgrounds worked alongside one another to sustain the economy. During the Spanish Louisiana period from 1763-1800, a liberal legal policy toward the enslaved resulted in a growing population of free people of color because self-manumission was much easier under the Spanish Crown. Consequently, nineteenth-century New Orleans featured a blended society in which status—i.e. free, indentured, and enslaved—often transcended race—European, African, or often a mixture of the two.

When the United States acquired the Louisiana territory in 1803, the lax Spanish policy that fostered manumissions was quickly curtailed. Nevertheless, the demographic of New Orleans' population was permanently changed. As a result of the Spanish Louisiana period, people like Andrew Durnford, a mixed-race sugar planter on the outskirts of New Orleans, owned numerous slaves—a rare find in most southern societies. John McDonogh, a white slaveowner and land speculator, was his closest business associate. The two men—one a white slaveowner and the other a black slaveowner—held a mutual respect for each other and functioned on relatively equal terms in New Orleans society, but not often outside of that area. When Durnford took a

trip to Richmond, Virginia to purchase slaves, for instance, he was treated in a prejudicial manner as slave auctioneers were often reluctant to sell slaves to a free black man.

In the early to mid-nineteenth century, the state of Louisiana explicitly enforced a series of slave laws known as Black Codes that expressly denied civil rights to those held in bondage and severely restricted their actions. During French Louisiana, these laws were known as the *Code Noir*, during Spanish Louisiana, *Las Siete Partidas*, and after the United States purchased Louisiana, they were rewritten and became known as the Black Codes. Among the multitude of laws passed, many were restrictive. Slaves were barred from providing court testimony, and the *gens de couleur libre* were instructed never to “presume to conceive themselves equal to the white” and relegated to a legal position inferior to that of their white counterparts. Other laws, however, were more favorable to the enslaved. For instance, slaves were allowed “the free enjoyment of Sundays” unless they should take up extra wage labor that day.<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of which government controlled Louisiana, the slave codes enacted at any time were modeled on centuries-old Roman slave laws. One feature of Roman slave law was the ability of slaves to earn and administer a *peculium*—a monetary fund for a

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<sup>17</sup> Acts Passed at the First Session of the First Legislature of the Territory of Orleans, January 25, 1806, Chapter 23, Black Code, Sec. 16, “Slaves shall not be parties to civil matters—nor witnesses against white people,” p. 138, Sec. 40, “Penalty for people of color not paying due respect to the whites,” pp. 188, 190; Sec. 1, “Slaves to have the enjoyment of Sundays, & be paid when they work on that day,” p. 150, HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.35112203962842;view=1up;seq=162>. In place of *Las Siete Partidas*, Judith Kelleher Schafer referenced the *Código Negro*. Other historians, like Lawrence N. Powell, compared the French *Code Noir* to the Spanish *Las Siete Partidas*. For the purposes of this paper, *Las Siete Partidas* are referenced for the slave codes during Spanish Louisiana. See Judith Kelleher Schafer’s “Roman Roots of the Louisiana Law of Slavery: Emancipation in American Louisiana, 1803-1857” in *Louisiana Law Review* 56, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 409-422 and Powell’s *The Accidental City*, pp. 225-226, 274, 281.

slave allowed by their slaveowner. Slaves, through extra labor outside of the amount owed to their master, could earn supplementary income to be placed toward purchasing their freedom. The *peculium* feature was integrated into the Project of the Civil Code of Louisiana of 1825 (Civil Code of 1825). That same year, John McDonogh presented to his slaves his unique proposition for their self-emancipation, which included his keeping track of their theoretical and earned wages accrued outside of their labor time owed to him—much like a *peculium*. There was, however, a bolstering of the emancipation restrictions under the Civil Code of 1825. The number of articles concerning emancipating a slave increased from three in the Black Codes of 1808 to ten in the Civil Code of 1825. One article required former slaveowners to be financially responsible for the support of their former slaves should they become destitute after being freed. Restrictions such as this meant that—with the exception of McDonogh—the practice of *peculium* was not readily adopted by Louisiana slaveowners. None of these restrictive legal codes, however, prevented John McDonogh from executing his vision of self-emancipation for his slaves. When the Louisiana state legislature criminalized educating a slave in 1830—and after he first requested permission for an exception to educate his slaves—McDonogh began providing them an illicit evangelical education on his plantation.<sup>18</sup>

Although the Spanish Empire in Louisiana was brief, lasting from 1763 to 1800, its laws and governance had a lasting effect on the demographic makeup of New Orleans. McDonogh arrived in New Orleans in the last year of the Spanish Crown's rule over

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<sup>18</sup> Schafer, "Roman Roots of the Louisiana Law of Slavery," pp. 411-412, 415-417.

Louisiana. His knowledge of Spanish law and government likely influenced his later decision to create a system by which his slaves could purchase their freedom through their own labor. Prior to Spanish rule in Louisiana—when the territory was under French control—the *Code Noir* was the set of slave laws enforced in New Orleans, which strengthened slave owners’ power through state-sanctioned law. Spanish officials, in contrast, were known for their more liberal legal treatment of slaves compared to their French counterparts. In Spanish Louisiana, the *Code Noir* was replaced by *Las Siete Partidas*, a more relaxed, Spanish-equivalent of the French slave codes. Under Spanish law, slaves held more autonomy as they were not considered to be in perpetual bondage as was the case under French law (unless slaves were voluntarily manumitted by their master). Hence, in Spanish Louisiana *coartación* (“self-purchase”) was a legal means by which slaves were able to negotiate with their owners/masters for their (or a family member’s) freedom, and masters were legally obligated to enter into negotiations with their slaves. A fixed price was mutually agreed upon, and slaves were able to earn wages to pay for the cost of their freedom over a period of time. Installment payments were even an option under *coartación*, although in New Orleans it was more common for slaves to pay for their freedom in full. After New Orleans suffered a decimated population in the aftermath of the Good Friday fire in 1788, when labor demands reached a critical level due to a mass exodus of residents, this Spanish legal process guaranteed the rise of the *gens de couleur libre* population in the city. The self-purchase trend continued into the early nineteenth-century. In the three years prior to the Louisiana Purchase—when the territory’s government shifted from the Spanish crown to a second

brief French reign—seventy-five percent of all manumission papers granted were the result of *coartación*.<sup>19</sup>

During Spanish Louisiana, New Orleans was the site of an emergence of what historian Lawrence N. Powell referred to as a “tripartite racial order.” The Spanish referred to it as the *sistema de castas* (system of caste). The three-tiered caste system was a result of a variety of factors. Although the Spanish Empire was in part powered by slavery, the Spanish Crown allowed slaves to exercise the right of *coartación*. This feature of the Spanish government gave rise to a significant population of former slaves who paid for their own freedom. Many of these former slaves, likewise, were the product of relations between the white planter class and the black slave class. The children of these unions were known as free people of color. Consequently, a three-tiered racial system emerged that represented the white planter class thriving on top, the *gens de couleur libre* encompassing the middle rung, and the black slaves barely surviving at the bottom. A phenomenon unique to New Orleans, this melding of the races resulted in the “one-drop rule” around the beginning of the nineteenth century. The “one-drop rule” reflected the notion that if a person had any trace of African ancestry, regardless of their proportion of white ancestry and often despite their phenotypical appearance, that person was considered “black.” Legally speaking, this was not always enforced to the extent that

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<sup>19</sup> Powell, *The Accidental City*, pp. 198-199, 225-226, 277-313ff, 406. According to Powell, in the aftermath of the Good Friday fire in 1788, New Orleans’ population—which was just over 5,000 people—declined, not because of a loss of life (only one person died), but rather due to slaves being sent to other plantations, transient workers moving on to other cities, and long-time white residents packing up their bags temporarily or for good. Furthermore, Powell detailed how not all slaves partook in the *coartación* feature offered by the Spanish government. Skilled artisan slaves sometimes purchased *bozales* (native African slaves) to serve as their replacements. Once the *bozale* learned the craft of the artisan slave, the latter was able to liberate their self.

Jim Crow laws were at the end of the nineteenth century. As the “in-betweens,” free people of color were often polarized: identification with the white class meant elevated status at the expense of abandoning African identity. Likewise, identifying with blacks in the lower ranks of New Orleans could hinder societal advancement.<sup>20</sup>

Shortly after he moved to New Orleans, McDonogh penned a personal set of commandments for how he conducted the remainder of his life. The rules were heavily influenced by his Presbyterian upbringing and strong work ethic. Titled, “Rules for the Guidance of my Life in 1804,” the list consisted of religious, ethical, financial, and practical commands. The astute businessman and future benefactor instructed himself to “Study in the course of your life to do the greatest possible amount of good.” McDonogh adhered to his own advice of promoting goodwill in the form of education. He sponsored the schooling of family members, orphans, his godson, and two slaves. McDonogh further wrote, “Time is gold: throw not one minute away, but place each one to account.” The slaveowner, quite literally, calculated the value of his slaves’ time before he presented them with his offer of conditional freedom. Another instruction read, “Never spend but to produce.” In the emancipation plan presented to his slaves, McDonogh calculated their time owed to him by how many years it would take the slaves to repay McDonogh’s cost in purchasing them plus their replacements. Always conscientious of

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<sup>20</sup> Powell, *The Accidental City*, pp. 292-293, 295. Although the *sistema de castas* included categories for those of Native American descent, these groups (aside from *mestizos*) were virtually erased from the baptismal and marriage records of Spanish New Orleans. As Powell noted, Native Americans in the American South were often scattered and not concentrated. They differed from the natives of Mexico and Peru that the Spanish encountered, who populated the highland regions in concentrated groupings.

his earnings, McDonogh secured a profit to advance his interest in free public education via his slaves' freedom.<sup>21</sup>

Although military service interrupted his quest for land holdings, McDonogh was still remarkably successful. Like his father, McDonogh enlisted as a soldier under a prominent military leader and future president. He was a member of the Beale's Rifles regiment during the War of 1812 and served under Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans from December 1814 to January 1815. In 1813, just before his enlistment, McDonogh purchased the Monplaisir Plantation, located on the West Bank of the Mississippi River opposite the city of New Orleans. He subdivided the property and sold lots to *gens de couleur libre*. McDonogh also offered long-term leases to the poor at low rental prices—evidence that he extended his benevolence to contemporaries and did not reserve it strictly for posterity—before leaving the city of New Orleans to live on the plantation with his slaves. The area surrounding McDonogh's plantation residence became known as McDonoghville. Included among the land lots and McDonogh's plantation was McDonoghville Cemetery, a public burial space reserved for McDonogh's slaves, those who could not afford a proper burial for their loved ones, and even a plot for McDonogh himself. McDonogh continued to gamble in land speculation because it consistently paid off: he accumulated a massive fortune in real estate, owning much of the land in and around New Orleans. McDonogh was rumored to have owned the most

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<sup>21</sup> McDonogh's "RULES FOR THE GUIDANCE OF MY LIFE IN 1804" are printed in both William Allan's *Life and Work of John McDonogh*, p. 22, and C. Leighton Ciravolo's *The Legacy of John McDonogh*, p. 56. These rules were inscribed on McDonogh's tomb in McDonoghville Cemetery as well.

land of any individual in America at the time, and some referred to him as “the first Andrew Carnegie” in the New World.<sup>22</sup>

McDonogh’s relationship with his slaves was not that of a typical slaveowner as often understood by the general public. The slaves who belonged to John McDonogh received an illicit education from their master. Although McDonogh was passionate about education, he viewed education and religion as one and the same. According to McDonogh, secular education produced contributing members of society. Likewise, religious education provided the foundation and framework within which educated persons exercised moral soundness—particularly in their societal roles. As early as 1802, he began financing the education of numerous family members, and he extended his generosity beyond his family to include orphaned children. Boys were educated in McDonogh’s home while girls attended a New Orleans convent school, the Roman Catholic Ursuline. McDonogh’s interest in education gradually went beyond his family and orphaned children to include his slaves as well. Although educating a slave was illegal in Louisiana under American rule, McDonogh petitioned the Louisiana Legislature for permission to educate his slaves. McDonogh’s request, however, was denied. He bypassed this legal obstacle by having a church built on the plantation grounds expressly for his slaves’ use. Either a neighboring slave, one of his own slaves, or McDonogh himself preached sermons to provide religious instruction to his slaves. The slaveowner, therefore, utilized the façade of religion to illicitly educate his slaves. Additionally, he

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<sup>22</sup> A.E. Winship, “New Orleans,” *Journal of Education* 71, no. 9 (March 1910): 230, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42808646>; Ciravolo, *The Legacy of John McDonogh*, pp. 3-4.



employed a teacher to educate slave children at his home, much in the same fashion as he did for the orphaned boys under his care. There were, however, restrictions imposed. If a slave was charged with or committed a crime, McDonogh had the offender “tried by their peers” where he summoned “a jury of five or six of the principal men.” After the offense was made known to the jury members, the slaves would hold court on the plantation where “the court room was the church,” the accused was tried, and the punishment decision given to McDonogh. “If twenty lashes were awarded,” according to McDonogh, he would reduce the sentence to “ten lashes, and a moral lecture to the culprit, for the offence.” Nevertheless, the slaveowner did send two slaves to the auction block for offences which he could not excuse. These slaves were “put up at public sale, (their offences declared and made known,) and sold.” Any wages they previously earned were distributed among the remaining slaves for “the benefit of the others in general.”<sup>23</sup>

Early in the 1840s, many if not all of McDonogh’s slaves were literate. In addition to a Biblical education, McDonogh instructed his slaves in various trades—like bricklaying and construction—and some assisted him in accounting and collected rental payments. McDonogh not only educated his slaves by religious means, but in 1838 he sent two of his slaves north to Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania for higher education. McDonogh paid for David Kearney McDonogh and Washington Watts McDonogh to earn college degrees. Their education, however, was conditional: once David and Washington completed their degrees, they were to immigrate to Liberia as a

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<sup>23</sup> “A Letter of John McDonogh, on African Colonization,” *The African Repository* 19 (February 1843): 51, 56-57.

part of the American Colonization Society's plan of repatriation for free and manumitted blacks. McDonogh was a high-standing and well-respected member of the ACS who contributed significant financial backing to the organization's mission, and his college-educated slaves were meant to serve as model citizens in Africa's first republic.<sup>24</sup>

The American Colonization Society was organized in 1817 by New Jersey Presbyterian minister Robert Finley, and it existed with a singular purpose: to "repatriate" the thousands of free blacks in America to West Africa. The offer of freedom was conditional: blacks could not remain in their native country but had to emigrate to their ancestral homeland in Africa. ACS leaders chose the region of West Africa because they assumed that free blacks from America would naturally feel "at home" with those of the same race. They viewed this goal as an antidote to the ill of slavery, an institution that weakened America's character and contradicted the very words in the Declaration of Independence.<sup>25</sup> Members came from privileged backgrounds, the most prominent being James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, and Henry Clay, among others. The first four presidents

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<sup>24</sup> Although no direct evidence exists during the time, the former slaves' later correspondence from Liberia demonstrated that many of them were literate. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that they learned to read and write between the time of the church being built on the plantation outside of New Orleans and their emigration to Liberia in 1842. Ciravolo stated that, although David Kearney McDonogh and Washington Watts McDonogh attended Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, in actuality they were instructed by faculty outside of the classroom. Most likely, the slaves were not allowed to attend regular classes alongside white students. Nevertheless, the author maintained that they each received the equivalent of a college degree. See Ciravolo, *The Legacy of John McDonogh*, pp. 3-4, 6; "A Letter of John McDonogh, on African Colonization," *The African Repository* 19 (February 1843): 56-57.

<sup>25</sup> For a twentieth-century interpretation, see Fox's *The American Colonization Society 1817-1840*. Fox claims that the success of the ACS should not be based on the numbers of blacks repatriated to Africa but rather in its "suppression of the slave trade...when it probably saved from transportation into slavery no fewer than twenty thousand native Africans a year," p. 11). The truth of the members' motivations is likely somewhere between these historical interpretations. Regardless of their intentions, ACS members sent the first colonists to Liberia in 1820. By 1861, however, emigration was largely halted due to the outbreak of the Civil War. In this peak forty-year period, approximately 12,000 blacks—over half of which were former slaves—left the United States with the hope of securing freedom in West Africa. See Bell I. Wiley, *Slaves No More*, p. 1.

of the ACS were slaveholders themselves (their combined tenures ranged from the organization's founding to around the beginning of the Civil War).<sup>26</sup> Initially, members of the Society solicited private donations to send agents to West Africa to explore the area and establish an American colony, hoping to demonstrate to the U.S. government the feasibility of their plan. When government officials read the reports that proved the climate and soil conditions were ideal for farming they sought further financial support. While not successful in persuading Congress to underwrite its entire program, the Society did receive \$100,000 to aid its efforts. With financial aid from the U.S. government secured, on December 15, 1821 the Society established the colony of Liberia on the West African coastline. While Liberia was not granted *official* recognition by the U.S. government, the capital city's name was Monrovia, a nod to the commander in chief's support for the Society's cause.<sup>27</sup>

There were also anti-slavery organizations whose members advocated more radical approaches. Often formed by white abolitionists who viewed the ACS' goal of

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<sup>26</sup> Fox, *The American Colonization Society 1817-1840*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>27</sup> Timothy F. Reilly, "The Louisiana Colonization Society and the Protestant Missionary, 1830-1860," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 43, no. 4 (2002): 433-34; Philip John Staudenraus, "The History of the American Colonization Society," pp. 26, 37-38, 41, 44, 61-68ff, 84; J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), pp. 3-5; F.W.H. Migeod, "A View of the Colony of Sierra Leone," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 25, no. 97 (1925): 1, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40759642>. Congress approved Mercer's bill, considered "an act in addition to the acts prohibiting the Slave Trade" that granted President Monroe power to "make such regulations and arrangements, as he may deem expedient, for the safeguarding, support and removal" of blacks in the United States. The bill also allowed President Monroe to establish a government entity in West Africa. Congress appropriated \$100,000 to accomplish these means. Mercer's bill never mentioned the term "colonization." When President Monroe presented the bill to his Cabinet, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams objected, stating that that Slave Trade Act did not allow the President to purchase land in Africa to "build and own colonies." Adams deemed these powers too loose of an interpretation of the executive's rights, and the Cabinet agreed. Accepting their disapproval, Monroe told the American Colonization Society that he would not be able to establish a colony as recognized by the U.S., but he would be able to provide the society with the \$100,000 to assist in the initial purchase of land, construction tools, farm implements, and other projects to ensure viability.

repatriation as inherently flawed, these groups existed to destroy the colonization efforts of the ACS and to promote their black freedom agenda. The most well known of these groups was the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS). The Society was founded in the early 1830s by radical abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. Members of the AASS promoted staunch abolitionist beliefs, urged immediate emancipation, and criticized colonization schemes. Despite vocal opponents like Garrison and Douglass, the ACS forged ahead with its plan of colonizing the western coast of Africa with repatriated black Americans.<sup>28</sup>

Despite McDonogh's support, the ACS faced many critics. The strongest objections came from southern slaveholders. Although careful to avoid the term "emancipation" in its promotion, the Society faced serious opposition from members of the planter class, who viewed the Society's repatriation plan as the first stepping stone along the path toward abolishing slavery—an act that would prove devastating to their livelihoods. To pacify their worries, the ACS leadership emphasized how the systematic removal of free blacks would in fact *secure* slave property by extinguishing an incendiary population, thereby preserving the institution vital to the southern economy. McDonogh did not promote abolitionism, because he believed that deep-seated racial prejudices prevented blacks from living on equal terms with whites if granted freedom and citizenship in America. African colonization, therefore, ensured that blacks could thrive in their own separate republic where they would be free from racial discriminations.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815 -1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 425-426, 646.

<sup>29</sup> Staudenraus, "The History of the American Colonization Society," pp. 37-38; Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege*, Map of Liberia, pp. xvii, 1-5.

To illustrate further the complexities of the issue, free blacks were divided over the colonization question. In 1817 in Richmond, Virginia, free people of color organized to express their opinions on the subject of African colonization. While supporting the notion of colonization and believing it to be a benefit, their preference was to settle a colony “in the remotest corner of the land of their nativity,” possibly on the Missouri River, lower Louisiana, the Pacific Northwest, or any other area deemed suitable by the U.S. government. In 1826 in Baltimore, a group called the Negroes of Maryland organized a series of meetings in which they made known their support for African colonization. The group viewed themselves as strangers in their own country and believed that deep prejudicial treatment would prevent them from ever living as equals in a white-dominated society. But other free blacks were not as supportive. In Philadelphia, free black community leaders congregated at Bethel Church to encourage others to denounce the Society’s plan. Africa was not home, but America was, and they would “never separate... voluntarily from the slave population of this country.”<sup>30</sup>

Those who supported African colonization, like McDonogh, did so for various reasons. Some believed the removal of the opposite race to be *necessary* to avoid internal conflict. Others saw it as an opportunity to spread the Gospel, to repay a “moral debt” for enslaving Africa’s people, and to return to Africa “her kidnapped children.” But Africa was much more than a new land for zealous Christian missionaries. From an enterprising perspective, Africa was a commercial prospect whose resources were waiting to be

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<sup>30</sup> Louis R. Mehlinger, “Attitude of the Free Negro Toward African Colonization,” *The Journal of Negro History* 1, no. 3 (June 1916): 276-279; Staudenraus, “The History of the American Colonization Society,” pp. 5, 41-42 44; Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege*, p. 1.

tapped. The British colony of Sierra Leone had already proven this to be true, and if America established a colony on the West African coast, it could do the same. Trade and commercial profits would “more than compensate for every expense” the ACS could anticipate.<sup>31</sup>

The history of African colonization is even more complex. Before the establishment of Liberia, one of the earliest attempts by an American to colonize West Africa began in 1808 with Paul Cuffee. A half black, half Native American Massachusetts Quaker, Cuffee was a wealthy ship captain and possibly the richest black man in America at the beginning of the nineteenth century. His colonizing endeavors and social status were similar to that of Cresson and McDonogh. Cuffee promoted African colonization with the hopes of receiving merchant trading privileges at Sierra Leone—a colony of the British government. After communicating with officials from the African Institution, travelling to England, visiting Sierra Leone, and securing a trading permit from the British government, Cuffee returned to the United States to promote African colonization among the free black population. Although he anticipated making annual trips to Sierra Leone, the War of 1812 interrupted Cuffee’s plans when the U.S. Congress deemed his merchant and emigration endeavors—which involved a British colony belonging to the wartime enemy—to be inappropriate. Cuffee, therefore, was forced to wait until the war’s end, but in 1816 he brought thirty-eight black emigrants from America to Freetown, Sierra Leone. Cuffee’s attempts to aid in British colonization in

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<sup>31</sup> Reilly, “Louisiana Colonization Society and the Protestant Missionary, 1830-1860,” p. 433; Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 541; Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege*, Map of Liberia, pp. xvii, 1-5; Staudenraus, “The History of the American Colonization Society,” pp. 26-28.

Africa and capitalize on trading profits there proved fruitless. The ambitious merchant's promise of trading privileges in the colony expired with the peace treaty signed between America and Great Britain, and in September 1817 Cuffee died. From then on, the African colonization movement in the United States was led by a handful of the country's elite white men.<sup>32</sup>

While McDonogh's "experiment in self-emancipation" was unique among southern planters, the idea itself was not. The northern merchant-turned-southern planter arrived in New Orleans in 1800. McDonogh was likely influenced by the last vestiges of Spanish rule in Louisiana, particularly the *coartación* policy regarding slaves. McDonogh's proposition to his slaves, however, differed from the Spanish law in its secrecy: his slaves were not to say a word or else risk the loss of their freedom. With the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the autonomy slaves enjoyed under Spanish rule was drastically reduced in the transfer of Louisiana to the United States. Despite the tightening of laws, John McDonogh persisted in granting his slaves a degree of autonomy similar to what Spanish Louisiana had offered.

John McDonogh's repatriation plan initially began as a way to prevent his slaves from working on Sundays. As was common on many southern plantations, slaves could work on their day off—typically Sunday—to earn extra wages to purchase items not provided by their owners. McDonogh abhorred such a practice by his slaves because, as a

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<sup>32</sup> Cuffee's father was Kofi (or Cuffe) Slocum, an African man of Akan descent, and his mother was Ruth Moses Slocum, a woman of Wampanoag descent. For more details about Paul Cuffee's life, see James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic, 1760-1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 11; Philip John Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 9-11.

devout Christian, he reserved Sunday as the day of rest in accordance with Protestant Christian tradition. McDonogh realized that because his slaves did not have the income to purchase extra necessities not provided by him that they *had* to work on their only day off. Their condition as slaves, therefore, was much to blame. In 1822, McDonogh presented to his slaves a proposal that set him apart from the rest of the Southern planter class. He offered them “the one-half of Saturday (say Saturday from mid-day until night,) to labor for themselves,” as he put it, and earn wages. Should a slave violate the arrangement by working on Sunday instead of Saturday evening, the offender would be punished and sold to another master. In the summer, McDonogh paid his male slaves sixty-two and a half cents per day, females fifty cents. During the winter, when the days were shorter, the men earned fifty cents per day, the females thirty-seven and a half cents, “and the large boys and girls in proportion.”<sup>33</sup>

To John McDonogh, freedom had a calculable, defined price. By 1825 the slaves had accrued capital, which spawned an idea in the self-made businessman. McDonogh began “to calculate in what length of time... they would be enabled to purchase the remaining 5 ½ days of the week.” He theorized that slaves could gradually “purchase” their days of the week and, consequently, as he saw it, “freedom for themselves and children.” The children’s increasing value as they grew plus any child born after the start of McDonogh’s emancipation plan was not factored into the cost of the slaves’ freedom—this served “as a counterbalance to an interest account.” Creating and employing an empirical formula, McDonogh approximated that it would take his slaves

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<sup>33</sup> McDonogh, “Letter of John McDonogh on African Colonization,” pp. 4-5.



about fifteen years to earn their liberation. One Sunday after church service concluded, he presented his plan to a select group of men and women, those most admired by the slaves, and explained his rationale. All would have to agree to the contract—a significant stipulation—for it to be enacted. Not a single person objected, and thus the “successful experiment” in self-emancipation began.<sup>34</sup>

McDonogh kept an account of the slaves’ earnings and ensured that their arrangement would be honored in the event of his death. He charged them “at fair and reasonable prices,” for the cost of their replacements, such as \$600 for every man, \$450 for every woman, “and the boys, girls and children in proportion.” Ever the entrepreneur and promoter of colonization, McDonogh believed that Louisiana slaveholders could follow his example “every fifteen years, without the cost of a dollar to themselves.” Since the slaves were McDonogh’s legal property, their wages earned were hypothetical at best. John McDonogh, therefore, was in no way bound by law to honor any such arrangement. Nevertheless, McDonogh made provisions in his will so that, should he die before the completion of his slaves’ service term, the Executors of his will were to temporarily sell the slaves as servants to complete their remaining contract time. Once the slaves’ contract was completed in full, the slaves (and their children) were guaranteed

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<sup>34</sup> John McDonogh, “Letter of John McDonogh on African Colonization,” p. 5; “A Letter of John McDonogh, on African Colonization,” *The African Repository* 19 (February 1843): 51, 56; John McDonogh, “Self-Emancipation: A Successful Experiment on a Large Plantation in Louisiana,” *Colonization Journal* (Tract No. 10, February 1862), p. 1. In 1843, McDonogh claimed that his first emancipation plan for his slaves in 1825 was not the best approach. Upon reflection, McDonogh was “convinced... that the plan I did pursue, was the correct and honest one, but now... I see, and am convinced it was not); that of selling to them one day at a time out of each week.” In his latter formulation, he calculated that his slaves could have earned their freedom and their children’s freedom in a span of anywhere from six to twelve years as opposed to his original plan which required fifteen years of servitude. See the section titled “Mr. McDonogh’s Letter” in *The African Repository* 19 (November 1843): 344-348.

passage to Liberia and, consequently, granted their freedom as McDonogh originally promised.<sup>35</sup>

Although he lived on a plantation with slaves, McDonogh believed in the physical separation of free blacks and whites. His proposition presented to his slaves distinctly called for them to be sent to Liberia as freemen once their labor contract was completed, not to remain in the United States. McDonogh “would never consent to give freedom to a single individual” among his slaves “to remain on the same soil with the white man.” Regarding colonization in Liberia, McDonogh believed that “every section of our country, North and South, slaveholder, non slaveholder, and man of every creed” should support the ACS and its mission to “repatriate” the thousands of free and manumitted blacks to their ancestral homeland in West Africa. McDonogh believed “the separation (and consequent preservation) of the two races of men” was the only route to avoid the destruction of both, and he held ambitious ideas how to accomplish such a daunting task. McDonogh advocated helping blacks by “carrying with them the Arts, Civilization, and Christianity” of their white benefactors to Africa. He did so, however, from his conviction that repatriation was “the most glorious return we can make them for the injustice we have inflicted on their race.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> John McDonogh, “Letter of John McDonogh on African Colonization,” pp. 1-26ff; McDonogh, “Self-Emancipation: A Successful Experiment on a Large Plantation in Louisiana,” *Colonization Journal*, pp. 1-7ff; Ciravolo, *The Legacy of John McDonogh*, p. 5. In his footnotes, Ciravolo noted that the plan did not include house servants, who would be freed upon McDonogh’s death.

<sup>36</sup> McDonogh, “Letter of John McDonogh on African Colonization,” p. 7; John McDonogh to Robert S. Finley, June 9, 1847, MPTA; John McDonogh to Finley, June 15, 1847, MPTA; John McDonogh to John W. S. Napier, October 30, 1848, MPTA.

John McDonogh was an anomaly among southern men. The slaveowner provided a college education to two of his slaves, Washington Watts McDonogh and David Kearney McDonogh. The slaveowner's educational assistance was conditional, however, and McDonogh had a specific motive for his charity: David and Washington were educated on the agreement that David studied medicine to become a doctor and Washington studied religion to become a minister. Essentially, one was to heal bodies and the other to save souls. Once they were "repatriated" to Liberia, the former slaves were to become contributing members of an independent colony in West Africa. Washington would be the only one to make the voyage. Much to McDonogh's disapproval, David refused to join Washington in Liberia and instead relocated to New York where he built a successful career as a doctor. McDonogh did not force him to return to New Orleans despite his technical status as his slave. By not seeking David's return, McDonogh unofficially granted him freedom.<sup>37</sup>

McDonogh seized every opportunity to preach the benefits of colonization. In 1842—once his first group of former slaves were sent to Liberia to colonize the fledgling West African republic—McDonogh published his story in the *New Orleans Bulletin*. His twenty-six page letter promoted African colonization and detailed the nature of his contractual agreement with his slaves over the course of seventeen years before their journey to Liberia. McDonogh's letter reached a wide audience, including a few other

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<sup>37</sup> "Auxiliary Societies—Young Men's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania," *The African Repository* 12 (April 1836): 125-126; "Auxiliary Societies—Louisiana Colonization Society," *The African Repository* 12 (June 1836): 192-193; "Education in Africa—American Society for the Promotion of Education in Africa," *The African Repository* 13 (June 1837): 196-197; John H.B. Latrobe to John McDonogh, March 19, 1835, MPTA; "Annual Proceedings—Officers and Managers for the ensuing year," *The African Repository*, 11 (February 1835): 51.

southern planters interested in applying his emancipation method on their own plantations. In his correspondence to abolitionists and those interested in his repatriation scheme, he cited the positive declarations in numerous letters from his former slaves as proof of their satisfaction in their new roles as Liberian colonists. McDonogh wrote of their “want of nothing, having every thing that they stand in need of, in the greatest abundance, that the country is one of the finest on Earth, the soil exuberantly rich, and climate fine, for the Black man.” McDonogh painted the most positive image of his former slaves’ experience in their new country, rarely including their struggles to cultivate crops, survive disease, and obtain material necessities.<sup>38</sup>

To broaden his audience further, McDonogh published some of the letters from his former slaves in the *African Repository*, the monthly journal of the ACS. To prove authenticity, McDonogh stated that the colonists’ letters were “written by themselves, for many of them write, and write well—some of them having been my clerks” in New Orleans. The boasting about his slaves’ literacy may indicate that McDonogh viewed himself above the law, since teaching a slave to read or write was in direct violation of the Black Codes in Louisiana. Perhaps McDonogh pushed the legal boundaries because he believed that his wealth would insulate him from punishment. Additionally, McDonogh was not shy about taking others to court, so he may have used his popularity to flaunt his actions, intimidate the public, and dare his foes to challenge his actions. McDonogh received the letters via “New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, London, &c.,” therefore “the postmarks of those different cities” also attested to their legitimacy. He

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<sup>38</sup> McDonogh to Napier, October 30, 1848, MPTA.

believed the colonists' own words "would have a better effect, and carry a conviction to the minds of men, stronger than anything" he could ever say. As a less wealthy free man of color, Durnford likely would not have behaved in the same way as did McDonogh and escaped any repercussions.<sup>39</sup>

Not all, however, agreed with McDonogh's approach. McDonogh was publicly criticized in the *New Orleans Commercial Bulletin* for sending away people of "good, orderly and moral character, and qualities as mechanics of various trades" leaving the city to suffer from "a public loss in having them sent away." The author of the newspaper article asked whether the slaves "would have been more happy to have been freed and left here" in New Orleans and whether McDonogh himself was against slavery. McDonogh responded by stating that he was "not opposed to it" (slavery) as he had "sent away but a part of [his] black people." Nevertheless, McDonogh was quick not to incriminate himself, slyly acknowledging to the critic that he *did not free* any of his slaves—"so long therefore, as they remain on board the ship which transported them, they remain in slavery; but the instant their feet touch the soil of their father-land... they are free as the air they breathe."<sup>40</sup> Not everyone, however, could engage in these practices as freely as McDonogh.

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<sup>39</sup> John McDonogh to Rev. R.S. Finley, June 9, 1847, "John McDonogh's People No. 1," *The African Repository* 23 (September 1847): 259-260.

<sup>40</sup> "Departure of Emigrants—Departure of the Mariposa," *The African Repository* vol. 18 (July 1842): 234-235. Hathitrust Digital Library. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/004565311>.

### ***Chapter 3:***

## **Andrew Durnford: Free Person of Color and Louisiana Planter**

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Even though McDonogh wrote about his belief in the separation of the white and black races, in reality his closest business associate and friend was Andrew Durnford, a black Louisiana sugar planter and slaveowner. Unlike McDonogh, Durnford did not share his friend's zeal for African colonization. Instead, he seemed indifferent if not directly opposed to such ideas, and he did not offer his slaves emancipation opportunities like McDonogh. Nevertheless, the two men conducted business affairs and remained friends for decades.

McDonogh had a longstanding relationship with the Durnford family. Thomas Durnford established a lasting business connection with John McDonogh that, after his death, continued with his son, Andrew. In 1776, Thomas Durnford moved from Ringwood, England to North America, eventually settling in New Orleans sometime around 1800. During this time, Spanish Louisiana fostered a liberal legal system for the enslaved, which resulted in a growing population of free people of color at the end of the eighteenth century. Slave women, who dominated the gendered New Orleans labor market, purchased their liberation more often than slave men. They were able to provide food, personal, and domestic services, which translated into faster-growing savings accounts, hence approximately twice as many enslaved women purchased their freedom as did their male counterparts.

Consequently, a population of *femmes de couleur libres* (free women of color) came of age at the end of the eighteenth century, and many were searching for husbands in a society lacking an equal supply of free men of color. Numerous free women of color, therefore, sought the companionship of white bachelor men—partly out of sheer availability and partly because of the economic security white men offered in a racially segmented, tripartite society. The resulting caste hierarchy in New Orleans produced a system of arranged, institutionalized connections, opportunities mainly for women of color to form relationships with white men of some financial means. These women were known as *placées* and were typically educated since they came from privileged backgrounds. Thomas Durnford married Rosaline Mercier, a free woman of color who was a *placée*. In 1800, the couple had a son, Andrew, who became one of the few free men of color to own a successful plantation and a large number of slaves. Since his mother was a free woman of color and his father a white man, Durnford never knew a life of bondage despite his African ancestry..<sup>41</sup>

As a slaveowner, Andrew Durnford identified with the white planter class despite being a free man of color. Alignment with the governing white class was both a way to improve his economic station (or the next generation's) and was relatively easily done. The period of Spanish rule in Louisiana—featuring its liberal rules for a slave purchasing

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<sup>41</sup> Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, pp. 4-7. According to Whitten, census records show Andrew Durnford's birth as 1800 in New Orleans. Powell, *The Accidental City*, pp. 274, 284-287. Powell noted that in addition to the food, personal, and domestic services by which enslaved women earned wages to purchase their liberation, a significant number (over 40 percent of manumitted slaves between 1771-1803) were freed out of *gracias*, or gratitude for their service(s) to their master. These services were undoubtedly of an intimate, emotional variety that resulted from cohabitation between free women of color and white men, who were forbidden to marry under the Code Noir of 1724. Similarly, the Spanish *cédula* of 1789 forbid interracial cohabitation.

their freedom—gave rise to the *gens de couleur libre*. New Orleans’ free people of color often capitalized on a traditional feature of Spanish culture, *compadrazgo* (godparenthood), as a means of vertically climbing the social ladder. Generally, the person in a lower social position bestowed the honor of godparent on a person on a higher social rung. Slaves typically assigned their masters or a free person of color the role of godparent. The more successful the biological parents were, however, the more elevated the status of the godparent. In the case of Andrew Durnford, this honorary naming of “fictive kin” continued beyond the period of Spanish Louisiana and was still practiced in New Orleans well into the nineteenth century. Durnford, himself a successful free man of color and slaveowner, aligned himself with McDonogh, a white elite rumored to own the most land of any individual in America. Durnford named his eldest son, Thomas McDonogh Durnford, after his business partner and chose McDonogh to be Thomas’s godfather.<sup>42</sup>

At the same moment that New Orleans experienced a shift in its demography, the city also experienced a demand for sugar cultivation. Louisiana previously depended on tobacco and indigo production to support much of its economy. By the 1790s, sugar became available to the masses in Europe—in France, in particular—and was no longer considered a luxury item strictly consumed by the elite. Simultaneously, the French Revolutionary spirit made its way to Haiti where a majority-slave population, led by Toussaint L’Ouverture, successfully revolted. The result was the first black republic. Haiti had previously satisfied much of France’s demand for sugar cane, but with its

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<sup>42</sup> Powell, *The Accidental City*, pp. 297-298.



independence came the loss of sugar production. With the demand for sugar still high in Europe, New Orleanians seized the opportunity to capitalize on a new cash crop and further exploit slave labor—thus the transition to sugar cane production. As a free person of color and sugar planter located on the outskirts of New Orleans, Durnford was a product of the governmental, demographic, and economic changes in New Orleans at the close of the Spanish period and at the beginning of American rule.<sup>43</sup>

For over thirty years Durnford operated St. Rosalie, a sugar plantation located about thirty miles to the south of New Orleans that he and his slaves built from scratch. Growing large-scale crops is no easy task. To undertake cultivating sugar cane on a massive plantation-scale in an environment with less than perfect conditions is even harder. Louisiana was such a place. Unlike the Caribbean islands where sugar cane grows year-round and thrives until cut, Louisiana's climate challenged sugar planters in ways that those in Haiti never faced. With a nine-month growing season and periodic frosts that threatened the crop, growing sugar cane in southern Louisiana required a delicate balance of letting the plants mature long enough to be productive yet harvesting before the frost hit and ruined an entire year's worth of work. Durnford complained about his "rascally Negroes" that tended to the numerous cast iron boiling kettles at St. Rosalie.<sup>44</sup> The black sugar planter was less than satisfied with his slaves' work ethic, so he threatened "them severely to get them to do their dutys [sic], but it will not happen again as I will get a man to be with them all the season. I cannot be everywhere apres tout."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Powell, *The Accidental City*, pp. 249, 258.

<sup>44</sup> Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, p. 64.

<sup>45</sup> Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, p. 64.

As a free man of color who profited from plantation slave labor, Durnford embodied a paradox in American slavery unique to Louisiana's blended cultural influences. Over time, Durnford showed little sympathy for his slaves' condition and no interest in their improvement via "self-emancipation" and colonization like his friend and business associate, McDonogh. As a free person of color, Durnford's status was elevated in New Orleans society and distinctly separate from that of a slave regardless of his African ancestry.<sup>46</sup>

Durnford sustained a relationship with McDonogh for nearly three decades. Durnford and McDonogh's frequent correspondence revealed not only a close business relationship but also a close personal one. McDonogh paid for Thomas' college education in Pennsylvania at the same institution that his two slaves attended, Lafayette College. Durnford held McDonogh in high regards—he was "the only man from whom" Durnford "would take a [s]colding." The correspondence between the New Orleans planters' revealed a relationship that balanced both business and personal matters.<sup>47</sup>

In 1835, Durnford was introduced to Elliott Cresson, a Pennsylvania Quaker and active member of the ACS. That year, Durnford left St. Rosalie plantation en route to Richmond, Virginia via Philadelphia. Once in Pennsylvania, he met Cresson thanks to McDonogh's connection to the well known abolitionist through various colonization societies. In fact, when Durnford and Cresson met, the latter was "very anxious to raise funds, for is colony," believing "that 10.000\$ will do more good know than it will in five

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<sup>46</sup> Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, pp. 15-17, 19, 64.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, November 10, 1835, MPTA.

years.” Durnford was no abolitionist, but at his closest business partner’s request he obliged McDonogh by meeting with Cresson. Although Durnford spoke highly of Cresson, stating that “he is all smartness, activity, gayity, a perfect gentleman,” the purpose of Durnford’s trip to Virginia was to purchase slaves—not to be converted on his detour to Philadelphia by Cresson’s abolitionist sympathies. When Durnford inquired whether he was married, Cresson retorted that “he had a Black wife and three thousand children.” Although Cresson was a vocal supporter of African colonization, he was unable to sway Durnford to his side. Nevertheless, the following Spring, Durnford wrote McDonogh in regards to a letter he was expecting from Cresson “on sugar planting in Liberia.” Despite their differences, Durnford and Cresson remained in contact for years afterwards, and the two probably met again at Durnford’s plantation outside of New Orleans. On May 5, 1840, Durnford noted in his journal that “Elliott Cresson left here for Mobile this day.”<sup>48</sup>

Even though Durnford did not adopt Cresson’s anti-slavery ways, the black slaveowner kept up with the Quaker’s progress in the abolitionist arena. Shortly after Cresson left the New Orleans area—one stop on his tour of the southern states in 1840—Durnford asked McDonogh whether Cresson delivered his speech that Sunday. Durnford emphasized that he was “interested in what he [Cresson] is doing and what he will be doing.” Despite their differences of opinion regarding slavery, Durnford was a friend and

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<sup>48</sup> Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, June 1, 1835, MPTA; Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, March 5, 1836, MPTA; Whitten, “Slave Buying in 1835 Virginia,” pp. 234-235; Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, p. 63. Whitten acknowledged that Durnford’s journal entry could either be referring to Cresson leaving St. Rosalie plantation en route to Mobile or instead leaving New Orleans for that same city. Whitten believed that Durnford was referring to the latter.

business partner to two men heavily involved in the abolition and colonization movements in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>49</sup>

As a southern black slaveowner traveling in Virginia, Durnford's experience was unusual. During his few months' absence in 1835, Durnford sent McDonogh correspondence that revealed his encounters as a free black slaveowner purchasing chattel slaves in Virginia. The most striking revelation is Durnford's frustration with the slave-buying process and his apathetic attitude toward enslaving his own race. Slave market prices in 1835, according to the Louisiana planter, were unusually high. As a *homme de couleur libre*, Durnford experienced prejudicial treatment in his attempts to purchase slaves, since "some of the farmers... don't like to sell to Negro traders butt will, to anybody that buys for their own use."<sup>50</sup>

If Durnford's slave-buying trip to Virginia suggested a lack of concern about enslaving his own race, then the free black planter's words solidified this stance. According to Durnford, this was "not the time to buy" since "people is higher, than it ever was known." Despite the high prices—and after about a month of negotiating slave sales in Richmond—Durnford purchased "twenty-five people of all description," spending a total of \$6876. He blamed the "Alabamians" for paying the high purchase prices for slaves, claiming their actions "spoiled the market" and thus slave prices were no longer in his favor. The Louisiana planter's trip to purchase slaves was apparently ill-timed: Durnford lamented how it was "only after the harvest that people may be got

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<sup>49</sup> Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, p. 63; Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, May 8, 1840, MPTA.

<sup>50</sup> Whitten, "Slave Buying in 1835 Virginia," p. 236; Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, June 10, 1835, MPTA.

cheaper,” and even then better prices were not guaranteed. Durnford referred to the people he purchased as “Blacks” and protested their ever-increasing prices. He complained how he “could have bought some cheaper but, they are what I call rotten people.” Durnford’s description of “rotten people” was either an indication that the human stock for sale in Virginia was sickly or a sign that their behavior was troublesome for the Louisiana planter. In the first instance, the slaves failed to meet Durnford’s health standards and were a gamble investment; in the latter scenario, the group’s purchase ran the risk of rebellion en route to Louisiana. Toward the end of his letter to McDonogh, Durnford referred to the previously mentioned people as “deseased,” so his mentioning of “rotten people” was likely an indication of the slaves’ poor health as opposed to their rebellious behavior.<sup>51</sup>

Durnford’s slave buying habits suggested that he preferred to purchase entire slave families as opposed to individual slaves. Durnford stated that he had “two or three bargains on hand,” which included “a woman of 32, her daughter of 12. a boy of 7 a boy of 3. for 1550.” The Louisiana planter decided not to purchase, for \$1900, “an other family of coloured persons” that included “the mother 25 years a girl of 10. a boy of 8. a boy of 6 a boy of 4. a child of 4 month’s.” Durnford purchased a slave woman at an unknown cost, and she told him that she cost her previous owner \$700. The slave woman’s previous owner returned to bring to Durnford her husband “and two or three children of the same woman of 8 to 10 years old.” Although Durnford expected to pay

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<sup>51</sup> Whitten, “Slave Buying in 1835 Virginia,” pp. 238-239; Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, June 25, 1835, MPTA; Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, July 6, 1835, MPTA; Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, June 9, 1835, MPTA.

high prices for the slave woman's family, he requested the rest of the family members be brought to him for a possible purchase, thus on at least one occasion he made a deliberate effort to keep a slave family intact. Durnford's decision to keep members of the slave family together as opposed to separating them likely guaranteed Durnford a degree of loyalty from the slave family and discouraged rebellious behavior.<sup>52</sup>

Durnford found the logistics of transporting bound people from Richmond to New Orleans difficult. The slaves' safe arrival at their final destination was threatened by the possibility of contracting illness en route if traveling by foot. Likewise, the transport of slaves proved even more costly if traveling by boat since their freight passage was charged per head, and even then the possibility of sickness was still not eliminated. Transporting slaves, therefore, was a financially risky endeavor on the part of the purchaser. Durnford was concerned about overland travel when half of an Alabama farmer's slaves contracted the measles along the way. Since Durnford's "lot" included children who were unable to walk, he knew the distance between New Orleans and Richmond would prove difficult for them. He feared that "if half a dozen should get sick on the way," his travel home would be further delayed. Nevertheless, Durnford returned home to St. Rosalie from his slave buying trip to Virginia where he continued utilizing slave labor for sugar cane production.<sup>53</sup>

Durnford's identity evolved the longer he remained a slaveowner. In the beginning of his planter career, Durnford self-identified as a black man who was in the

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<sup>52</sup> Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, June 15, 1835, MPTA.

<sup>53</sup> Durnford to McDonogh, June 25, 1835, MPTA. Durnford reported that the cost of transporting slaves via "brig" or steamboat "from Norfolk to Charleston for passage of black people is immense 10\$ a head for big persons and 5 for those under 10 years."

rare position of owning slaves. Like McDonogh, he initially even seemed interested in bettering his slaves' condition. In 1833, he wrote "As to that part of my disposition respecting the class to whom I belong to I hope a day will come that I will be able to do better for them. He! who sees the remotest part of a man's heart knows that I mean well." In 1844, the black sugar planter boasted that "For several years my people never work on Sunday and I do not wish to brake through my resolution on that subject exceptant." Durnford's actions as a slaveowner mirrored those of his closest business partner, at least to the extent of refusing to employ slave labor on Sundays. With regard to the subject of emancipating slaves, however, the Louisiana planters could not have disagreed more.<sup>54</sup>

Durnford's former youthful, positive outlook was hardened over time by a sobering realization that Louisiana's economy—and his own prosperity—hinged on exploiting slave labor. Durnford, therefore, criticized McDonogh's emancipation plan and never adopted such an arrangement for his own slaves. Durnford believed that the abolishment of slavery would not happen in his lifetime—that daunting task was reserved for future generations and the United States government. McDonogh, as a single individual systematically liberating his slaves and trying to encourage other planters on a national scale to do the same, in Durnford's eyes, was simply ludicrous. Durnford's attitude toward enslaved blacks—who ranked lower in Louisiana's caste-based social hierarchy—also played a role in his perspective. He questioned the soundness of McDonogh's plan, not because of McDonogh's ability to execute it, but because of slaves' inability to withstand material temptations to save money. The black planter

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<sup>54</sup> Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, p. 58; Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, June 13, 1844, MPTA.

believed that slaves lacked “the moral courage to deprive themselves of luxuries. Ninety-five out of a hundred will not think of buying their freedom” if presented with McDonogh’s plan. Durnford questioned whether “one in a hundred can do it,” and he warned McDonogh that only “when white men are starving can the slave prosper.” The black slaveowner, therefore, was less inclined toward manumission than the white one.<sup>55</sup>

Durnford may have wanted to appear disinterested on paper to protect himself from punishments for supporting McDonogh’s plan, which was in direct violation of Louisiana’s Black Codes. As both a free person of color *and* slaveowner, Durnford was in an unusual legal position, at least from the vantage point of the Louisiana law. On the one hand, he was a slaveowner who held complete autonomy over his slaves. On the other, he was a free person of color who, according to the Black Codes, was legally inferior to whites. Not supporting McDonogh’s emancipation plan would make him appear as a disinterested, non-threatening member of the very small slaveholding class of *gens de couleur libre* in New Orleans. Durnford’s self-interest, therefore, was likely the reason the black slaveowner disagreed with McDonogh offering his slaves an unusual path to freedom.<sup>56</sup>

Although Durnford did not adopt McDonogh’s emancipation and colonization plan, there are a few cases in which he did grant freedom to his slaves and legal support to others. In 1839 Durnford freed two adult slaves, and eleven years later he freed two

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<sup>55</sup> Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>56</sup> Acts Passed at the First Session of the First Legislature of the Territory of Orleans, January 25, 1806, Chapter 23, Black Code, Sec. 40, “Penalty for people of color not paying due respect to the whites,” pp. 188, 190. HathiTrust Digital Library. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.35112203962842;view=1up;seq=162>.



enslaved children. In his will, the black planter stipulated that a boy named Albert be manumitted. According to Albert's mother—a slave named Wainy—Albert was Durnford's son. Wainy, however, was not granted her freedom: around 1857 Durnford gave her and another of her children to Rosema, his own daughter. In rare instances, therefore, the black slaveowner was willing to liberate a select few slaves but never on the scale that McDonogh envisioned. Durnford did, however, give some of his money toward slaves' legal representation in court. In one case, a planter named Stephen Henderson stipulated in his will that all slaves born on his estate were to be emancipated within five years of his death. Since Henderson died in 1838, the legal battles began in 1843. Other complicated provisions—like designating his land to become a separate city—drew the execution of Henderson's will into a protracted legal battle with multiple lawsuits over a seventeen-year period. In 1844, Durnford authorized McDonogh “to employ a lawyer, and pay him five hundred dollars, or less if possible, to defend the Interest of the Slaves of the Estate of Stephen Henderson...”<sup>57</sup>

Throughout the course of McDonogh and Durnford's business and personal relationships, the latter cultivated familiar relationships with McDonogh's slaves. One slave, Noel, was regularly mentioned in correspondence between Durnford and McDonogh from as early as 1834 until as late as 1847. He served as a messenger between the two men, bringing updates to and small gifts from one planter to another. He even assisted Durnford when one slave, Jackson, who was “a little out of his head,” ran away from St. Rosalie. Durnford's son, Thomas, enrolled at the same college in Pennsylvania

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<sup>57</sup> Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, pp. 60-62, 94.

that two of McDonogh's slaves, David and Washington, attended. All three of their paths crossed between 1840 and 1842. Once McDonogh's first group of slaves were sent to Liberia in 1842, their correspondence not only inquired about the well-being of their former master, but many also inquired about Mr. Durnford and his family. Washington Watts McDonogh, a former slave who attended college with Durnford's son, was one of those inquiring Liberian colonists.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, April 1, 1834, November 1, 1847, November 11, 1847, MPTA; Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, pp. 103-105. Whitten stated that Thomas enrolled as a Model School (a preparatory school at Lafayette college designed to prepare students for future college courses) student in 1840 and 1841 while he entered as a college freshman in 1842. Washington and David both enrolled at Lafayette College in 1838 and were still attending courses when Thomas arrived.

## ***Chapter 4:***

# **Washington Watts McDonogh: Former Slave to Liberian Settler**

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Free blacks were divided over the prospect of colonizing Africa. Although Paul Cuffee promoted African colonization at the beginning of the nineteenth century, for the remainder of the century Frederick Douglass was the face of the free black population in America. Douglass believed that the proposals made by various politicians to send manumitted slaves and free people of color “back” to Africa were demeaning and insulting. He believed the sacrifices on the part of slaves—especially the physical toil in the fields and military service in past wars—warranted an equal place for blacks in a white-dominated society. Douglass opposed the notion of African colonization as an answer to the slavery question. The brutal realities of the institution of slavery, he insisted, meant that blacks had more than earned a right to remain in the country of their birth, free from discrimination. Despite his popularity and support in America and abroad, Douglass’ position was not representative of the entire black population in the United States. Some manumitted slaves and free people of color supported colonization. Thousands willingly made the voyage to West Africa to ensure separate but equal lives across the Atlantic where they could govern themselves as citizens in a black republic. McDonogh’s slave, Washington Watts McDonogh (Washington), was one of those thousands of colonists. Like Douglass, he was born a slave. Unlike Douglass, however,

Washington supported the colonization efforts of his master and created a successful life for himself in the Republic of Liberia.<sup>59</sup>

Little is known about Washington's life prior to his education in Pennsylvania in 1838. The difficulty lies in tracing the family ancestry of the enslaved since "genealogical trees do not flourish among slaves," as Douglass famously stated.<sup>60</sup> Washington was most likely born a slave in 1821—the same year that the ACS established the colony of Liberia—on John McDonogh's plantation outside of New Orleans. Washington referred to his former master as "one who has been a father unto me instead of a cruel oppressor" who took him from his parents to be raised in McDonogh's "own dwelling... as a son instead of a servant."<sup>61</sup> Washington and his brother, David Kearney McDonogh (David), were the only two McDonogh slaves who benefitted from a college education. Both were enrolled at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania—the same institution that Andrew Durnford's son, Thomas, attended. Although the brothers' higher education was paid for by McDonogh, the scholarship was conditional: Washington and David were to emigrate to Liberia upon the completion of their degrees. Washington was a dedicated student and pursued his studies until June 10, 1842—the day before he was to leave for Liberia. He was one of the seventy-nine slaves repatriated by McDonogh that summer. At the end of

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<sup>59</sup> Frederick Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews, Volume 2: 1847-1854*, ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 149-150, 166, 210, 241; Frederick Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews, Volume 4: 1864-1880*, eds. by John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 57, 420-421. To understand Douglass' stance on African colonization, see Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1968).

<sup>60</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 34.

<sup>61</sup> Washington Watts McDonogh to John McDonogh, October, 7, 1846, MPTA; Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 141-142.

his courses David refused to emigrate to Liberia, but Washington honored McDonogh's wishes and completed the journey to West Africa.<sup>62</sup>

The two brothers led very different lives on either side of the Atlantic. Even though David did not immigrate to Liberia after college, he did not return to life as a slave. By not seeking his return to New Orleans, McDonogh unofficially granted David his freedom. The former slave went on to graduate from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York in 1847 and established a successful medical practice in that state.<sup>63</sup> Over the course of their studies at Lafayette College, the brotherly bond between Washington and David deteriorated. After he left college and was adjusting to his new home in Liberia, Washington wrote to McDonogh that he did “not wish to tell you how he [David] treated me while I was at College with him, neither do I wish to say any thing to him now.”<sup>64</sup> A few years later, Washington had a change of heart. At the end of a letter

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<sup>62</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 121-122; Washington Watts McDonogh to John McDonogh, September 5, 1842, MPTA.

<sup>63</sup> Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, pp. 104-106. The validity of David Kearney McDonogh's medical degree has been disputed. Whitten noted that the Lafayette Catalogue recorded a listing for David's graduation in 1847 from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York (CPSNY). CPSNY, however, lacked a record of David graduating from their institution, and other contemporary medical schools contained no record for David, either. New York directories, however, do contain entries for “David K. McDonogh” and list his profession as physician. Whitten also detailed a folkloric tale common to New Orleans about a slave moving off to attend college—a story that seemed to be one-part truth and another part fiction—as a possible explanation for the discrepancy. David's story was recorded by Herbert M. Morais in *The History of the Negro in Medicine*. Morais claimed that while David was not directly admitted to medical school, he did study under a surgery professor at Columbia named Dr. John K. Rodgers. This fact could explain why David was not listed among degree-earners but was nevertheless a practicing and well known physician in New York. Morais also claimed that the first private hospital founded by blacks in New York was named McDonogh, after David. *The African Repository* reported that David was instructed in “classical study” and gave “some attention to medicine, under the instruction of Dr. Abernethy of Easton, in the hope of being useful among the colonists and natives of Africa as a physician.” See *The African Repository*, 18 (August 1842): 263-264.

<sup>64</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 121-122; Washington Watts McDonogh to John McDonogh, September 5, 1842, MPTA.

written to McDonogh in 1846, he inquired to “know what has become of David.”<sup>65</sup> A third brother, George R. Ellis McDonogh (George), emigrated with Washington to Liberia, although McDonogh did not sponsor his education as he did for Washington and David. There may have been other siblings as well. In August 1843, Washington wrote to McDonogh from Settra Kroo that his “Sister died wit the fever, my oldest Sister,” the clarification suggesting that he had another sister as well.<sup>66</sup> In a letter written from Monrovia in the spring of 1847, George mentioned how “Julia, my sister, has had a fine son since I wrote you last, his name was ‘James Watts.’”<sup>67</sup>

Many of the colonists maintained a close relationship not only with their former master but with Andrew Durnford as well. In Washington’s correspondence from Liberia, he requested that McDonogh “please to remember me to all my friends and acquaintances, to Mr. Dumford and son...” George, likewise, asked McDonogh to “Please give my love to Mr. Andrew Durnford and family and beg him to excuse me for not writing him.” Augustine Lamberth wrote to McDonogh that he and some of the other colonists send “a thousand good wishes to you, also to Mr. A. Durnford.” Nancy Smith McDonogh provided a long list of those in Louisiana to whom she sent her affections: “and, above all, please to give my love to Mrs. And Mrs. Andrew Danford.” At the end of another letter from A. Lamberth, Phillis, likely Washington’s mother, added two quick, puzzling sentences addressed to McDonogh. She stated that she was “very glad to hear

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<sup>65</sup> Washington Watts McDonogh to John McDonogh, October 7, 1846, MPTA; *The African Repository* 23 (June 1847): 175-176.

<sup>66</sup>Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 123-124.

<sup>67</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 117-122, 146-147; Washington Watts McDonogh to John McDonogh, September 5, 1842, MPTA.

that Mr. Durnford is coming out and wish you would be so kind as to send me some provision by him.” Aside from this comment, nothing else indicated that the black sugar planter—who never participated in African colonization efforts—ever considered going, nor ever completed the journey, to Liberia to see the former McDonogh slaves.<sup>68</sup>

Even though the former McDonogh slaves worked alongside each other in Louisiana for years toward the collective goal of freedom, they did not remain a cohesive group once in Liberia. As per McDonogh’s instructions, they were to go to the port at Sinoe near the Sinoe River along the western coast of Liberia after they landed in Monrovia. Just before their departure from New Orleans, the colonists promised McDonogh that they would follow through with his wishes once in Liberia. Many resisted the additional journey southward from Monrovia and instead accepted land granted to them along the St. Paul River. Death threats were even made against at least one settler in the McDonogh group. George reported that a “good many moved up the river and a good many on the Cape and at other place on coast.” He went on to apologize to McDonogh for the colonists’ “brok promise we made,” but pointed out that he himself deserved no blame as the others threatened his “life incase they should be prevented from stoping” along St. Paul’s River. As of September 1843, over a year after the former McDonogh slaves arrived in Liberia, one of the colonists still intended to move to Sinoe. That same colonist lamented to McDonogh that he was unable to convey his former master’s “love to all but we live so fare a part” that he had not seen the others since

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<sup>68</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 124-125, 132-137, 141-142; Washington Watts McDonogh to John McDonogh, October 7, 1846, MPTA; George R. Ellis McDonogh to John McDonogh, April 14, 1844, MPTA; Augustine Lamberth to John McDonogh, May 20, 1844, MPTA.

receiving word from McDonogh. Warnings from the governor caused some of the colonists to be unwilling to move to the location upon which McDonogh insisted. According to colonist James McGeorge, members of the group were told that “the population was So Scanty” at their final destination and “the Country people” were “much more Uncivilized,” they risked being robbed of all they owned by continuing southward. Warfare among the native West Africans also prevented the McDonogh colonists from settling at the location stipulated by their former master. When the group first moved to Liberia in 1842, they were delayed from moving to Sinoe because the place was “in an unsettled state” due to a disagreement “between the croomen & country people.” By 1844, the situation had worsened. A colonist reported that “the whole of the country amongst the different tribes are at war to this day.”<sup>69</sup>

Another colonist offered a more practical reason for the colonists’ refusal to settle in Sinoe. James Gray acknowledged that McDonogh “must have been much disappointed in [his] people not going to “Sinoe,”” but he likewise assured his former master that the group would fare just as well near Monrovia. According to Gray, the people of Monrovia profited from trade activity brought by the presence of the American Squadron, who

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<sup>69</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 124-126, 135-136; James McGeorge to John McDonogh, November 17, 1843, MPTA; James McGeorge to John McDonogh, May 20, 1844, MPTA. *The African Repository* published a write-up called “Departure of the Mariposa,” in which the writer stated that the McDonogh slaves were “to establish themselves... on an eligible tract of land called Blue Barre (opposite the village of Greenville, at Sinou) which his to bear the name of Louisiana in Liberia.” See *The African Repository* 18 (August 1842): 258. The tract of land for Blue Barre was selected by the Louisiana Colonization Society and proved to be a contentious purchase. The McDonogh colonists arrived in Liberia before the land purchase from the natives, who were to “receive a small compensation,” was finalized. See *African Repository* 19 (January 1843): 19-20; and *African Repository* 18 (February 1, 1842): 44-45. Additionally, one colonist wrote to McDonogh that the Liberian Governor “made no arrangements for us at Sinoe or Blue Barra.” See the letter from Mary Jackson to John McDonogh, February 20, 1844 in the *African Repository* 23 (September 1847): 263-264.



stopped in the port city for water and other foodstuffs. The presence of these military men benefitted Monrovia's population by "circulating a great deal of money among the inhabitants," so Gray assured McDonogh that the group would be just as successful by staying in Monrovia instead of settling in Sinoe. Nevertheless, the group fractured, "scattered all about the country," and splintered apart, with "some on the cape" and others along Liberia's coastline.<sup>70</sup>

McDonogh had trained his slaves in various trades in preparation for them to be self-sustaining once they were in Liberia. In the 1842, the colonists arrived in Monrovia via the ship *Mariposa*. In the ship's manifesto—"a list of the Black and Colored Persons" bound "for Louisiana in Liberia,"—McDonogh listed all eighty-one colonists, including the various trades and qualifications of many. Notably, a colonist "aged about 30 years" named James was labeled "an African by birth." James, therefore, may have been illegally purchased by McDonogh after slave importation to the United States was banned in 1808. Multiple colonists were listed as brickmakers and carpenters who were "accustomed to plantation work." Two men were listed as "first rate Blacksmith" and a woman dubbed a "first rate midwife." Likewise, multiple men were noted for their knowledge of sugar cane cultivations, some listed as sugar makers or sugar mill builders. Other colonists were noted for their educational capacities, like Nancy who was "a talented woman capable of teaching a common school." Others held multiple professions or trades. For instance, a colonist named Mark was "a carpenter by trade, and a schoolteacher." Phillis—Washington's mother—was "an Excellent woman a doctress,

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<sup>70</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 126-127; James Gray to John McDonogh, January 28, 1844, MPTA.

and understands all things,” and Bridget was “a woman of high moral character, and various qualifications.” Washington was the last colonist described in the manifesto: Phillis’ twenty-one-year-old-son and “a Christian missionary” who was “educated, at the Lafayette College in Pennsylvania.”<sup>71</sup>

Washington passed his religious upbringing and evangelical education on to the next generation in Liberia—mainly to native West African children. He established multiple schools in the colonies along Liberia’s coast. Writing from Settra Kroo in February 1844, Washington informed McDonogh that he taught “twenty eight boys in school & three girls” and was “going to commence a new school about 10 or 12 miles below this.” He went on to boast about how “out of the 28 boy in school there is but 5 that cannot read the word of God. 2 of the girls can read the bible very well... They are all native children.” Washington’s attempts to Christianize native populations were met with both success and frustration. Writing from Nova Kroo in November 1847, Washington despondently reported that he was “still among the heathens trying to teach them the ways of God. But alast for us we see but little or no fruites of our labours as yet.” McDonogh provided Washington with a Christian education as a child and ensured that he received a ministerial education when he attended college. Christianity and education, therefore, had been inseparable components of Washington’s life since

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<sup>71</sup> “Emigrants by the Ship Mariposa,” *McDonogh Project*, <http://exhibits.lafayette.edu/mcdonogh/items/show/2484>. This website features an exhibition by Lafayette College on Washington Watts McDonogh and David Kearney McDonogh. While some claims made on the website cannot be verified through available primary source evidence on that same website, the author was confident that the *Mariposa* ship manifesto on the online exhibit was an authentic document authored by John McDonogh.

childhood, so he naturally taught the West African children in the same manner in which he was raised.<sup>72</sup>

Many of the McDonogh colonists were affected by Washington's ministerial calling. In 1844, a McDonogh colonist in Monrovia boasted of the "religious enjoyment in the churches of different denominations, particularly the Methodists and Baptists." Another colonist reported that "George and Susan have joined the Baptist Church; also, Matilda and little Nancy." Although he did not specify which denomination, in October 1846 George reported that "Julia and her husband and Lamberth have both joined the Church, and nearly all the rest of the people. Lamberth is one of the official members." Additionally, George was appointed as the "agent for the Presbyterian Mission at Settra Kroo" to aid Washington by delivering goods sent to his mission from America. Not all, however, were swayed by the Gospel. "Old uncle Richard has lost all religion," reported a colonist, "and has turned out to be a great drunkard."<sup>73</sup>

The American southern plantation economy—including the tripartite social stratification—was transplanted from the Gulf Coast of Louisiana to the Western Coast of Africa along with the McDonogh colonists. The free and manumitted blacks from America who colonized Liberia took on new identities as Americo-Liberians. In the earliest days of Liberian colonization, free blacks outnumbered manumittedes, but by the 1840s—when the McDonogh slaves arrived—the numbers were reversed. Interestingly, a

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<sup>72</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 128-129, 147-148; Washington Watts McDonogh to John McDonogh, February 7, 1844, MPTA; Washington Watts McDonogh to John McDonogh, November 13, 1847, MPTA.

<sup>73</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 129-130, 136-137, 142-143; George R. Ellis McDonogh to John McDonogh, March 26, 1847, in the "Letter from a Liberian" section of the *The African Repository*, 23 (July 1847): 223; John Roberts to John McDonogh, March 8, 1844, *The African Repository* 23 (September 1847): 260.

similar demographic shift occurred in Liberia as had happened during Spanish rule in Louisiana. In the 1780-1790s Spanish Louisiana's governmental structure fostered a system that favored a form of self-emancipation, called *coartación*, by which slaves could negotiate with their masters for freedom. Gradually, freed African slaves intermixed with white Europeans, creating a group of people known as the *gens de couleur libre*. These people represented the second tier in a three-tiered society in which they were the "in-betweens." The *gens de couleur libre* faced identity challenges: not black, not white, neither slave, nor entirely free. Many, like Andrew Durnford, chose to identify with their white ancestry because of self-preservation and the lure of social advancement—but often at the expense of their black ancestry. A similar story emerged in Liberia.<sup>74</sup>

The Americo-Liberian settlers gradually imposed this three-tiered social stratification system on themselves and the West African natives. Free blacks (typically light-skinned) comprised the highest order and maintained the most power, with manumitted blacks and African natives encompassing the middle and bottom tiers, respectively. Former slaves suspected the free black elite of enslaving West African natives under the guise of "apprentices," which prevented those in the middle from obtaining sufficient employment and kept them in an impoverished state. One McDonogh colonist noted how "the wealthier folks in Liberia live well and seem to enjoy themselves very much."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege*, pp. 8-9; Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution*, p. 141.

<sup>75</sup> Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution*, pp. 141-142, 152-153; Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 129-130.

At least one settler grew a variety of crops with the help of native workers. The economic and social aspects of Louisiana plantation life, therefore, were transplanted to the shores of Liberia, where at least one of the former McDonogh slaves rose to the status of master. In contrast, the West African natives commandeered to aid in crop cultivation took on the positions of slaves. Washington's brother, presumably George R. Ellis McDonogh, relied on slave labor to plant and harvest crops. Washington himself may have owned slaves. He certainly displayed no moral objection to the system despite his ministerial calling in Liberia. In 1844, George owned approximately "fifteen or twenty acres of land," which had been "cleared and planted in Potatoes, cassadoes, arrow root, corn and about two hundred cotton bushes." In addition to this variety of crops, George's parcel of land featured "about six or seven hundred coffee plants." Even outsiders attested to the success of McDonogh's former slaves. William M. Hanbury, commander of a ship that sailed from Monrovia, Liberia to New Orleans in the spring of 1844, noted how he "dined frequently with" the McDonogh colonists and boasted that "they live well, have plenty of every thing around them, and have fine plantations." By the beginning of 1846, however, George had tripled or quadrupled his land holdings and was utilizing "about 24 or 25 bound boys" to cultivate a variety of crops. During a visit to his family that year, Washington and his brother worked alongside the boys, some of whom "were taken from on board of a slaver by an American man-of-war," to clear the fields and plant "a fine crop of rice, corn, and cassadas" on George's sixty acres. Reflecting his view as

being superior to non-Christian natives, Washington reported to McDonogh that after more than two months with his family, he “returned to [his] labor among the heathen.”<sup>76</sup>

Washington’s experience in Liberia revealed how many of the assumptions that the ACS held about its mission of “repatriation” were both absurd and unrealistic. Common racial heritage was not enough to bind the former American slaves and the West African natives. Cultural differences guaranteed a difficult transition, and the McDonogh colonists often misunderstood the beliefs and actions of African natives. Death was an example, and one episode in particular highlighted the cultural differences between the settlers and natives in the early days of colonizing Liberia. Sometime in December 1845, a boy “died in the Mission yard,” which caused the native children attending the school to leave due to local beliefs concerning death. This incident caused Washington to reason that “the people among whom we live are very ignorant and superstitious.” The missionary reported how the natives believed that if someone dies that person must have been “bewitched,” and the only solution was to visit “the gran devil man as his is sometimes called” and convince him to reveal the guilty party. The remedy for the bewitchment was to give the guilty person sassa wood—“the bark off a tree that grows in the swamps.” Presumably the sassa wood was meant to be ingested. There were two varieties of the bark, with one kind in particular being poisonous. Washington stated that should the accused have “a plenty of money” that person will consume “the worst kind” of the sassa wood for his money to be taken, but the accused can buy their

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<sup>76</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 132-133, 141-142; George R. Ellis McDonogh to John McDonogh, April 14, 1844, MPTA; Washington Watts McDonogh to John McDonogh, October 7, 1846, MPTA; William M. Hanbury to Editors of the *New Orleans Bulletin*, April 20, 1844, “How It Strikes a Disinterested Person,” *The African Repository* 20 (September 1844): 266-267.

innocence and be given the weaker variety if they “will pay them a good sum.”

Nevertheless, “a poor person will be sure to come of badly.” While the ACS assumed that the transplanted African-Americans would transition easily into West African societies because of a common ancestry, Washington’s experience demonstrated how the Society grossly underestimated the difficulty in overcoming cultural differences.<sup>77</sup>

By 1848, Washington’s attitude was dramatically different from the one that he had exhibited during his first few years in Liberia. The prospect of marriage was largely responsible for his positive demeanor. In March 1848, Washington “found one that is able and willing to help me... as Missionary among the heathen.” The “young lady from the West” had been in Liberia for the past five months and had “gon through her acclimating fevers” and was thus healthy enough to assist him in his missionary work. Washington’s future wife had been raised and educated in Cincinnati and came from “one of the best Christian familys.” She was, therefore, the perfect partner for Washington and his missionary endeavors in Liberia. By 1862 Washington and his wife had a large family of sixteen persons: three children of their own plus three orphaned Liberians, four Congoese, and four boys of Kroom descent.<sup>78</sup>

The colonists often exalted McDonogh, and their praises provided strength and hope to their friends and loved ones who still remained in bondage in Louisiana. Their sentiments were surely a combination of genuine affection for their former master and

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<sup>77</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, p. 138, Washington Watts McDonogh to John McDonogh, December 28, 1845, MPTA.

<sup>78</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 148-149; Washington Watts McDonogh to John McDonogh, March 7, 1848, MPTA, “Missionary Intelligence—Scholars at Settra Kroom,” *The African Repository* 38 (March 1862): 91-92.

emigration sponsor as well as a means of maintaining material support. One colonist reported that the site where many settled, approximately fifteen miles inland along the St. Paul River, was named “Louianna McDonough,” in honor of the man who had followed through on his promise of their freedom. Not only did the colonists give hope to their loved ones still enslaved in New Orleans, but they also tried to give hope to the enslaved masses in America. The McDonough colonists assisted their former master in his African colonization endeavors by agreeing to have their letters from Liberia published in the *African Repository*, the journal of the ACS. One colonist confirmed that McDonough’s “pamphlets came safe,” and she and the rest of the group were “hopeful that they may be of much service in the United States, particularly to the holders of our race.” The McDonough colonists’ positive declarations about the country, the quality of life, the newfound freedoms, and more were aimed at swaying the hearts of slaveholders to consider liberating their slaves for removal to Liberia. For the former McDonough slaves—but in stark contrast to Frederick Douglass’ position—separate from whites but equal among blacks in Africa was a worthwhile compromise. The opportunity for freedom in Liberia far outweighed the alternative of remaining in bondage in their native country.<sup>79</sup>

The contents in Washington’s letters addressed to McDonough revealed that, although he and the rest of the McDonough slaves endured foreseen—and unforeseen—challenges, the colonization trials in Liberia were worth bearing to be free. The former slaves fashioned new identities and created new homes in Liberia. One McDonough

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<sup>79</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 129-130, 135-136; James McGeorge to John McDonough, May 20, 1844.



colonist believed that in Liberia “persons of color may enjoy their freedom.” Washington echoed a similar sentiment. He believed Liberia to be “the only place where a colored person can enjoy his liberty,” and consequently, would “never consent to leave this country for all the pleasures of America combined together.” Nevertheless, in that same letter he told of the impressment of native Africans who worked in the fields owned by his brother, George R. Ellis McDonogh. Another Liberian colonist, although a former slave of a different master in America, also sang praises for McDonogh. He wished “there were some more Mr. McDonoghs in the world,—it would be good for the poor black man.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Wiley, *Slaves No More*, pp. 141-142; Washington Watts McDonogh to John McDonogh, October 7, 1846, MPTA; Augustine Lamberth McDonogh to John McDonogh, n.d., “John McDonogh’s People,” *The African Repository* 23 (September 1847): 261; “John McDonogh’s People,” *The African Repository* 23 (June 1847): 175-176; Edward Morris to John McDonogh, May 21, 1844, “John McDonogh’s People,” *The African Repository* 23 (September 1847): 261-262. Morris was a former Mississippi slave who emigrated to Liberia in 1838 and later represented Sinoe county in the Liberian legislature—first serving as a senator and then as superintendent of Sinoe County. See the National Portrait Gallery’s webpage <http://www.npg.si.edu/exh/awash/morris.htm> and Library of Congress’ webpages <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trr033.html> and <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004664347/>.

## Conclusion

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History remembers people in different ways. There is no memorial dedicated to Andrew Durnford, one of the few black planters in the antebellum South. No statue commemorates the life of Washington Watts McDonogh, a former slave turned Liberian colonist. John McDonogh, however, left a lasting physical and intellectual legacy.

Andrew Durnford died on July 12, 1859. His son and McDonogh's godson, Thomas, carried on the Durnford family business with Durnford's widow. The Durnfords operated the St. Rosalie sugar cane plantation via slave labor until at least the start of the Civil War. Marie died in 1866, and Thomas sold his portion of the plantation inheritance and chose not to seek executorship of his deceased father's estate. The slaves owned by the Durnford family were freed in 1865 via the Thirteenth Amendment. The forced emancipation of the Durnford slaves may have been the reason Thomas chose to relinquish the family business instead of continuing plantation-scale sugar cane production.<sup>81</sup>

Washington Watts McDonogh likely spent the remainder of his life in Liberia. He remained steadfastly dedicated to his ministerial efforts by educating African youth and later became active in Liberian politics. Like his benefactor, Washington promoted the Presbyterian doctrine of Christianity. Washington's last correspondence to the *African Repository* was published in 1862. He spoke of his children, his pupils, "the change that has taken place" among the native population, and the need for repairs and improvements

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<sup>81</sup> Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, pp. 94, 129-131.

at his mission. Dwindling funds and lack of support for African colonization and Liberian settlements hampered his progress. Washington's continued ministerial efforts rested on improved infrastructure in the missionary field. Although Washington had "gained the confidence and the kindly feelings" of the Kroo people, by 1866 the "greatly dilapidated" buildings and the need for more workers crippled his missionary and educational efforts. Nevertheless, Washington persevered. He regularly reported to the *African Repository* the attendance record of his school. For the 1873 school year, there were eight students, seven male and one female. In addition to evangelical education endeavors, Washington was involved in Liberian politics in both an unofficial and official capacity. After years of living among various indigenous groups, many regarded Washington "as their judge to settle the disputes among themselves" and as their ally "to aid them should they be oppressed by others." In an 1873 issue of *The African Repository*, Washington McDonogh was listed as one of three representatives for Sinoe County, Liberia. He operated a private school in Sinoe County, Liberia as late as 1874, at which time he would have been about fifty-three years old. Beyond 1874, Washington was never mentioned again in the *African Repository*.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> A letter from Washington Watts McDonogh, transcribed and published in *The African Repository* 38 (March 1862): 92, was dated November 6, 1861. Only an excerpt of his letter was published, and it was not addressed to any specific individual. "African Missionary News," *The African Repository* vol. 42 (April 1866): 125, (Sept. 1866): 273; "Missions," *The African Repository* 38 (Sept. 1862): 265. "African Presbyterian Mission," *The African Repository* 48 (March 1872): 84. Watts is listed as a teacher at an African Presbyterian Mission in Setra Kroo, Liberia. *The African Repository* 41 (Oct. 1865): 304; "Education in Liberia," *The African Repository* 50 (June 1874), 190-191; "Affairs in Liberia," *The African Repository*, 49 (January 1873): 249. Washington's age based on his description by John McDonogh in the *Mariposa* manifesto as written by John McDonogh, who described Washington as "Son of Phillis 21, Years of age" in June of 1842. "Emigrants by the Ship Mariposa," *McDonogh Project*, <http://exhibits.lafayette.edu/mcdonogh/items/show/2484>.

McDonogh drafted a generous but complicated Will. It was written on December 29, 1838 and filed in the Fifth District Court of New Orleans on October 28, 1850.

McDonogh's Will and the attached "Memoranda of Instructions to the Executors of John McDonogh" formed a lengthy sixty-nine page document with highly detailed instructions for executing his complicated vision. McDonogh desired that his real estate become rental property to create a perpetual source of revenue to support the creation of public schools in New Orleans and Baltimore. Additionally, he instructed the executors to free his slaves after fifteen years of service (to be sent to Liberia via the ACS) and replace them with newly purchased slaves, repeating the same process every fifteen years. The execution of McDonogh's Will, however, was a protracted legal battle and an exhausting nine-year-process.

The *African Repository* frequently reported on new developments throughout the case. Upon his death in 1850, McDonogh bequeathed half of his fortune in equal parts to four philanthropic organizations and the other half of his fortune equally to the cities of New Orleans and Baltimore. Half of McDonogh's wealth, therefore, was designed to create public schools to benefit the poor of those cities. The ACS was one of the four designated philanthropies, and the Society was, as per McDonogh's instructions, to receive a generous annual allotment. Unfortunately for McDonogh and the ACS, executing the New Orleans benefactor's Will proved more complicated than expected. The Louisiana slaveowner, known for his reclusive tendencies, kept his Will under lock and key, with only a handful of individuals aware of its existence. Once its provisions were made known, problems immediately arose because McDonogh had not obtained

sound legal advice when writing the document. Members of the ACS warned McDonogh in 1842—presumably once the first group of his slaves was repatriated to Liberia—that his “will never could be executed, and begged him to alter it, but without avail.” His vast land holdings and net worth compounded the problems, so the final rulings in his case were handed down by the Supreme Court of Louisiana and the United States Supreme Court. The Louisiana court ruled that, because he failed to consult a lawyer, “McDonogh, by the conditions which he imposed upon his property, transcended the powers with which the law clothed him.” The court’s ruling meant that only a portion of McDonogh’s philanthropic wishes would be carried out because the restrictive stipulations he attached to his Will impeded practical execution—particularly in the case of his vast landholdings.<sup>83</sup>

Many of the problems in McDonogh’s Will arose due to a combination of inaccurate value assessments of McDonogh’s land holdings and his own impossibly grandiose vision for his legacy. The Louisiana slaveowner valued land—“it will not take wings, and fly away, as Silver and Gold, Government and Bank Stocks often do. It is the only thing in this World of ours, which approaches to anything like permanency.” He stipulated that the land he owned was to be perpetually rented so that the profits could indefinitely sustain his educational bequests and support his designated philanthropic

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<sup>83</sup> “McDonogh’s Will Broken,” *The African Repository* 28 (1852): 331. The entry in the *African Repository* reads, “We told Mr. McDonogh ten years ago that that will could never be executed, and begged him to alter it, but without avail.” Presumably “We” refers to the members of the ACS since the *African Repository* was the monthly journal of that organization. The year prior, however, the *African Repository* called McDonogh’s Will “an ably written document, alike creditable to the head and heart of the benevolent individual who left it as his last and only testament.” See *The African Repository* 27 (March 1851): 66. *The African Repository* (September 1858): 282. Quotes were from the verdict delivered by Judge Eggleston of the Fifth District court in New Orleans, Louisiana.

organizations (like the ACS) for a lengthy period of time. McDonogh's secretive Will stipulated that the ACS was to receive "one eighth part, (or twelve and a half per cent) of the net yearly revenue of rents of the whole of the Estate." McDonogh, however, did cap the annual amount due to the ACS. He designated the Society to receive a sum not exceeding \$25,000 annually for forty years; however, due to varying land values and numerous heirs attempting to claim a share, the Will was not fully executed until 1859.<sup>84</sup> The 1851 value of McDonogh's landholdings—approximately 610,000 acres—was overestimated at more than \$2 million. In 1856, the *African Repository* referred to a report published in the *New Orleans Crescent* concerning the appraised value of many of McDonogh's holdings. Among the values assessed, over \$1.2 million was in New Orleans real estate, more than \$890,000 in other Louisiana parish properties, \$30,000 in slaves, and \$75,697 in cash. Other holdings and debts were also calculated. Legal costs to execute the complicated Will depleted the funds that were designated for charitable purposes. Nearly six years after McDonogh's death—at which point the value of McDonogh's estate was reduced to \$2.27 million from the original \$5 million assessment—"not one dollar of charity had ever yet been received from the estate; not one negro had been sent to Liberia; nor the tears and sorrows of one poor orphan boy ever been assuaged."<sup>85</sup> Nine years after his death, McDonogh's Will was finally executed after the value of his estate was again reduced, to \$1.5 million. In 1859 and 1860, a sum

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<sup>84</sup> John McDonogh, "Will of John McDonogh," p. 6, and "Memoranda of Instructions to the Executors of John McDonogh," p. 43, MPTA. See also "Annual Report of the American Colonization Society," and "Proceedings of the Board of Directors of the A.C.S.," *The African Repository* 27 (March 1851): 66, 89.

<sup>85</sup> "Intelligence—The McDonogh Estate," *The African Repository* 32 (June 1856): 186-187.

of \$83,000 was given to the ACS from his estate and later the disastrous effects of the Civil War further devalued McDonogh's land holdings.<sup>86</sup>

With the passage of the Civil Code of 1825 and until 1857, the Louisiana state legislature enacted laws restricting the ability of slaveowners to emancipate their slaves. This strengthening of the Black Codes manifested itself acutely in 1852. That year, the Louisiana state legislature passed a law requiring that any freed slave be sent to Liberia upon emancipation, and the slaveowner was mandated to pay \$150 to secure the passage of each slave. The law was enacted two years after McDonogh's death—precisely during the heated and protracted legal battle that the Supreme Court of Louisiana was waging against the executors, heirs, complainants, and defendants of McDonogh's Will. The law, however, didn't last long. In 1855 the Louisiana state legislature repealed the mandatory stipulation that freed slaves be sent to Liberia, and two years later, the repealed law was replaced with an even harsher one: in 1857 the state banned *all* emancipations.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> In addition to supporting the American Colonization Society, McDonogh also designated funds for support of the Society for Destitute Orphan Boys of New Orleans. See Ciravolo, *The Legacy of John McDonogh*, pp. 11-12. The value of McDonogh's landholdings at the time of his death in 1850 is difficult to determine. Values ranged from over \$2 million to \$5 million. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the value of McDonogh's real estate was initially overestimated, and his net worth continued to decline until the final execution in his Will in 1859. "Intelligence—Report on the McDonogh Estate," *The African Repository* 32 (May 1856): 154-155. See also Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, p. 243. Whitten, in *Andrew Durnford*, p. 61, reported that the amount received by the ACS as per the Supreme Court of the State of Louisiana was \$84,000 as opposed to \$83,000 as stated by Staudenraus. Whitten cited the Report of the Commissioners and Agents of the General Estate of John McDonogh, to the Common Council (New Orleans, 22 March 1858, Special Collections Division, Tulane University Library), 8-9. Likewise, "Annual Report of the American Colonization Society—Finances" *The African Repository* vol. 36 (February 1860): 51 stated, "From the McDonogh legacy has been received during the year \$82,564 18, and from other sources."

<sup>87</sup> Schafer, "Roman Roots of the Louisiana Law of Slavery," pp. 419-422.

The funds allocated to the ACS were to be used for repatriating to Liberia the eighty-three slaves owned by McDonogh at the time of his death. McDonogh stipulated that all of his slaves were to be emancipated and sent to Liberia with provisions and money fifteen years after his death. The funds accrued from those emancipated slaves during their labor contract for freedom were to be used to replace the work force on his plantation once those slaves were sent to Africa. This process was to be repeated every fifteen years, and the new slaves were to receive a combination of religious and secular education and be trained in various trades so that they would become contributing members in Liberian society once repatriated. Additionally, the profit from the new slaves' harvesting of crop was to be used to fund the cost of their future replacements. In 1859, however, all of McDonogh's remaining eighty-three slaves were granted complete freedom. In this group of eighty-three, many had likely completed various stages of their fifteen-year service plan. Only forty-one of these slaves, however, were sent to Liberia. In 1860, the "cargo of slaves" on board the *Rebecca*, "these McDonogh people," were sent to Liberia by the agents who executed McDonogh's Will, not by the American Colonization Society. The ACS, therefore, was not responsible for those final McDonogh colonists on board the *Rebecca*.<sup>88</sup>

Nothing is known of the experience of the second group of McDonogh colonists. No letters remain to tell of their lives in a new country. The lack of archival evidence is not likely the result of illiteracy, especially since McDonogh took such care to ensure the

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<sup>88</sup> McDonogh, "Will" and "Memoranda," pp. 3, 19, 43-44, 66-67, MPTA; Whitten, *Andrew Durnford*, p. 61; "The McDonogh Emigrants," *The African Repository* 35 (June 1859): 174; "Late from Liberia" and "The Ship Rebecca," *The African Repository* 36 (January 1860): 3, 19.



education of the first group of repatriated slaves. The possibility exists, however, that the fate of the second group of McDonogh colonists was the exact opposite of what their benefactor intended. Instead of securing their freedom when they landed in Liberia, the McDonogh colonists may very well have been re-enslaved. After leaving New Orleans in April onboard the *Rebecca*, the second group reportedly landed in Monrovia, Liberia on July 2, 1859. A letter from Rev. John Seys, dated July 27, 1859 and published in the *African Repository*, claimed that the *Rebecca* was here (presumably Monrovia), “with the McDonogh people—a strange craft, more strange captain, and still more strange cargo for the *Congo River, St. Paul de Londo, and other parts of black Ebony notoriety.*” The Reverend Seys went on to report that “the whole party” of McDonogh colonists “have gone to Careysburg, are perfectly delighted... and thus far things are going on finely.” Liberian President Stephen A. Benson, in a letter dated August 1, 1859, reported of “the safe arrival of the ship *Rebecca* from New Orleans, and the comfortable location of the emigrants by her at Careysburg.” Perhaps these writers—who told of the McDonogh colonists’ safe arrival at Monrovia and subsequent relocation to Careysburg—were wrongly informed, because a far different report on the status of the colonists emerged the following year in *The African Repository*. In 1860, *The African Repository* published a letter dated August 28<sup>th</sup> from the ex-President of Liberia. Writing from Monrovia, he discussed “the suspicions entertained here respecting the character of the ship ‘*Rebecca*’.” Coincidentally, “an English man-of-war” arrived at the Monrovia harbor on the same day as the McDonogh colonists aboard the *Rebecca*. In an October 1859 letter, Roberts reported that *Rebecca* “escaped with a full cargo of slaves,” possibly destined for

Cuba or “some southern part of the United States.” The second group of McDonogh colonists, therefore, may very well have been re-enslaved the moment they landed as freemen in West Africa. Their re-enslavement would explain why no letters remain to shed light on their experience; the possibility exists that they never realized their goal of becoming Liberian settlers.<sup>89</sup>

Despite receiving various bequests, donations did not sustain the American Colonization Society. It was a failing organization. Funds for the African colonization movement remained in high demand, but little were supplied. The ACS’ mission was largely impractical—transporting thousands, if not millions, of persons across the Atlantic for resettlement was too costly an endeavor and a logistical nightmare. In addition, Southern sentiment regarding slavery was a constant uphill battle. After the Civil War, the ACS was a ghost of its former self. Nevertheless, the Society managed to survive well into the twentieth century. A mere five members sustained the organization in 1909; six members were present as late as 1961.<sup>90</sup>

McDonogh’s vision of southern planters adopting his repatriation plan did not come to fruition. The countless praises writers in the *African Repository* bestowed upon McDonogh, their numerous pleas for his repatriation plan as well as the letters of his former slaves to “be in every household in America, and especially in the southern

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<sup>89</sup> “Annual Report of the American Colonization Society,” *The African Repository* 36 (February 1860): 34; “From Liberia,” *The African Repository* 35 (October 1859): 290. Italicized text is part of original document. *The African Repository* 35 (October 1859): 290; *The African Repository* 35 (November 1859): 321-324; Stephen A. Benson to Rev. R.R. Gurley, August 1, 1859, “The Ship Rebecca,” *The African Repository* 36 (January 1860): 19. The letter from Ex-President Roberts is presumed to have been written in 1859 since a follow-up letter from him regarding the ship *Rebecca* was also published in the same issue of *The African Repository* and was dated October 25, 1859.

<sup>90</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, p. 249.

portion of it,” did not garner a significant amount of public support. Those who followed McDonogh’s plan were few and far between. Considering the slave population by 1860 alone numbered just shy of 4 million and a mere 12,000 free and manumitted blacks were repatriated, African emigration was largely unsuccessful. Over the next one hundred years, a civil war ensued, constitutional amendments were passed, reconstruction attempted, and segregation ended before African-Americans were fully accepted into American society and the African colonization movement was finally abandoned. Even as McDonogh wrote his Will in 1838, he predicted the demise of American slavery. On more than one occasion he made a point to note that his instructions for the future slaves of his estate, those purchased after his death, were to be followed “so long as there is slaves in the Country.”<sup>91</sup>

John McDonogh’s memory in the cities of New Orleans and Baltimore has been complicated because of conflicting physical and intellectual legacies. New Orleans has experienced the most change in the way McDonogh has been remembered. After the Civil War, the days of sharecropping in the South resembled a slightly altered version of slavery, but the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-twentieth century enabled African-Americans to achieve further progress in American society. During the Civil Rights era, “McDonogh Day” in New Orleans—originally known as Founder’s Day and begun in 1891 when the students enrolled at McDonogh schools would gather at the statue

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<sup>91</sup> “John McDonogh’s Letter,” *The African Repository* 23 (September 1847): 283-284; McDonogh, “Memoranda,” pp. 44, 66, MPTA; United States Census Bureau, “Map Showing the Distribution of the Slave Population of the Southern States of the United States Compiled from the Census of 1860.” The 1860 census listed the slave population as 3,950,343. See [http://www.census.gov/history/pdf/1860\\_slave\\_distribution.pdf](http://www.census.gov/history/pdf/1860_slave_distribution.pdf).

memorializing McDonogh and two schoolchildren in Lafayette Square to place flowers—was boycotted in 1954 by many black students to protest racial discrimination. Toward the end of the twentieth century names of former slaveholders were often erased from public buildings in New Orleans and replaced with those of Civil Rights activists and other prominent African-Americans. This renaming was the outcome for most of the public schools established by McDonogh’s Will—nearly all of which previously bore his name. The visibility of McDonogh’s educational legacy in New Orleans, therefore, has been almost entirely erased. In 2016, however, at least four schools still bear his name. The annual placing of flowers at the site of his original tomb in McDonoghville Cemetery in New Orleans is only attended by a handful of loyal individuals, mostly current and former McDonogh school students and staff plus a McDonogh historian. McDonogh’s physical legacy, however, is more evident than his intellectual legacy in New Orleans. The “McDonogh Day” statue remains in Lafayette Square, a bust of McDonogh is on display in the Gretna City Hall, and the McDonoghville cemetery still survives.<sup>92</sup>

The McDonogh School in Baltimore has been more generous to the memory of its benefactor. A monument standing on the school’s campus marks the location of

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<sup>92</sup> McDonogh No. 26 is in Gretna, LA, while McDonogh No. 32, McDonogh No. 35, and McDonogh No. 42 are all in New Orleans, LA. See “McDonogh No. 26 Elementary School,” <http://mcdonogh26.jpschools.org/>, “Welcome to McDonogh #32 Literacy Charter School,” McDonogh #32, <http://mcdonogh32.net/>, “McDonogh #35,” Louisiana High School Athletic Association, <http://www.lhsaa.org/schools/school-directory/mcdonogh-35>; “Homepage,” McDonogh 42 Elementary Charter School, <http://mcdonogh42-no.org/>. McDonogh was originally interred at McDonoghville cemetery in New Orleans, but in 1860 his remains were removed to Owings Mills, Maryland (near Baltimore) on the site of the McDonogh School campus. See Ciravolo’s *The Legacy of John McDonogh*, 23-24, 34, 39-41, 63-65; Amy Hubbell, “John McDonogh Topic of Algiers Historical Society Meeting,” *NOLA.com*, June 2, 2011, [http://www.nola.com/west-bank/index.ssf/2011/06/post\\_163.html](http://www.nola.com/west-bank/index.ssf/2011/06/post_163.html); Helen Williams, “John McDonogh Day gets new life with visits from Baltimore school counterparts,” *NOLA.com*, June 5, 2011, [http://www.nola.com/west-bank/index.ssf/2011/06/post\\_171.html](http://www.nola.com/west-bank/index.ssf/2011/06/post_171.html).

McDonogh's grave where schoolchildren bring flowers annually to honor McDonogh's wishes as expressed in his Will. The yearly pilgrimage to McDonogh's final resting place is Baltimore's version of New Orleans' "McDonogh Day" and is known as the Founder's Day ceremony, which takes place every October. While the school still bears his name, McDonogh's vision of free public education to poor boys of all races has been altered. The original semi-military discipline and male-only attendance policies have been replaced by coeducational enrollment and no military-style discipline. As per McDonogh's wishes, the Baltimore school strives to embrace "diversity of background, culture, and thought" to honor McDonogh's "original mission to provide life-altering opportunities and to develop in students the will 'to do the greatest possible amount of good.'" The cost of attending McDonogh school has also changed. Depending on the grade level, annual tuition for the 2016-2017 academic school year at the McDonogh school ranged from \$16,060 to \$38,920, with an average need-based financial aid award of approximately \$12,000.<sup>93</sup>

Avenues for further research in the field of nineteenth-century antebellum New Orleans are numerous, especially among Andrew Durnford, Washington Watts McDonogh, and John McDonogh. Andrew Durnford's social position could be better evaluated by examining his relationships and correspondence with other businessmen in

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<sup>93</sup> "A Brief History of McDonogh," McDonogh School, <https://www.mcdonogh.org/c/about-mcdonogh/archives/a-brief-history>; "Tuition," McDonogh School, <https://www.mcdonogh.org/c/admissions/tuition-financial-aid/tuition>; "Diversity Vision and Mission," McDonogh School, <https://www.mcdonogh.org/c/about-mcdonogh/diversity>; "Founder's Day Observed: John McDonogh and Living a Good Life," McDonogh School, <https://www.mcdonogh.org/news/1439/founder-s-day-observed-john-mcdonogh-and-living-a-good-life>; "Enrollment and Tuition," McDonogh School, <https://www.mcdonogh.org/c/about-mcdonogh/at-a-glance/enrollment-and-tuition>.

New Orleans aside from McDonogh. More information on Washington Watts McDonogh's life might be obtained by examining documents in Liberian archives, although this would surely prove the most logistically challenging research venture suggested. Another research possibility is examining the nature of McDonogh's landholdings. According to Arthur G. Nuhrah, McDonogh bought plantations in and around New Orleans and then sold them for a profit—"flipping" plantations, so to speak. If this is true, then perhaps McDonogh reduced the plantation acreage before sale (but sold all the newly purchased slaves along with the smaller plantation) so that his landholdings increased while his slave force remained small—isolated to those slaves that lived on his plantation across from New Orleans and were hired out for services in the city. Also, not all of McDonogh's slaves were sent to Liberia once emancipated. McDonogh freed ten slaves upon his death, each of which he individually named in his Will and stated that they were to remain in New Orleans once granted their freedom. Odds are favorable that they were literate and left an archival trail. Researching their experiences as freedmen in New Orleans and comparing their lives with those of the former McDonogh slaves who became Liberian colonists might shed light on which group experienced "freedom" in the truest sense. I have explored only a limited amount of material. A wealth of historical information remains hidden in archives, and hopefully future scholars will take advantage of its rich material to expand the story of slavery in nineteenth-century New Orleans and the African colonization movement.

Twenty-first-century Americans are still living with the consequences of slavery, and the traditional narrative does not offer consolation to a society in which race is often

a divisive issue. The peculiar institution has, despite its abolition, had a rippling effect over time in which the South has been tinged with racial animosity. Nevertheless, a modern people should know and care about men like McDonogh, Durnford, and Washington in order to understand the truth about slavery. These men existed on different parts of a slavery continuum, not on polarized ends in which “white” always meant free and “black” guaranteed enslavement. The traditional portrayal of slavery has perpetuated a simplistic view of the institution that tore America apart in the Civil War, but the truth is much more complicated. These three men from New Orleans demonstrate the nuances of American slavery. Their thoughts, beliefs, and actions are proof that, while the traditional narrative is gradually being replaced by a more complex view there is still room for improvement and expansion to create a more complete view of American slavery.

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