



Scenes from Freetown, Sierra Leone, roughly thirty-five years after the formation of the Liberated African Department. The images offer a panorama of the colonial civilizing mission, and a picturesque view of a colony transformed after the Napoleonic Wars from an anti-slavery trading post into the site of a complex and ambitious mission to create and promote “civilization” among people freed from the slave trade by British ships. In the top image, the walled Liberated African Yard is visible on shore, hard by Freetown’s natural harbor. In the bottom image, the colonial barracks loom in the background, and a “typical” Liberated African hut is prominently featured in the foreground. Colored lithographs by Auguste François Laby, ca. 1850. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

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# The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery: The Liberated African Villages of Sierra Leone, 1815–1824

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“WHEN I SEE THE BIG SHIP,” Josiah Yamsey remembered in 1820, “I see none but white men.” He was sure that he would be eaten. Instead, he was locked below decks, behind an iron grille. Another captive man told him that whites “did not eat the people, but made them work.” Soon a Royal Navy vessel gave chase and brought the captured slave ship back to Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, Britain’s small colony on the West African coast. Yamsey and his shipmates went ashore, to the ramshackle Liberated African Yard, a barracks operated by the colonial Liberated African Department. A few months later, Yamsey was sent to Regent, a village in the mountains five miles inland. In Regent he met W. A. B. Johnson, a German-born missionary, and eventually converted to Christianity. “God bring me out from my Country people,” Yamsey declared. “God did all these things to save me from Hell, by Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

Josiah Yamsey’s recollections are preserved in the archives of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). His testimony is heavily mediated. Johnson transcribed it, and shaped it according to the generic conventions of missionary writing and the expectations of his audience, the CMS’s London-based leaders.<sup>2</sup> We can only guess at the contents of Yamsey’s mind, at his fears, at the succor he took from Christianity. His life is archived more durably than his faith. Under the terms of the 1807 Slave Trade Act, which abolished the British slave trade, the governor of Sierra Leone had the right to

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<sup>1</sup> “Account of Josiah Yamsey, a Liberated Negro,” ca. March 1820, Sierra Leone Mission Book, 21st Year (1819–1820), Archives of the Church Missionary Society, University of Birmingham Special Collections [hereafter CMS], C/A/1/M1/16 (consulted on microfilm).

<sup>2</sup> On conversion narratives and the importance of conversion to missionary discourse, see D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), 3–7; Doreen Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture* (London, 1984), 48; Susan Thorne, “‘The Conversion of Englishmen and the Conversion of the World Inseparable’: Missionary Imperialism and the Language of Class in Early Industrial Britain,” in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997), 238–262; Anna Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800–1860* (Cambridge, 2003). On the CMS archive in particular, see J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, Ind., 2003), 9–22.



FIGURE 1: Photograph of the colonial hospital, Freetown, Sierra Leone, in the late nineteenth century. The hospital was built within the walls of the old "Liberated African Yard." The National Archives, Kew, Colonial Office Papers, CO 1069/88.

"dispose" of people released from slave ships.<sup>3</sup> The Liberated African Department (LAD) was built up to manage and refine this process. To the LAD, Yamsey was a data point in a system of settlement and labor. To the CMS, Yamsey was a character conjured from missionary correspondence for the edification of donors. The institutions that archived Josiah Yamsey had a common ambition: that after emancipation, former slaves could be "civilized."

British activists argued that the slave trade had been an obstacle to "civilization" in Africa; it was "[t]he chain which bound Africa to the dust, and rendered abortive every effort to raise her."<sup>4</sup> After 1807, a rhetorical flourish in London became a practical problem in Sierra Leone. The colony was deeply connected with the campaign to end the British slave trade. Now that the trade had been abolished, what kind of society could Britain build in West Africa to replace it? And how would British officials know when former slaves living in a post-slavery society had been "civilized"? To the LAD, "civilization" was a package of British folkways that could be observed and measured: taking wages, wearing European clothes, owning land, attending church. To the CMS, it was a more ineffable transformation, but one that was still detectable in narratives of personal transformation judged to be "authentic" by white missionaries. Josiah Yamsey lived between these two versions of "civilization." The power of missionaries like John-

<sup>3</sup> See African Institution, *Fourth Report of the Directors of the African Institution: Read at the Annual General Meeting on the 28th of March, 1810* (London, 1810), 57–58.

<sup>4</sup> *West-African Sketches* (London, 1824), 3.



son relied on the cooperation of privileged converts like Yamsey, but it was justified on the basis of Africans' incapacity and grateful obedience. In Sierra Leone, imperial anti-slavery laws were a charter for a system of economic exploitation built on a shifting foundation of paternalism, coercion, and codependence. In 1820, when Josiah Yamsey bore witness to his fellow converts about his captivity and conversion, he was also bearing witness to the rebirth of British anti-slavery as colonialism.

Building "civilization" out of anti-slavery in Sierra Leone was a different, although related, project from the emancipation of slaves in British colonies. In the slave colonies, emancipation presented officials with what Thomas Holt, writing about Jamaica, called "the problem of freedom," of how "thoroughly [to reform] . . . ex-slaves' culture so as to make them receptive to the discipline of free labor."<sup>5</sup> In Sierra Leone, officials felt that they faced a more foundational problem. A majority of enslaved people in the West Indies spoke some English, many were practicing Christians, and most participated, to some extent, in a cash economy.<sup>6</sup> In Jamaica, the roots of "civilization" seemed to be shallow but visible; the "problem of freedom" was the problem of protecting and nurturing those roots after emancipation. In contrast, most people arriving in Freetown from slave ships spoke no English, had never worked in heavily capitalized agricultural industries, and had never bought anything with a British shilling. Anti-slavery activists in London assumed that the West African societies involved in the slave trade had been so debased by it that they had virtually no "civilization" to speak of, and that the people they sold had even less.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, former slaves repatriated in Sierra Leone came from across West Africa, and beyond; British officials did not need to finesse the logistics of the end of slavery with the traditions of a conquered society.<sup>8</sup> The British colony at Sierra Leone was something new, and something made by anti-slavery. In consequence, colonial officials claimed a mandate not just to reform former slaves' culture, but to *create* a culture for them, and then to impose it. As two parliamentary representatives commented in 1827, the "manner of life" of former slaves living in vil-

<sup>5</sup> Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore, 1992), xxii. See also Holt, "The Essence of the Contract: The Articulation of Race, Gender, and Political Economy in British Emancipation Policy, 1838–1866," in Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Post-emancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2000), 33–59. See, for example, Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004); Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009); Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860–1899* (Princeton, N.J., 1985); Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009); Scott, "Paper Thin: Freedom and Re-enslavement in the Diaspora of the Haitian Revolution," *Law and History Review* 29, no. 4 (2011): 1061–1087; Alvin O. Thompson, *Unprofitable Servants: Crown Slaves in Barbice, Guyana, 1803–1831* (Barbados, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> For example, one leading West Indian planter estimated that in 1774, enslaved people held at least 20 percent of all the circulating specie in Jamaica. See Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), 114.

<sup>7</sup> See discussions in Ralph A. Austen and Woodruff D. Smith, "Images of Africa and British Slave-Trade Abolition: The Transition to an Imperialist Ideology, 1787–1807," *African Historical Studies* 2, no. 1 (1969): 69–83; Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780–1850* (Madison, Wis., 1964).

<sup>8</sup> For a good summary of the problem of British colonial officials attempting to abolish slavery while maintaining "traditional" institutions in a colonized society, see the discussion of the Gold Coast Colony in Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003), chap. 1.

lages such as Regent was “altogether artificial.”<sup>9</sup> In Sierra Leone, the “problem of freedom” intertwined with what might be called the “emerging problem of imperial trusteeship,” as British efforts to teach the discipline of capitalism to former slaves grew in symbiosis with British ambitions to rule West Africa for the sake of the “natives.”

IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, AT LEAST 81,745 people like Josiah Yamsey were repatriated in Sierra Leone, including nearly 13,000 between 1814 and 1824.<sup>10</sup> Before 1815, however, colonial officials took more interest in captured slave ships than in the people imprisoned aboard them. The 1807 Act passed during the Napoleonic Wars, and was designed to adapt the interdiction of slave ships to the routines of maritime warfare. The act permitted a new Court of Vice-Admiralty in Freetown to award military personnel a portion of the auction value of the slave ships they had helped to capture as “prize money”—the same incentive offered for the capture of enemy warships and merchant shipping.<sup>11</sup> This focus on the value of slave ships made the fate of former captives an afterthought. In Sierra Leone, some were indentured as “apprentices,” others were enlisted in the armed forces, but many were sent to informal settlements outside Freetown, where they effectively disappeared from the scrutiny of colonial officials.<sup>12</sup>

By 1815, prize money was essential to the colonial economy. Consequently, in Sierra Leone, the end of the Napoleonic Wars was a crisis, not a relief. After Waterloo, former captives kept arriving, putting pressure on wages, while the rewards of capturing slave ships decreased. The 1815 Treaty of Paris did not mandate the abolition of other European slave trades. Instead, the rules governing the seizure of foreign slave ships became stricter, and British officers shared the proceeds of captured non-British ships under new bilateral agreements with other European states. For Charles MacCarthy, who served as governor of Sierra Leone from 1814 until his death in the first Anglo-Asante

<sup>9</sup> James Rowan and Henry Wellington, “(312) Sierra Leone. Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of the Colony of Sierra Leone. First Part,” House of Commons Papers, Reports of Commissioners, 1826, 92.

<sup>10</sup> The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, Voyages Database, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/>; Jean Herskovits Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria: The “Sierra Leonians” in Yoruba, 1830–1890* (Madison, Wis., 1965), 25.

<sup>11</sup> See Padraic Xavier Scanlan, “The Rewards of Their Exertions: Prize Money and British Abolitionism in Sierra Leone, 1808–1823,” *Past & Present* 225, no. 1 (2014): 113–142. On prize courts more broadly, see Richard Hill, *The Prizes of War: The Naval Prize System in the Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815* (Portsmouth, 1998); E. S. Roscoe, *A History of the English Prize Court* (London, 1924); Roscoe, *Studies in the History of the Admiralty and Prize Courts* (London, 1932); J. M. Fewster, “Prize-Money and the British Expedition to the West Indies of 1793–4,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12, no. 1 (1983): 1–28; Tony Guttridge, “Aspects of Naval Prize Agency, 1793–1815,” *The Mariner’s Mirror* 80, no. 1 (1994): 45–53; Guttridge, “George Redmond Hulbert: Prize Agent at Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1812–14,” *The Mariner’s Mirror* 87, no. 1 (2001): 30–42.

<sup>12</sup> For primary accounts of Sierra Leone in this period, see Kenneth Macaulay, *The Colony of Sierra Leone Vindicated from the Misrepresentations of Mr. Macqueen of Glasgow* (London, 1827), 5; Paul Cuffe to William Allen, April 22, 1811, in Rosalind Cobb Wiggins, ed., *Captain Paul Cuffe’s Logs and Letters, 1808–1817: A Black Quaker’s “Voice from Within the Veil”* (Washington, D.C., 1996), 119; Thomas Coke, *An Interesting Narrative of a Mission, Sent to Sierra Leone, in Africa, by the Methodists, in 1811: To Which Is Prefixed, an Account of the Rise, Progress, Disasters, and Present State of That Colony—The Whole Interspersed with a Variety of Remarkable Particulars* (London, 1812), 40. For a history of census-taking, see R. R. Kuczynski, *Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire*, vol. 1: *West Africa* (London, 1948), chap. 2.



FIGURE 2: The Freetown Peninsula, Freetown, and the “village system.”

War in 1824, “civilization” was a way to shore up the fortunes of a fading colony; colonialism was an emergent property of economic necessity.

Between 1816 and 1823, MacCarthy founded an archipelago of villages to settle former captives. The villages, in the hinterland of Freetown, included Regent, Kissy, Gloucester, Waterloo, Wilberforce, Leopold, Charlotte, Bathurst, Wellington, York, Kent, and Hastings, as well as villages on the Banana Islands off the coast south of Freetown, and another on the Isles-de-Los, a chain of islands near present-day Conakry, Guinea. By 1822, nearly 8,000 people lived in the villages, compared with about 5,600 in Freetown itself.<sup>13</sup> The village system was overseen by the chief superintendent of the LAD, and each village was managed by a missionary superintendent, recruited by the CMS. The missionaries were administrators as well as preachers, organizing agriculture, operating schools, and maintaining village registers.

Some historians of Sierra Leone portray the village system, particularly in the 1830s and 1840s, as an incubator for future generations of leaders.<sup>14</sup> However, it began as a pragmatic attempt to dull an economic shock. Because “civilization” was valuable, the

<sup>13</sup> *The Royal Gazette and Sierra Leone Advertiser* (Freetown), August 10, 1822; see also Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria*, 25.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford, 1962), 144–147; John Peterson, “The Enlightenment and the Founding of Freetown: An Interpretation of Sierra Leone History, 1787–1816,” in Christopher Fyfe and Eldred Jones, eds., *Freetown: A Symposium* (Freetown, 1968), 9–23, here 20–21; Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone, 1787–1870* (London, 1969). For an echo of this position, see Maeve Ryan, “‘A Most Promising Field for Future Usefulness’: The Church Missionary Society and the Liberated Africans of Sierra Leone,” in William Mulligan and Maurice Bric, eds., *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 2013), 37–58.

records of the village system are relatively robust in comparison with the records of other colonial departments.<sup>15</sup> Regent's records are especially rich. In his time, no missionary in West Africa was as celebrated as Regent's superintendent, W. A. B. Johnson.<sup>16</sup> A historian of British missionary work wrote that Regent represented "[a]ll that we have wished [for] . . . from missionary efforts."<sup>17</sup> Missionary accounts of the "civilization" of former slaves also attracted the attention of the American Colonization Society, which saw in the villages a proof of concept that, "under the political government of a few white men," a colony could safely be established in Africa to hive off free African Americans.<sup>18</sup> In response to the shock of peace in Europe, the village system transformed a legal instrument that had made ending the slave trade profitable into a colonial bureaucracy that removed the legal status of "slave" from former captives, and elaborated a set of norms for the behavior and everyday life of "free" people.

THE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE has recently been revitalized by studies of individual people and places, foregrounding and thickly describing connections within an empire that was heterogeneous, "a mass of loose ends, contradictions and unfinished projects."<sup>19</sup> Concomitantly, recent work on the transatlantic slave trade has reinterpreted the core subject of Atlantic history with close readings of individual places, and individual lives.<sup>20</sup> The village system in Sierra Leone was relatively small, and relatively isolated, but its con-

<sup>15</sup> For example, I have found no extant records of the Ordnance or Public Works departments, and few remaining records from the law courts.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, [Robert Benton Seeley, comp.], *A Memoir of the Rev. W. A. B. Johnson, Missionary of the Church Missionary Society, in Regent's Town, Sierra Leone, Africa* (New York, 1853); W. A. B. Johnson, *The Gospel in Africa: An Account of the Labors and Success of the Rev. W. A. B. Johnson, Missionary of the Church Missionary Society in Regent's Town, Sierra Leone, Africa* (New York, 1858); Arthur T. Pierson, *Seven Years in Sierra Leone: The Story of the Work of William A. B. Johnson, Missionary of the Church Missionary Society, from 1816 to 1823 in Regent's Town, Sierra Leone, Africa* (New York, 1897); Maria Louisa Charlesworth, *Africa's Mountain Valley; or, The Church in Regent's Town, West Africa* (London, 1856). Johnson also plays a prominent role in missionary histories published in the mid-nineteenth century. See Samuel Abraham Walker, *Missions in Western Africa, among the Soosos, Bulloms, &c.: Being the First Undertaken by the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East* (Dublin, 1845); Walker, *The Church of England Mission in Sierra Leone: Including an Introductory Account of That Colony, and a Comprehensive Sketch of the Niger Expedition in the Year 1841* (London, 1847).

<sup>17</sup> Walker, *The Church of England Mission in Sierra Leone*, 83.

<sup>18</sup> American Colonization Society, *The Second Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour in the United States: With an Appendix* (Washington, D.C., 1819), 7.

<sup>19</sup> John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (New York, 2013), 65. See also Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550–1800* (Cambridge, 2008); Clare Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790–1920* (Cambridge, 2012); Zoë Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections, 1815–45: Patronage, the Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester, 2005); David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds., *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Career in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2006); Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London, 2001); Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> See especially James H. Sweet, *Domingos Alvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2011); G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (New York, 2010); Randy J. Sparks, *Where the Negroes Are Masters: An African Port in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014); Natalie Zemon Davis, "Judges, Masters, Diviners: Slaves' Experience of Criminal Justice in Colonial Suriname," *Law and History Review* 29, no. 4 (2011): 925–984; Davis, "Creole Languages and Their Uses: The Example of Colonial Suriname," *Historical Research* 82, no. 216 (2009): 268–284; Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012).



nections with the wider British Empire give it outsize importance. In a field structured by Eric Williams's thesis that the abolition of British slavery was made possible by the declining value of the West Indies to British industry, and by David Brion Davis's and Christopher Leslie Brown's careful intellectual histories, the *origins* of British abolitionism preponderate.<sup>21</sup> In part, this is because the 1807 Slave Trade Act was designed to weaken the slaveholding regime of the British West Indies from the supply side, eventually leading to emancipation.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, although historians of the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act emphasize the practical challenges of emancipation, most treat the law as a nearly inevitable sequel to 1807.<sup>23</sup> Between these milestones, celebrated by British reformers in the nineteenth century and reified by historians, colonial Sierra Leone was built on the scaffolding of imperial laws against slave-trading.

Sierra Leone was an abolitionist colony insofar as it was a colonial incarnation of British anti-slavery ideology. However, British "abolitionism" was different from its American counterpart. Some historians of the United States seem to have drifted toward a position where the label "abolitionist" can apply only to activists committed to ending slavery *and* to securing equal citizenship for African Americans. By that measure, William Wilberforce, Britain's most famous abolitionist, was never an "abolitionist." It might be simpler to say that there were many abolitionisms, in different times and places, with different goals and bases of support, and that the British and American iterations of the movement had distinct trajectories and ambitions. In a country where slavery was a visible part of everyday life, American abolitionism was revolutionary and introspective. In Britain, slavery was a colonial institution, concentrated in the West Indies. Most leading activists against British slavery and the British slave trade rarely encountered enslaved people. For them, as for most Britons, the effects of the end of colonial slavery were largely economic: layoffs in Liverpool, fluctuations in the price of sugar. In consequence, British anti-slavery was more ideologically static, less radical, more expansive, and more *imperial* than American abolitionism. The successes of British anti-slavery underwrote schemes for domestic moral reform, for global missionary work, and for the "protection" of the indigenous peoples living in the British settler empire.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> On Williams and his critics, see Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; repr., New York, 1961); Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh, 1977); Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor vs. Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York, 2002); David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1987). On the intellectual history of abolitionism, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975); Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1," *American Historical Review* 90, no. 2 (April 1985): 339–361; Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 2," *American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (June 1985): 547–566; David Brion Davis, "Reflections on Abolitionism and Ideological Hegemony," *American Historical Review* 92, no. 4 (October 1987): 797–812.

<sup>22</sup> On amelioration, see J. R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750–1834: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford, 1988); Christa Dierksheide, *Amelioration and Empire: Progress and Slavery in the Plantation Americas* (Charlottesville, Va., 2014).

<sup>23</sup> See Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago, 2002); Gad Heuman, *"The Killing Time": The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica* (London, 1994); William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830–1865* (1976; paperback ed., Oxford, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> On the long tail of anti-slavery in humanitarian reform schemes, see Howard Temperley, *White Dreams, Black Africa: The Antislavery Expedition to the River Niger, 1841–1842* (New Haven, Conn., 1991); James Heartfield, *The Aborigines' Protection Society: Humanitarian Imperialism in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, South Africa, and the Congo, 1836–1909* (New York, 2011); Bronwen Everill and



The leaders of the British movement against the slave trade and against slavery were also fundamentally conservative in their assumptions about the pace of emancipation; most assumed that former slaves would learn the economic, cultural, and cognitive habits of freedom over generations. In the wake of the American Revolution, most northern states abolished slavery and put in place systems of gradual emancipation, attenuating the freedom of formerly enslaved people. In the era of the Civil War, abolitionists began to call for immediate and unconditional emancipation. The question of whether these two moments of emancipation were part of one continuous process from gradual to immediate emancipation, or whether the Civil War created a rupture, has been the subject of much recent debate.<sup>25</sup> The history of British anti-slavery adds an important transatlantic perspective to this controversy. In the British Empire, gradualism was the generally accepted position for abolitionist activists at home and was widely implemented in the empire. Gradual emancipation blurred into both abolitionism and ideas of “civilization” in Sierra Leone. The assumption that former slaves ought to learn the discipline of free labor blended smoothly with expectations that they ought gratefully to accept British control over their lives.

British anti-slavery was expansive and imperial. Some recent histories of the British campaign against the slave trade posit a continuity between late Georgian and early Victorian activists and the bureaucrats of the high Victorian Foreign Office, and single-mindedly interpret any action taken against slave traders by the British government in the later nineteenth century as evidence of a “moral” British foreign policy.<sup>26</sup> And yet, it is certainly true that leading British anti-slavery activists were insiders, not street fighters, and that anti-slavery was promiscuous, its ambitions reaching far beyond slavery as such. As one critic of the so-called “Saints” put it, “They step into their carriages . . . they are the Sierra Leone Company; and again . . . the Society for Missions . . . another transformation makes them the Society for the Suppression of Vice; a fifth carries

Josiah Kaplan, “Introduction: Enduring Humanitarianisms in Africa,” in Everill and Kaplan, eds., *The History and Practice of Humanitarian Intervention and Aid in Africa* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2013), 1–22; Alan Lester, “Humanitarians and White Settlers in the Nineteenth Century,” in Norman Etherington, ed., *Missions and Empire* (Oxford, 2005), 64–85; Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance: Protecting Aborigines across the Nineteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge, 2014); George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York, 1987), 240–245. For useful comments on missionary work among emancipated people in the empire, see Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, La., 2009), 32; David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, Conn., 2005), 152; Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester, 2004), 41; William A. Green, “The West Indies and British West African Policy in the Nineteenth Century—a Corrective Comment,” *Journal of African History* 15, no. 2 (1974): 247–259.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, James J. Gigantino II, *The Ragged Road to Abolition: Slavery and Freedom in New Jersey, 1775–1865* (Philadelphia, 2014); Sarah Levine-Gronningsater, “Delivering Freedom: Gradual Emancipation, Black Legal Culture, and the Origins of Sectional Crisis in New York, 1759–1870” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2014); Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1998); Paul J. Polgar, “‘To Raise Them to an Equal Participation’: Early National Abolitionism, Gradual Emancipation, and the Promise of African American Citizenship,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 2 (2011): 229–258.

<sup>26</sup> See especially work by Richard Huzzey, including *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2012) and “Minding Civilisation and Humanity in 1867: A Case Study in British Imperial Culture and Victorian Anti-Slavery,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 5 (2012): 807–825.

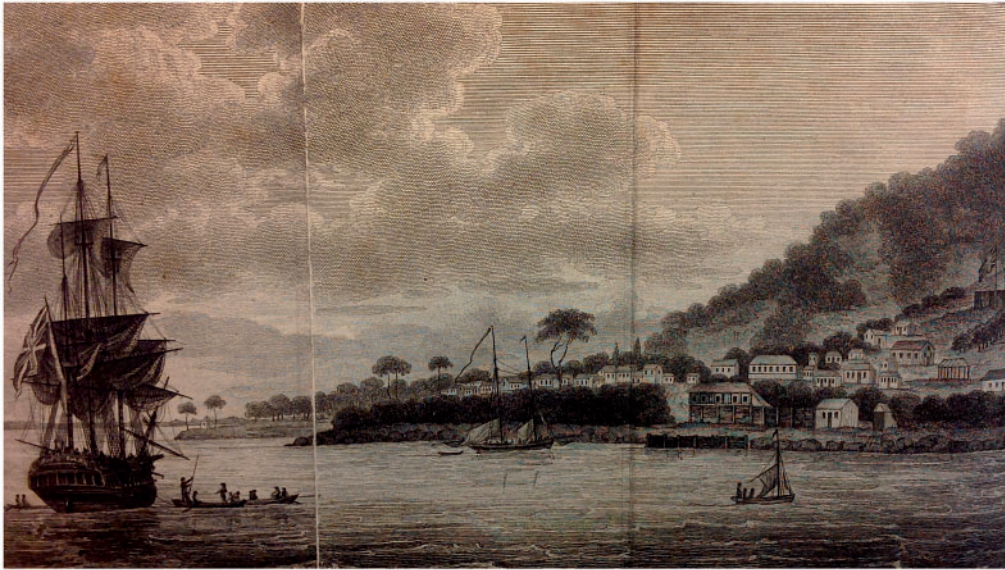


FIGURE 3: Freetown, Sierra Leone, circa 1803. From Thomas Winterbottom, *An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone: To Which Is Added, an Account of the Present State of Medicine among Them*, 2 vols. (London, 1803), 1: frontispiece.

them to the India House; a sixth lands them at the House of Commons.”<sup>27</sup> After 1808, Sierra Leone passed to the Crown, and was governed mostly by military officers, but the colony remained deeply connected to the ambitions of British anti-slavery.

BRITISH SIERRA LEONE BEGAN AS AN attempt to prove that commerce in Africa could be more profitable without the slave trade. In 1787, the colony began as the short-lived “Province of Freedom,” with settlers drawn from among the “Black Poor,” indigent soldiers and sailors living in London after the American Revolutionary War.<sup>28</sup> In 1792, the Sierra Leone Company (SLC) re-launched the colony with a new settlement, Freetown. The SLC’s directors included William Wilberforce and other prominent leaders of parliamentary anti-slavery. Freetown was first settled by nearly fifteen hundred “Black Loyalists,” African Americans who had joined the British side in the Revolutionary War, and had then been resettled in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, joined in 1800 by roughly five hundred exiled Trelawny Maroons from Jamaica. The Sierra Leone Company hoped that the settlers would take wages to grow crops like sugar and cotton, and prove the efficiency of free labor over slave labor. Those plans faltered, and in 1808 the SLC dissolved and Sierra Leone became a Crown Colony.

However, the elite London abolitionists maintained strong connections with the governors of Sierra Leone. Correspondence on West African affairs sent to the Colo-

<sup>27</sup> This critique was part of an attempt by T. P. Thompson, the first Crown governor of Sierra Leone, to use his position to expose the “hypocrisy” of the London-based abolitionist elite. See Decision of the Court of Vice-Admiralty, November 6, 1809, Records of the Colonial Office, The National Archives, Kew [hereafter CO], CO 267/27.

<sup>28</sup> See Stephen J. Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists: London’s Blacks and the Foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement, 1786–1791* (Liverpool, 1994).

nial Office was routinely copied to Wilberforce and the leading abolitionist jurist, James Stephen. Zachary Macaulay, who had governed Sierra Leone under the SLC, served on the board of the Church Missionary Society, built a trading empire out of his firm's branch office in Freetown, and represented the business interests of many colonial officials, including Charles MacCarthy.<sup>29</sup> After the Sierra Leone Company folded, eight of its fourteen directors joined the steering committee of the new "African Institution." The Institution, whose subscribers also included noblemen, merchants, and pious bankers, was founded expressly to influence British policy in West Africa.<sup>30</sup> The relationships between London activists and colonial officials could be intimate as well as professional. When MacCarthy was on leave in London in 1821, he asked Zachary Macaulay to help him find a wife, "to fill the throne at Sierra Leone," as Macaulay put it.<sup>31</sup>

After 1807, the African Institution lobbied for the founding of a Vice-Admiralty Court in Sierra Leone to process captured slave ships, and promoted the court to British officers.<sup>32</sup> Freetown became the judicial and military capital of slave-ship interdiction in the British Empire. Prize money provided ready cash and cheap goods to merchants and military officers.<sup>33</sup> While prize money boomed, former slaves appeared only intermittently in colonial records. Tellingly, when Governor Edward Columbine, a Royal Navy officer, ordered a colonial census in 1811, the census-takers counted the 1,917 people in Freetown, but not the nearly 1,000 people who had already been emancipated under the 1807 Act but had been sent to live outside the capital.<sup>34</sup>

After the 1815 Treaty of Paris formally ended the Napoleonic Wars, Royal Navy cruisers continued to capture slave ships, but under a more closely regulated prize system. Regular sittings of the Vice-Admiralty Court were suspended; the court, which had operated unilaterally and with few regulations, was replaced by bilateral Courts of Mixed Commission. In the Mixed Commissions, British judges shared the bench with representatives of other European governments, and prize money was divided between British officers and foreign judges.<sup>35</sup> In Sierra Leone, as prize money became scarcer, more than twenty-five hundred people arrived in Freetown from slave ships. "Unless some more enlarged plans are adopted," wrote Charles MacCarthy, "the increase we daily receive of these individuals will rather retard than promote our advance toward

<sup>29</sup> See Scanlan, "The Rewards of Their Exertions."

<sup>30</sup> See Wayne Ackerson, *The African Institution (1807–1827) and the Antislavery Movement in Great Britain* (Lewiston, N.Y., 2005); Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton, N.J., 2009), 86.

<sup>31</sup> Zachary Macaulay to Selina Macaulay, London, September 20, 1821, in Viscountess Knutsford, ed., *Life and Letters of Zachary Macaulay* (London, 1900), 368.

<sup>32</sup> See Zachary Macaulay to Lord Castlereagh, May 8, 1807, Papers of the War Office, The National Archives, Kew [hereafter WO], WO 1/352; William Wilberforce to Castlereagh, October 26, 1807, *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> See Leslie Bethell, "The Mixed Commissions for the Suppression of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 7, no. 1 (1966): 79–93; Scanlan, "The Rewards of Their Exertions."

<sup>34</sup> See Paul Cuffe, *A Brief Account of the Settlement and Present Situation of the Colony of Sierra Leone, in Africa* (New York, 1812), 4; Cuffe to Samuel Mills, January 6, 1817, in "Extract of Letters Written by Capt. Paul Cuffe to Mr. Mills," in American Colonization Society, *The First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States and the Proceedings of the Society at Their Annual Meeting in the City of Washington, on the First Day of January, 1818* (Washington, D.C., 1818), 27–28.

<sup>35</sup> Bethell, "The Mixed Commissions for the Suppression of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century," 84. See also Castlereagh to Thomas Gregory, Esq., Foreign Office, February 20, 1819, Records of the Foreign Office, The National Archives, Kew [hereafter FO], FO 84/3.



Civilization.”<sup>36</sup> The growing number of cheap workers put pressure on the children of the first generation of settlers. Many left the colony to work as sailors on merchant vessels. MacCarthy faced a complicated economic problem: less prize money and fewer associated goods and services, a shortage of skilled labor, and a surplus of unskilled labor.<sup>37</sup> The village system was MacCarthy’s “enlarged plan” to manage this economic crisis.

MacCarthy, a career soldier, was not a pious man.<sup>38</sup> He had little interest in Anglican theology or orthodoxy; instead, he valued the rituals of social inclusion associated with the Church of England—the church-going, the festivals, the parish-level collection of vital statistics. From these premises, MacCarthy reasoned that missionaries could do double duty as administrators. He reached out to the Church Missionary Society in 1815 and 1816.<sup>39</sup> In 1816, a CMS representative, Edward Bickersteth, traveled to West Africa to take stock of the Society’s operations.<sup>40</sup> Bickersteth was soon convinced to move the missionary headquarters to Sierra Leone. “In the absence of supernatural inspiration,” he wrote, “such circumstances may be considered as the call, ‘Come over and help us.’”<sup>41</sup> MacCarthy proposed to “divide the Peninsula in Parishes, settling a Clergyman in each.” The most promising young men would be taken on by the colonial government as apprentices in skilled trades. The rest would be distributed out to the villages.<sup>42</sup> MacCarthy promised to double the salary of any missionary recruited by the

<sup>36</sup> MacCarthy to Bathurst, Sierra Leone, May 31, 1816, CO 267/42. H. I. Ricketts, *Narrative of the Ashantee War: With a View of the Present State of the Colony of Sierra Leone* (London, 1831), 214–215.

<sup>37</sup> On the price of labor in Freetown, see *Royal Gazette and Sierra Leone Advertiser* (Freetown), April 4, 1818; on settlers leaving the colony, see Paul Cuffe to Nathan Lord, April 9, 1815, in Wiggins, *Captain Paul Cuffe’s Logs and Letters*, 342.

<sup>38</sup> On MacCarthy’s career, see S. T. McCarthy, “The Clann Carthaigh,” *Kerry Archaeological Magazine* 2, no. 12 (1914): 181–202. See also Letters and Documents Connected with Sir Charles McCarthy and the McCarthy Family, 1695–1824, National Army Museum, London [hereafter NAM], NAM 6612/10/3; Edward O’Shill to Colonel Robert Brownrigg, September 22, 1798, NAM 6612/10/8/1; John Haig to Army Medical Department, January 12, 1799, NAM 6612/10/8/5.

<sup>39</sup> See Central Committee Minutes for July 15, 1815, and October 23, 1815, CMS G/C/1, vol. 2: 27 February 1815–10 March 1817, 394–398; MacCarthy to Josiah Pratt, June 29, 1817, CMS C/A/1/E6/102; MacCarthy to Edward Bickersteth, June 20, 1818, CMS C/A/1/E7/22. The CMS operated a school on Leicester Mountain, near Freetown, but its local headquarters in West Africa were in the Rio Pongas region, a few hundred miles north of Sierra Leone. On the Rio Pongas mission, see especially Bruce Mouser’s work: Mouser, “Trade, Coasters, and Conflict in the Rio Pongo from 1790 to 1808,” *Journal of African History* 14, no. 1 (1973): 45–64; Mouser, “Landlords-Strangers: A Process of Accommodation and Assimilation,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 8, no. 3 (1975): 425–440; Mouser and Nancy Fox Mouser, *Case of the Reverend Peter Hartwig, Slave Trader or Misunderstood Idealist: Clash of Church Missionary Society/Imperial Objectives in Sierra Leone, 1804–1815* (Madison, Wis., 2003); Mouser, “Origins of Church Missionary Society Accommodation to Imperial Policy: The Sierra Leone Quagmire and the Closing of the Susu Mission, 1804–17,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39, no. 4 (2009): 375–402; Mouser, *American Colony on the Rio Pongo: The War of 1812, the Slave Trade, and the Proposed Settlement of African Americans, 1810–1830* (Trenton, N.J., 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Josiah Pratt to Edward Bickersteth, August 12, 1815, published in T. R. Birks, ed., *Memoir of the Rev. Edward Bickersteth, Late Rector of Watton, Herts.*, 2 vols. (New York, 1851), 1: 223–224. See also Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work*, 4 vols. (London, 1899–1916), 1: 45, 80, 107, 122; Mouser, “Origins of Church Missionary Society Accommodation to Imperial Policy”; Bruce L. Mouser, “Continuing British Interest in Coastal Guinea-Conakry and Fuuta Jalloo Highlands (1750 to 1850),” *Cahiers d’Études africaines* 43, no. 172 (2003): 761–790, here 771; Jehu Hanciles, *Euthanasia of a Mission: African Church Autonomy in a Colonial Context* (Westport, Conn., 2002), 13.

<sup>41</sup> Birks, *Memoir of the Rev. Edward Bickersteth*, 1: 250–251. See also Kristina Bross, “‘Come Over and Help Us’: Reading Mission Literature,” *Early American Literature* 38, no. 3 (2003): 395–400.

<sup>42</sup> MacCarthy to Bathurst, May 31, 1816, CO 267/42.



CMS, from £125 to £250 a year, wagering part of the colonial budget against the hope that better organization would make up the difference. In celebration of the deal, MacCarthy gave an informal settlement in the colony, a village called Hog Brook, a patriotic new name: Regent's Town.<sup>43</sup>

DURING THE WARS, THE VICE-ADMIRALTY COURT was an economic dynamo, and the "civilization" of former slaves was a lower priority for colonial officials than maintaining the momentum of wartime commerce. However, the legal designation "captured Negro," which the court applied to former slaves, proved useful to the Liberated African Department in peacetime. "Captured Negroes" were "captured" in the same sense that the ships they had been imprisoned aboard were "captured": chattels seized as contraband by Britain.<sup>44</sup> The Crown symbolically refused to take "possession" of its "property," but still claimed the right to indenture, to enlist, or to resettle former slaves. By the early 1820s, MacCarthy's administration used the term "Liberated African" in preference to "captured Negro," but the legal disabilities associated with the category did not change. MacCarthy had simply renamed the kind of authority that flowed directly from imperial laws against the slave trade.<sup>45</sup>

Bureaucratic instruments express the ideologies of the institutions that make and use them.<sup>46</sup> The Liberated African Department's most famous record, the "Register of Liberated Africans," is a collection of names, physical descriptions, and occasional notes about the "nation" of more than ten thousand people released from the Middle Passage and resettled in the colony. Although some historians read the registers against the grain to understand the African diaspora in Sierra Leone, they were used by the LAD as a tool for surveillance.<sup>47</sup> The department also produced a second ledger, the

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> The concept of "contraband" goods has an unsettling history in the legal archives of slave societies; "contraband" slaves could, in a sense, "steal themselves." For a rich discussion of this idea and its repercussions, see, for example, Kate Masur, "'A Rare Phenomenon of Philological Vegetation': The Word 'Contraband' and the Meanings of Emancipation in the United States," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (2007): 1050–1084.

<sup>45</sup> As late as 1822, in a dispatch to Earl Bathurst, MacCarthy asked for "articles for the service of sick Liberated Africans" and for "clothing for the service of the Captured Negroes." Charles MacCarthy to Earl Bathurst, January 12, 1822, Governor Despatches 1818–1822, Sierra Leone Public Archives, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown [hereafter SLPA].

<sup>46</sup> Historians of slavery and capitalism in the United States working on paperwork have made this point in new and innovative ways. See, for example, Caitlin C. Rosenthal, "From Memory to Mastery: Accounting for Control in America, 1750–1880," *Enterprise and Society* 14, no. 4 (2013): 732–748; Michael Zakim, "Producing Capitalism: The Clerk at Work," in Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith, eds., *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago, 2012), 223–248; Zakim, "Paperwork," *Raritan* 33, no. 4 (2014): 34–56.

<sup>47</sup> For innovative uses of the registers, see Suzanne Schwarz, "Extending the African Names Database: New Evidence from Sierra Leone," *African Economic History* 38 (2010): 137–163; Schwarz, "Reconstructing the Life Histories of Liberated Africans: Sierra Leone in the Early Nineteenth Century," *History in Africa* 39 (2012): 175–207; G. Ugo Nwokeji and David Eltis, "The Roots of the African Diaspora: Methodological Considerations in the Analysis of Names in the Liberated African Registers of Sierra Leone and Havana," *History in Africa* 29 (2002): 365–379; Adam Jones, "Recaptive Nations: Evidence Concerning the Demographic Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Slavery and Abolition* 11, no. 1 (1990): 42–57; Jones, "New Light on the Liberated Africans and Their Origins: A List of Children Named after Benefactors," in Adam Jones, Peter K. Mitchell, and Margaret Peil, eds., *Sierra Leone Studies at Birmingham, 1988: Proceedings of the Fifth Birmingham Sierra Leone Studies Symposium* (Birmingham, 1990), 32–42. For a compelling and important Africanist's

“Statement of Disposals,” in which the total number of individuals in each slave ship was recorded, broken down by where they were sent to clear forests, row boats, repair buildings, cut roads, or bear children.<sup>48</sup> Although the LAD’s registers survive, other internal records are very rare; secrecy was a feature of the system. Charles MacCarthy preferred to give instructions to the chief superintendent in person, not in writing.<sup>49</sup> In turn, the chief superintendent informally instructed the missionary superintendents, riding circuit to the villages, “to observe that the system is acted up to.”<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the Liberated African Department was flexible and adaptable. Its records were spreadsheets for making and measuring “civilization.”

“Civilization” was a vague but useful and flexible concept; the LAD used the labor of the Liberated Africans and the infrastructure of the village system to advance a number of colonial projects. First, the villages announced a regime of surveillance. Until the 1880s, “Sierra Leone” was confined to Freetown and its immediate backcountry, a rugged peninsula of roughly three hundred square miles. And yet, even within this relatively restricted territory, some Liberated Africans slipped out of the LAD’s control. Most spoke little or no English, and few left any trace in the archive other than notes that they had absconded from their villages. Their motivations are not preserved in the archives, but they had many reasons to slip away: hope that they might find lost families, anger at the authority of missionary superintendents, fear of an alien situation or of re-enslavement. Many “runaways” did not go far, and settled in unofficial villages in the colony, or in the Mende, Temne, and Bullom villages near the colonial border. Some made their homes in a village called Bambara Town, a half-mile east of Freetown, “an African hamlet in the centre of a British colony.”<sup>51</sup> The discharged black soldiers from the 4th West India Regiment lived in another informal settlement, Soldier Town, unofficially called “the Camp,” and known as a market for stolen goods.<sup>52</sup> The village system did not stop this process, but it did declare the colonial government’s claims over the movement of people within the colony.

The villages also helped to solidify colonial borders. The LAD established villages in the hinterland of Freetown, in places where villagers would have to clear land of rocks and brush before they could build homes and gardens. From 1816 to 1819, most of the villages were built in the mountains, so that the Liberated Africans would, as the long-serving chief superintendent Joseph Reffell put it, “clear the Forest in the rear.”<sup>53</sup> The next villages, settled after 1819, were built in the swampy coastal lowlands when the mountain farms proved relatively unproductive.<sup>54</sup> By claiming land internal to the borders of the colony, the villages cemented the claim of Britain over the whole Freetown Peninsula, and excluded local Mende, Temne, and Bullom chiefs and headmen.

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perspective on the Liberated African villages, see Richard Anderson, “The Diaspora of Sierra Leone’s Liberated Africans: Enlistment, Forced Migration, and ‘Liberation’ at Freetown, 1808–1863,” *African Economic History* 41 (2013): 101–138.

<sup>48</sup> The volume for 1821–1833 survives in the Sierra Leone Public Archives in Freetown.

<sup>49</sup> Evidence of Joseph Reffell (former chief superintendent, Liberated African Department), Appendix 10B, CO 267/92. See also Evidence of Mr. Cole (chief superintendent, Liberated African Department), Appendixes 9B and 10B, *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Evidence of Mr. Cole, Appendixes 9B and 10B, CO 267/92.

<sup>51</sup> Fitzgerald to Pratt, May 3, 1821, Mission Book, 22nd Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/44.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Evidence of Joseph Reffell, 10B, CO 267/92. See also *West-African Sketches*, 174.

<sup>54</sup> Evidence of Mr. Cole, Appendixes 9B and 10B, CO 267/92.

To consolidate the colony's external borders, MacCarthy purchased a tract of land in 1819 from the Temne chiefs on the banks of a river (probably the Ribi) south of Freetown. With the new land claimed under the treaty added to the land claimed by the villages, MacCarthy boasted that Sierra Leone had grown into its "natural" geographic borders: rivers to the north and south, mountains to the east, and the Atlantic to the west.<sup>55</sup>

But the village system was most important as a mechanism for economic stimulus, as a conduit for money and goods. Its finances were conveniently opaque, circulating primarily within the colony and invisible to London auditors. Visitors reported that the Liberated African Department's cash account contained all of the expenses and revenues of the LAD, and that invoices were paid with bills drawn on the Treasury by the governor himself, in his role as public accountant.<sup>56</sup> These records do not survive in London or Freetown in either colonial or missionary records, although some data were copied down and published in 1827.<sup>57</sup> After MacCarthy died in 1824, in combat against Asante forces in the Gold Coast, the acting governor of Sierra Leone complained that he could not consult several key financial records related to the village system. MacCarthy had taken the only copies with him on campaign, and they were lost in the chaos that followed his death.<sup>58</sup>

Still, there is enough evidence to show that the villages made it possible to pay for expenses that the Treasury might not otherwise have signed off on. One of MacCarthy's successors complained about the salaries of two French Catholic nuns employed as nurses. "Why the whole of this sum was paid by the Liberated African Department," he wrote, "I can form no idea."<sup>59</sup> On at least fifty-five different occasions between 1817 and 1820, MacCarthy drew bills on the Treasury without an itemized advice slip, "on account of the expenses of Captured Negroes," for amounts ranging from £100 to £1,000. The Treasury was reluctant to pay, and wrote to the War and Colonial Office for authorization. Each time, MacCarthy's expenses were approved, perhaps because the governor was likely to have spent the money long before the bill made it to London. The extant bills charged in this way amount to £32,379, 16s, 14d. Adjusted for inflation, that is very roughly £2,465,000 in 2016 currency—not an astronomical sum, but significant, especially as it was granted with virtually no oversight.<sup>60</sup>

In Britain, the early 1820s were marked by skepticism toward the acquisition of new colonies, and by austerity in colonial budgets. But "civilization" proved valuable. The missionary press swelled with reports from Sierra Leone, and MacCarthy attached LAD registers to his dispatches, with the names of villagers freed from slavery by the

<sup>55</sup> MacCarthy to Henry Goulburn, April 22, 1819, CO 267/49.

<sup>56</sup> Rowan and Wellington, "Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry. First Part," 87.

<sup>57</sup> Evidence of Mr. Cole, Appendixes 9B and 10B, CO 267/92.

<sup>58</sup> D. M. Hamilton to William Sutherland, April 28, 1824, Local Letters: D. M. Hamilton's Letter Book, April 1824 to February 1825, SLPA. See also Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, 155.

<sup>59</sup> D. M. Hamilton to Captain Findlay, Commandant, Bathurst, Saint Mary, River Gambia, June 28, 1824, Local Letters: D. M. Hamilton's Letter Book, April 1824 to February 1825, SLPA.

<sup>60</sup> These seventy-one inquiries are spread across three boxes of files in the National Archives, Kew. They include memoranda sent from the Office of the Treasury to the Office of the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies on January 15, February 16, April 1, April 8, April 21, May 8, May 22, June 8, June 11, July 23, July 27, August 1, and December 10, 1818 (CO 267/48); on January 4, April 27, May 26, May 27, June 1, and July 10, 1820 (CO 267/52); and on January 24, March 9, March 16, March 30, April 26, May 10, and May 29, 1821 (CO 267/55). Calculations based on data for changes in the relative value of the pound sterling over time from *Measuring Worth* ([www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com)).

British and living under British protection. In response, even as grants for the basic expenses of colonial administration fell, the Liberated African Department received independent grants from Parliament: £29,000 in 1815, £41,000 in 1816, and £39,000 in 1823. At the same time, MacCarthy seems to have poured more and more money into the villages, as the LAD's expenses rose from £10,849 in 1815 to £59,629 in 1822.<sup>61</sup>

From these numbers (bearing in mind that the data are probably inaccurate and certainly incomplete), it seems the LAD ran a significant deficit. That probably did not trouble MacCarthy: he was not a merchant, and the department did not need to turn a profit to benefit the colony. The villages could run a deficit because they were a mechanism for economic stimulus, a way to send money generated by concern for "civilization" toward sectors of economic life threatened by the erosion of the prize-money economy, particularly local trade and skilled work. For example, from 1818 to 1825, more than £132,327 of the money granted to the Liberated African Department was spent on constructing and repairing colonial buildings.<sup>62</sup> Since villagers were expected to maintain their huts at their own expense, with limited material support from the government, and considering that there were relatively few Europeans and African American settlers in the colony compared to the population of Liberated Africans, those funds must have been a boon to skilled laborers in the colony, a steady source of contracts for carpenters, masons, and the like. Similarly, although villagers were expected to farm, there was never enough rice, the colony's basic staple, to satisfy demand.<sup>63</sup> Demand for rice and palm oil was met by offering tenders paid by the LAD. The amount of rice imported to Sierra Leone rose from 422 tons in 1818 to 1,091 tons in 1823, and the amount of palm oil imported increased from 13,788 gallons in 1820 to 31,546 gallons in 1823.<sup>64</sup> Colonial merchants suffered in 1815 as their customer base declined, and as the customers who remained had less money to spend. The village system offered merchants a new market to supply.

The Liberated African Department also allowed for the distribution of labor in the colony. In one sense, it did this by allowing merchants easy access to Liberated Africans as apprentices, by training some in skilled trades, and by sending others to be farmers in rural areas. The villages also supplied unskilled labor for colonial projects. While in "the King's service," former captives lived in temporary huts built out of mud, or in makeshift sheds at the Colonial Forge Yard and Forge House.<sup>65</sup> The LAD loaned out groups of workers to various colonial departments as needed. When loaned to the Ordnance Department, Liberated Africans were not paid wages.<sup>66</sup> In 1825, the Public Works Department employed 440 workers for wages and 300 more without wages. Apparently the unpaid workers were "employed in carrying Bricks and lime, being a lighter work and one more easily apportioned to the strength of the individual."<sup>67</sup>

For Charles MacCarthy, the village system was a powerful instrument. The system claimed territory, shored up trade, and managed labor. Its tidy registers also proved to be useful magnets for parliamentary funding. The system compelled Liberated Africans

<sup>61</sup> Peterson, *Province of Freedom*, 83.

<sup>62</sup> Rowan and Wellington, "Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry. First Part," 61.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 75–76. See also Evidence of Mr. Cole, Appendixes 9B and 10B, CO 267/92.

<sup>64</sup> Table of Rice Contracts and Tender, Appendix 15A, CO 267/91.

<sup>65</sup> Evidence of Mr. Cole, Appendixes 9B and 10B, CO 267/92.

<sup>66</sup> Evidence of Mr. Myrton (clerk of works, Ordnance Department), Appendix 16B, CO 267/92.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*



to work and live according to the economic logic of “civilization,” and its records neatly recorded the colony’s progress toward that “civilization” in spreadsheets and ledgers. The reorientation of the political economy of Sierra Leone around controlling the lives of Liberated Africans announced the expanded colonial ambitions of British anti-slavery. But in the villages themselves, the clear figures recorded in straight lines in the offices of the Liberated African Department did not always add up.

CHARLES MACCARTHY WAS PROUD OF the villages. He visited some as often as three times a week, often bringing guests with him.<sup>68</sup> The colonial newspaper reported on an occasion when the governor and his guests observed the former slaves at work and prayer, and concluded their visit with an “elegant dinner in *humble Style*.”<sup>69</sup> And yet, the everyday life of the villages was obscure, even to the governor. As one missionary wrote, “there is not an European in the Colony who knows a fourth part of what is going on here, excepting those who reside on the spot.”<sup>70</sup> From Freetown, in the ledgers of the Liberated African Department, “civilization” was transparent and visible. In Regent, which was, by the reckoning of the LAD, the most “civilized” and successful village, the white missionary superintendent managed the lives of former slaves while sharing power by choice and by necessity with African converts. The village system was built on anti-slavery and motivated by economic need—but in its everyday life it invested the goods and money delivered by the LAD with ambiguous, transformative power.

Most missionaries in Sierra Leone understood that Charles MacCarthy was more interested in what religion could do for his government than in religion itself. As one colonial chaplain complained, “He has two faces towards us.”<sup>71</sup> W. A. B. Johnson, superintendent of Regent from 1816 until his death in 1823, also experienced the governor’s indifference. While in Freetown, Johnson preached to an audience including MacCarthy and a clique of military officers. The officers laughed and talked throughout the service. After the service, a humiliated Johnson hiked from Freetown to Regent. “I felt,” he wrote, “as if I had come into another world.”<sup>72</sup> He entered a community of nearly two thousand people, living in wattle houses with grass roofs built around a stone church (which still stands), where Christian communion defined village life, both for privileged converts and for non-Christian villagers.<sup>73</sup>

In the later nineteenth century, Freetown was a hub of Christian missions led by Krio preachers, and the home of the Church of England’s first African bishop.<sup>74</sup> But in

<sup>68</sup> W. A. B. Johnson, journal entry for October 8, 1816, published in [Seeley], *A Memoir of the Rev. W. A. B. Johnson*, 46.

<sup>69</sup> *Royal Gazette and Sierra Leone Advertiser* (Freetown), January 1, 1820. See also Evidence of Joseph Reffell, Appendix 10B, CO 267/92.

<sup>70</sup> James Norman to Pratt, n.d., Mission Book, 22nd Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/88.

<sup>71</sup> William Garnon to Pratt, June 27, 1817, CMS C/A/1/E6/58.

<sup>72</sup> Johnson, journal entry for August 2, 1818, in [Seeley], *A Memoir of the Rev. W. A. B. Johnson*, 105.

<sup>73</sup> Pratt to Bathurst, August 31, 1816, CO 267/44; for another description, see Ephraim Bacon, *Abstract of a Journal of E. Bacon, Assistant Agent of the United States, to Africa* (Philadelphia, 1821), 60–67.

<sup>74</sup> See John Peterson, “The Sierra Leone Creole: A Reappraisal,” in Fyfe and Jones, *Freetown*, 100–117; Arthur T. Porter, *Creoledom: A Study of the Development of Freetown Society* (Oxford, 1963); Akinola Wyse, *The Krio of Sierra Leone: An Interpretive History* (London, 1989); Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria*, chaps. 1 and 2; David Eltis, “The Diaspora of Yoruba Speakers, 1650–1865: Dimensions and Implications,” in Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs, eds., *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*



FIGURE 4: Regent in the 1850s. From Thomas Eyre Poole, *Life, Scenery and Customs in Sierra Leone and the Gambia*, 2 vols. (London, 1850), 2: frontispiece.

the 1820s, the lives of Liberated Africans were just beyond the edge of the archive: most people freed from the Middle Passage were illiterate, and those who knew English left few records. Thus, the vast archives of the Church Missionary Society are deceptively rich, full of detailed accounts of village life that were intended, eventually, for British consumers.<sup>75</sup> As the CMS implored Johnson, “Send us particular narratives of what takes place that you think will interest our friends.”<sup>76</sup> Johnson’s journals—hundreds of pages of archival documents—focus almost exclusively on a minority of villagers, the elite “communicant” members of the church. Still, the communicants were, in the view of both the LAD and the CMS, the most “civilized” of the Liberated Africans. Consequently, although the records of the CMS occlude the lives of most former captives, the lives of the communicants who thrived under the colonialism emerging from imperial anti-slavery help further to define what British elite abolitionists and colonial personnel meant when they argued that anti-slavery would “civilize” Africa.

W. A. B. Johnson was a working-class immigrant to London from Hanover, zealous but innocent of theological training.<sup>77</sup> When he arrived in Regent in 1816, he found the village registers in chaos.<sup>78</sup> Once he brought the records up to date, Johnson distributed

(Bloomington, Ind., 2004), 17–39; Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*; Thomas Sylvester Johnson, *The Story of a Mission: The Sierra Leone Church, First Daughter of C.M.S.* (London, 1953); Hanciles, *Euthanasia of a Mission*; P. E. H. Hair, “Africanism: The Freetown Contribution,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 5, no. 4 (1967): 521–539.

<sup>75</sup> On networks of communication and funding, see Lester and Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance*, 11. For an introduction to the structures of missionary work, see Andrew Porter, “An Overview, 1700–1914,” in Etherington, *Missions and Empire*, 40–63.

<sup>76</sup> Pratt to Johnson, October 8, 1817, CMS C/A/1/E6/73.

<sup>77</sup> See Johnson, journal entries from March 1816 to June 1819, CMS C/A/1/E7A/66.

<sup>78</sup> Johnson, journal entry for June 18, 1816, CMS C/A/1/E7A/66. Johnson found distributing food a “very disagreeable task.” He preferred organizing and teaching in the village schools. Johnson, journal entry for June 20, 1816, *ibid.*

regular rations, delivered by the LAD. Food, together with free instruction in English, the language of trade in Freetown, seems to have convinced Liberated Africans assigned to Regent to stay, and the village grew quickly. Villagers attended church services, but Johnson was distressed. When he finished his sermons, parishioners “would come & ask me for clothing &c. which gave me reason to think that they only came for that purpose.”<sup>79</sup> However, in October 1816, a shingle-maker named Joe Thomson became Johnson’s first convert.<sup>80</sup> By January 1817, forty-one of the villagers had been baptized and invited to become full communicant members of the church.<sup>81</sup>

Johnson, as village superintendent, received significant material resources from the LAD. Goods were sent from London by the ton to support a worthy cause: slate, lead, bells, clocks, and weathervanes arrived free or at cost, to be used in the churches being built.<sup>82</sup> School supplies such as slates, notebooks, and ink were also delivered in bulk.<sup>83</sup> In one typical order, placed in 1818, Joseph Reffell requested thousands of shirts and pairs of pants, bars of soap, and blankets, as well as twenty-six tons of iron in different shapes and lengths, an industrial lathe, and a screw chuck.<sup>84</sup> In another order, placed in 1822, he requested almost nineteen miles of cloth.<sup>85</sup> Johnson distributed Regent’s share of this bounty.

Turning enslaved people into “Liberated Africans” was a simple bureaucratic procedure, done at the slave trade courts and recorded at the Liberated African Department. Converting Liberated Africans to Christianity, however, was much more complicated. Conversion is confounding for historians, both ephemeral and profoundly material.<sup>86</sup> For converts in Regent, it was a spiritual experience invisible in the archive, but also an invitation to join a privileged political and economic community with dense records. Johnson was an adept preacher, but he also controlled access to colonial resources. Johnson was charged by MacCarthy with keeping “the uncivilized in due order” and rewarding “the industry of the well behaved,” and he took his tasks seriously.<sup>87</sup> After services, when people lined up for clothing or food, Johnson “told them that I

<sup>79</sup> Johnson, journal entry for July 15, 1816, CMS C/A/1/E7A/66.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> MacCarthy to Bathurst, February 1817, CO 267/45; see also Peterson, “The Sierra Leone Creole,” 128–131.

<sup>83</sup> “[List of Articles] Required for the Service of Captured Negroes in This Colony of Sierra Leone,” January 11, 1822, Governor Despatches 1818–1822, SLPA.

<sup>84</sup> “Request for Service of Captured Negroes &c. in the Colony of Sierra Leone,” May 19, 1818, CO 267/47; “[List of Articles] Required for the Service of Captured Negroes in the Colony of Sierra Leone and for Furnishing the Churches and Build Stores and Superintendents’ Houses,” CO 267/47.

<sup>85</sup> Reffell received 3,000 yards of cloth for jackets, another 30,000 yards of fabric for trousers and shirts, and 2,000 duck frocks. “[List of Articles] Required for the Service of Captured Negroes in This Colony of Sierra Leone,” January 11, 1822, Governor Despatches 1818–1822, SLPA.

<sup>86</sup> For debates about the historical meaning and “use” of conversion, see Elizabeth Elbourne, “Early Khoisan Uses of Mission Christianity,” *Kronos*, no. 19 (November 1992): 3–27; Elizabeth Elbourne and Robert Ross, “Combating Spiritual and Social Bondage: Early Missions in the Cape Colony,” in Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, eds., *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997), 31–50; Elizabeth Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799–1853* (Montreal, 2002); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1: *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, 1991); V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, Ind., 1988), chap. 3; Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, chap. 8; Hanciles, *Euthanasia of a Mission*; Hair, “Africanism”; Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria*.

<sup>87</sup> MacCarthy to Pratt and Bickersteth, November 20, 1819, CMS C/A/1/E8/74; see also Johnson, journal entry for July 15, 1816, CMS C/A/1/E7A/66; Peterson, *Province of Freedom*, 116–117.



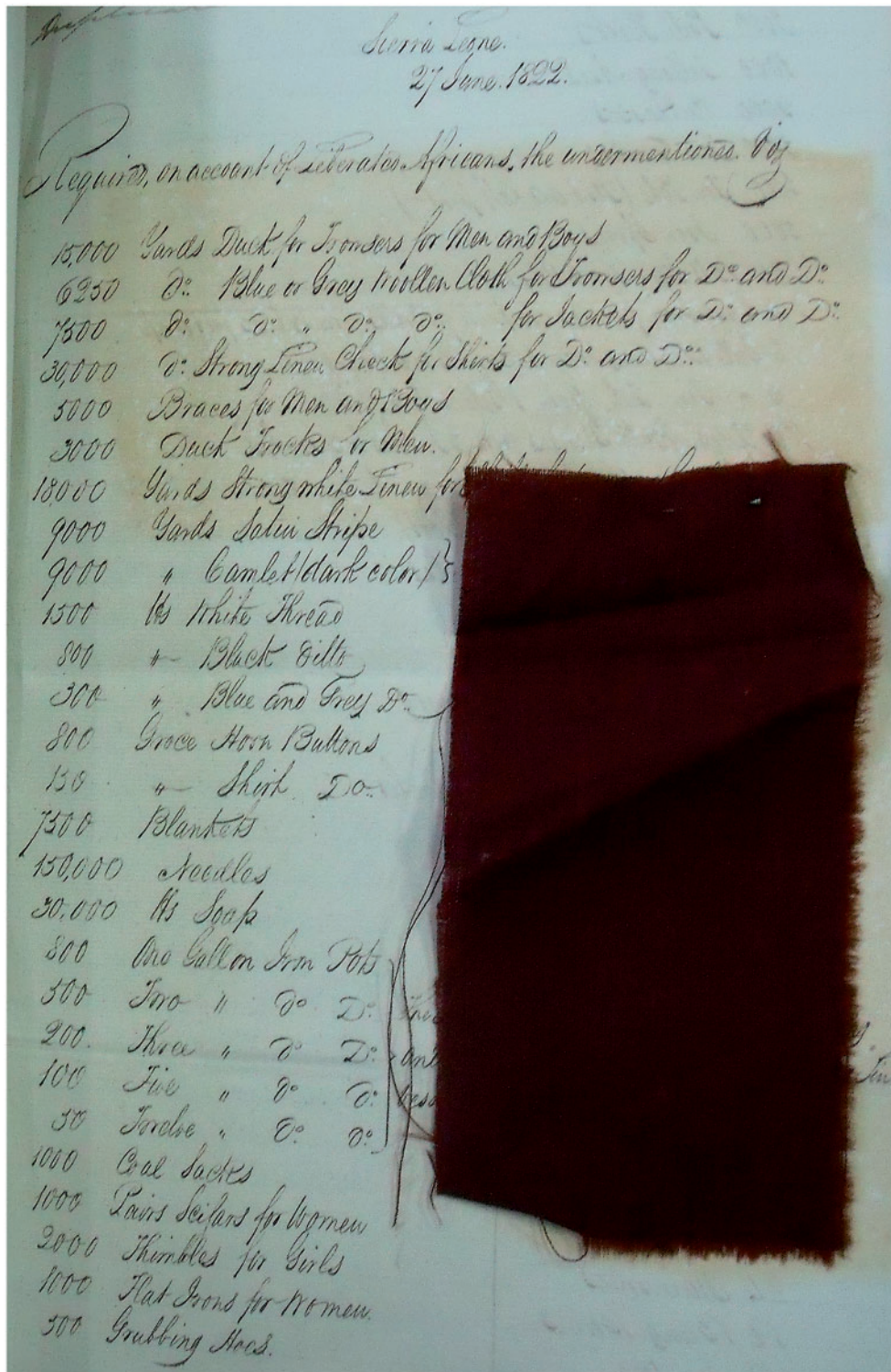


FIGURE 5: A sample of the supply of fabric sent in bulk to the Liberated African Department. The National Archives, Kew, Colonial Office Papers, CO 267/56.



would come and see them at their respective farms, and give . . . according to their industry.”<sup>88</sup> Children in the missionary school received army surplus clothing; Johnson referred to his favorite schoolboys as “my little Red Jackets.”<sup>89</sup> Conversion offered access to more of the resources of the village system. Soon, the material advantages of conversion were not exclusively Johnson’s to distribute. The communicants established a mutual aid society and disciplined “backsliders” by revoking their privileges.<sup>90</sup> Although the relentlessly positive tone of missionary journals presents the village as nearly conflict-free, there are hints in the archive of Johnson’s power to coerce by refusing rations, and of rising hostility toward the communicants. As a group of schoolgirls hoping to join the church complained to him, “Them other girls make too much noise, and some of them would do us bad, but they fear you.”<sup>91</sup>

In a village where beating rice was part of the rhythm of everyday life, Johnson explained election in cereal terms. When the rice stalks were beaten, the grains remained and the husks blew away; communicants, Johnson explained, were the grains, chosen for eternal life.<sup>92</sup> Johnson was convinced that “the Christian negroes shew a strong attachment to the simplest views of religion.”<sup>93</sup> However, his lack of formal theological training may have given communicants enough space to develop their own understandings of Christianity. In the accounts of their lives preserved in Johnson’s diaries, communicants remembered the “miracle” of their rescue from the Middle Passage, and their fear of damnation. “I thank God he bring me to this country,” one man proclaimed.<sup>94</sup> Another communicant experienced terror at the idea that he had *learned* to be Christian, and had not been authentically converted.<sup>95</sup> Ironically, Johnson was sometimes annoyed by the communicants’ preoccupation with their sins. He wrote, “They seem to have all the old usual disorders, complaining & mourning over the depravity of their hearts”<sup>96</sup>

The communicants impressed MacCarthy. Although he and his fellow officers joked through sermons, they always attended church. MacCarthy found the discipline of church attendance reassuring, a symbol of public acceptance of his government. He was delighted to learn that some communicants in Regent worshiped as many as six times on Sundays.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, when communicants married one another, they wore European clothes: “The brides . . . dressed in white gowns, black beaver hats, ribbons . . . the men in blue coats, light waistcoats, frilled shirts, white neck-handkerchiefs, light trousers, white stockings, shoes, and fine hats.”<sup>98</sup> On a visit in 1821, MacCarthy wept when he saw

<sup>88</sup> Johnson, journal entry for July 15, 1816, CMS C/A/1/E7A/66.

<sup>89</sup> Johnson, journal entry for February 21, 1820, Mission Book, 21st Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/21/9; see also Sir George Collier to Pratt, February 11, 1819, CMS C/A/1/E7/63.

<sup>90</sup> In one six-month period, the communicants collected £6, 14s, 1d and spent £6, 11s, 5d. Johnson, journal entry for July 11, 1818, CMS C/A/1/E7/47; see also Johnson, journal entry for May 18, 1822, Mission Book, 23rd Year (1821–1822), CMS C/A/1/M1/14.

<sup>91</sup> Johnson, journal entry for August 5, 1820, Mission Book, 21st Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/94.

<sup>92</sup> Charlesworth, *Africa’s Mountain Valley*, 160.

<sup>93</sup> Walker, *The Church of England Mission in Sierra Leone*, 104.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 134–135. For other examples, see Johnson, journal entry for September 12, 1818, CMS C/A/1/E7/47; David Noah and William Davies to Pratt and Bickersteth, received October 30, 1818, CMS C/A/1/E7/38.

<sup>95</sup> Johnson, journal entry for April 23, 1818, CMS C/A/1/E7/47.

<sup>96</sup> Johnson, journal entry for July 13, 1818, CMS C/A/1/E7/47.

<sup>97</sup> Johnson, journal entry for July 27, 1820, Mission Book, 21st Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/21/94.

<sup>98</sup> Johnson, journal entry for September 3, 1820, Mission Book, 21st Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/21/94.

the communicant villagers lined up along the road from Freetown, led by twelve girls in white.<sup>99</sup> To MacCarthy, church attendance and regular work went hand in hand, and the governor was as satisfied with Regent's work as with its public piety. Schoolboys cleared land for farms that grew more coconuts and cassava than any other village, as well as subsistence crops such as yams, plantains, and bananas, and a few cash crops like coffee.<sup>100</sup> In 1818 and 1819, laborers from Regent built a new road to Freetown.<sup>101</sup> A year later, the villagers cut another road from Regent to York, a fishing village south of Freetown. "The poor people have worked almost beyond their strength," Johnson wrote. "The rocks are immense."<sup>102</sup>

The success of the Regent communicants provoked tension between the bureaucratic and religious models of "civilization." To MacCarthy, the communicants seemed to be well along the path to "civilization." So why, he wondered, weren't there *more* of them? Johnson allowed relatively few people to be baptized, and even fewer to join the full communion. In Regent, in 1823, out of a population of roughly 2,000, there were only 410 communicants.<sup>103</sup> MacCarthy expected Johnson to baptize every Liberated African, and to treat conversion as a patriotic ritual. Johnson claimed the ability to distinguish true from false conversions, and insisted that since only a fraction of humanity had been elected to salvation, only a minority of the villagers could be communicants.<sup>104</sup> The governor did not have much leverage; he could not relocate too many of the villagers without putting the overall integrity of the system at risk. Moreover, Johnson was successful where many other missionaries in the colony were unimpressive, and a few scandalously brutal—William Randle, superintendent of Kent, beat a servant to death in front of a group of horrified villagers.<sup>105</sup> Still, MacCarthy complained that "a good moral conduct, a Christian appearance, and an assurance of an anxious wish to become Christians" ought to have been enough to merit baptism for Liberated Africans.<sup>106</sup>

As church membership became more desirable, Johnson became nervous that "the Devil is about to sow tares amongst the wheat."<sup>107</sup> His reticence was both practical and theological: if baptism remained scarce, village resources would remain concentrated in the hands of the worthy, and salvation would be appropriately uncommon.<sup>108</sup> Consequently, there were high barriers to entry into the communion, policed by Johnson and the communicants (including Josiah Yamsey). In 1818, Johnson convened a council of six communicants to evaluate candidates for baptism.<sup>109</sup> By 1820, the council included Johnson, two white missionary assistants, and seven communicants. Candidates were invited to "relate the dealings of the Lord." They were questioned, and "such were al-

<sup>99</sup> Johnson to Pratt and Bickersteth, December 29, 1821, Mission Book, 23rd Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/2.

<sup>100</sup> See "Accounts of Produce Purchased by the Liberated African Department, 1819–1825," Appendix 27A, CO 267/91; Johnson, journal entry for March 11, 1817, in [Seeley], *Memoir of the Rev. W. A. B. Johnson*, 56.

<sup>101</sup> Charlesworth, *Africa's Mountain Valley*, 101.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 234–235.

<sup>103</sup> Peterson, *Province of Freedom*, 103.

<sup>104</sup> Johnson, journal entry for December 19, 1818, CMS C/A/1/E7A/66.

<sup>105</sup> Bickersteth to Johnson, May 25, 1821, CMS C/A/1/L1/167; see also Johnson to Pratt, February 6, 1821, Mission Book, 21st Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/131.

<sup>106</sup> MacCarthy to Pratt, June 8, 1819, CMS C/A/1/E7A/72.

<sup>107</sup> Johnson, journal entry for September 18, 1818, CMS C/A/1/E7/47.

<sup>108</sup> Johnson, journal entry for April 11, 1820, Mission Book, 21st Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/45.

<sup>109</sup> Johnson, journal entry for February 23, 1818, CMS C/A/1/E7/47.

lowed who had manifested a change in their conduct, convinced of sin & had a view of the Saviour to save them.”<sup>110</sup> Johnson made a weekly announcement of the names and “places of abode” of candidates for baptism. The communicants would watch them, “and if they should observe any improper conduct . . . inform me of the same.” This week of surveillance was repeated after three months of candidacy, and again just before baptism.<sup>111</sup>

The inner circle of communicants on the committee had a few traits in common: all were men, all were polyglot, and all were skilled laborers.<sup>112</sup> Other missionaries sometimes believed that their converts aimed to bamboozle them, feigning conversion in order to receive the material benefits of the Christian communion. One wrote, for example, that “the first thing the [African] mother inculcates into her child is deceit.”<sup>113</sup> Johnson, in contrast, delegated so much authority that the European missionaries became jealous and vindictive. When Johnson was on leave in England, David Noah, one of the council, had his modest salary of £80 a year stripped from him. “David Noah,” Johnson fumed on his return, “is more useful than some Schoolmasters and Missionaries who enjoy a Salary of £200 & £250.”<sup>114</sup> Noah, Johnson wrote,

[c]onducts entirely the day and evening schools . . . issues rations for about 1,200 people; keeps the provision-lists and returns, and school-lists; measures out all the lots, and sees that the houses and fences are regularly built; receives the stores every Thursday in Freetown; enters marriages, baptisms, &c.; does the duty of a parish clerk; prays with the sick; in short, he is everything at Regent’s Town!<sup>115</sup>

This list shows the kind of bureaucratic work that Charles MacCarthy prized. But it also hints at the counterpoint to MacCarthy’s statistics and to the frictionless just-so stories of the missionary press. Regent prospered partly because of Johnson’s charisma and administrative acumen, but also because he allowed a group of elite Liberated Africans access to administrative power, and concentrated resources in their hands.

In Regent, the communicants were a powerful social group, the privileged adopters of “civilized” economic life who helped the village to flourish and both supported and challenged the authority of its white missionary. The village system—founded on anti-slavery law—was shaped by the complex, coercive, and transformative power dynamics of an emerging colonialism. But part of the project of “civilization” in Sierra Leone was a campaign to publicize the achievements of the system to the London-based backers of anti-slavery, and to a substantial Anglo-American audience for missionary literature. “Civilization” in Sierra Leone was messy, but it was represented to the Colonial Office in the matter-of-fact prose of official dispatches and the rectilinear clarity of spreadsheets. In the missionary press, the familiar fall-and-rise of conversion narratives and

<sup>110</sup> Johnson, journal entry for August 5, 1818, CMS C/A/1/E7/47. See also Johnson, journal entry for August 13, 1820, Mission Book, 21st Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/94.

<sup>111</sup> Johnson, journal entry for April 21, 1821, Mission Book, 22nd Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/34.

<sup>112</sup> For example, William Tamba was a butcher, William Davis a master shingle-maker, Peter Hughes a master mason, David Noah a clerk. See Johnson, journal entry for April 11, 1820, Mission Book, 21st Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/45.

<sup>113</sup> G. S. Bull’s Report on the Seminary Students, June 30, 1820, Mission Book, 21st Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/48.

<sup>114</sup> Johnson to Pratt and Bickersteth, July 12, 1820, Mission Book, 21st Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/63.

<sup>115</sup> Johnson to Pratt and Bickersteth, October 18, 1822, Mission Book, 23rd Year, CMS C/A/1/M2/51.



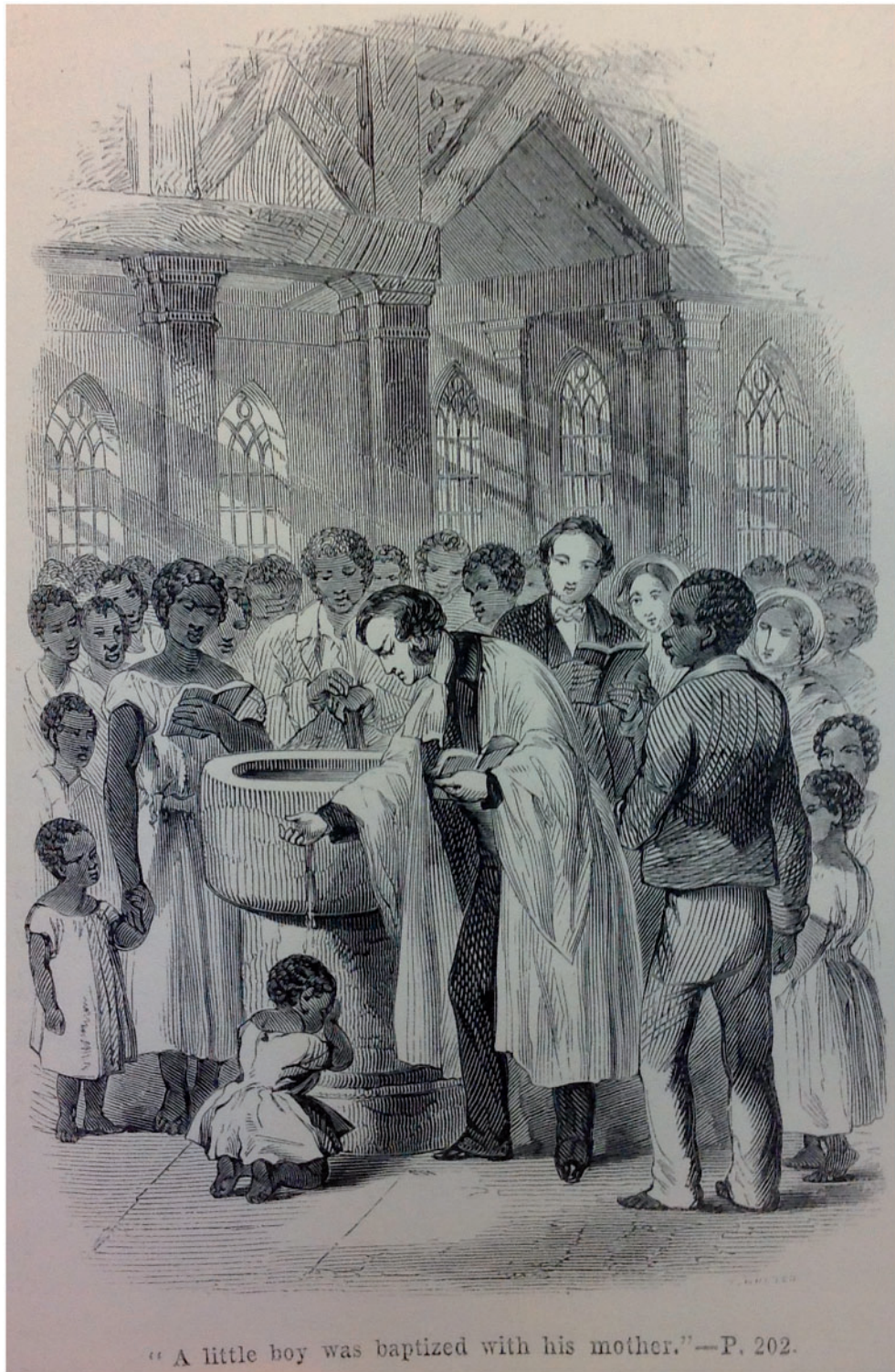


FIGURE 6: A stylized vision of conversion in Regent, made for the edification of donors to missionary causes. From Maria Louisa Charlesworth, *Africa's Mountain Valley; or, The Church in Regent's Town, West Africa* (London, 1856), following 190.



the trope of a paternal white missionary among grateful black converts represented the tangled faith and material culture of Regent as a simple, seductive parable of white supremacy.

IN THE MISSIONARY PRESS, THE VILLAGERS of Regent appeared to be ascending the ladder of “civilization” rapidly through grateful acceptance of Johnson’s tuition. This hallucination was peculiarly *British*, informed by the early fantasies of the elite London abolitionists, who hoped to use the momentum of earlier anti-slavery successes to push on for the conversion and reformation of the whole empire, and by the conventions of missionary writing. But this vision of Regent also seduced the American Colonization Society (ACS), which saw in Regent a model of a peculiarly *American* version of white supremacy, triumphant in Africa.

In part because of the profound differences between the British abolitionist movement and the ACS, historians rarely place colonial Sierra Leone and Liberia in the same frame.<sup>116</sup> The colonizationists promoted what Nicholas Guyatt calls “an idea of double emancipation,” in which “blacks would be freed from slavery, [and] then whites would be freed from blacks.”<sup>117</sup> Many African American communities, especially in the 1790s, endorsed the idea of a West African colony. In 1795, one congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, even sent a delegation to Freetown.<sup>118</sup> And yet, as early as 1802, Thomas Jefferson had also proposed sending free blacks from Virginia to Africa.<sup>119</sup> African Americans resisted the ACS for decades, and proposals for emigration were a constant counterpoint and rebuke to schemes for colonization.<sup>120</sup> However, the movement for white-led colonization commanded far greater resources than the movement for black-led emigration. In Regent, a plan devised by African Americans was seized upon by white colonizationists and retrofitted with the ideology of colonization, reinforced with American impressions of the success of the village system. The imperial ideology and colonial practices of British anti-slavery were not identical to the ambitions of the ACS, but these distinctions eluded the first generation of colonizationists.

<sup>116</sup> Bronwen Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2013); Monday B. Abasiattai, “The Search for Independence: New World Blacks in Sierra Leone and Liberia, 1787–1847,” *Journal of Black Studies* 23, no. 1 (1992): 107–116; Richard West, *Back to Africa: A History of Sierra Leone and Liberia* (New York, 1971).

<sup>117</sup> Nicholas Guyatt, “‘The Outskirts of Our Happiness’: Race and the Lure of Colonization in the Early Republic,” *Journal of American History* 95, no. 4 (2009): 986–1011, here 991. See also Kevin G. Lowther, *The African American Odyssey of John Kizell: A South Carolina Slave Returns to Fight the Slave Trade in His African Homeland* (Columbia, S.C., 2012), especially chap. 7; Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville, Fla., 2008); Claude A. Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004); Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2000), 255; West, *Back to Africa*, 102–105; W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870* (Cambridge, Mass., 1896), chap. 8; James T. Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787–2005* (New York, 2006), chap. 1.

<sup>118</sup> George E. Brooks Jr., “The Providence African Society’s Sierra Leone Emigration Scheme, 1794–1795: Prologue to the African Colonization Movement,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7, no. 2 (1974): 183–202.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Jefferson to John Lynd, January 21, 1811, published in American Colonization Society, *The First Annual Report*, 14.

<sup>120</sup> See Ousmane K. Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle against the Colonization Movement* (New York, 2014).

Paul Cuffe, a prosperous African American Quaker merchant captain, was an early proponent of bringing free black settlers from the United States to Sierra Leone, in order to found a transatlantic partnership between African American merchants in New England and West Africa.<sup>121</sup> Tellingly, Cuffe had little contact with Liberated Africans when he visited Freetown in 1811.<sup>122</sup> He founded a “Friendly Society” in Freetown to encourage trade, whose members included a man named John Kizell, from whom Cuffe bought tropical lumber.<sup>123</sup> Kizell had been born in the Sherbro’ and enslaved. After the Middle Passage, he was sold in Charleston. He joined the British ranks in the Revolutionary War, and returned to Africa from Nova Scotia in 1792.<sup>124</sup> From 1802, Kizell worked as a commercial agent for the Sierra Leone Company. In 1809, he sold all his property in Freetown in order to satisfy his creditors, and moved to the Sherbro’ as a merchant and unofficial colonial envoy.<sup>125</sup>

The Friendly Society was disrupted by the War of 1812. In February 1816, Cuffe returned to Sierra Leone, with cargo and just under forty settlers recruited from African American communities in the mid-Atlantic. The settlers were welcomed, but Cuffe was not allowed to land most of his trade goods. “The expenses of the Voyage,” he wrote, “will fawl Very heavy on me.”<sup>126</sup> Cuffe died in 1817, but not before corresponding about his plans with Robert Finley, a preacher from New Jersey, and Samuel Mills, a young missionary from Massachusetts.<sup>127</sup> In 1817, Finley co-founded the ACS, and in 1818, Mills arrived in Sierra Leone as its agent.

In his letters to Mills, Cuffe recommended that the American colony be founded near the Sherbro’, where “a citizen of Sierra Leone” could assist.<sup>128</sup> In Sierra Leone, Mills met with the Friendly Society, of which Kizell (the “citizen” whom Cuffe had mentioned) was now president.<sup>129</sup> Mills was delighted with Kizell, who in his view was “a second Paul Cuffe.”<sup>130</sup> After Cuffe’s death, his correspondents in the ACS seized on the rough outline of his plans—a colony of African Americans in the Sherbro’, near to and associated with Sierra Leone—and recast a plan for black solidarity in the image of

<sup>121</sup> There is a rich literature on Paul Cuffe. See especially Sheldon H. Harris, *Paul Cuffe: Black America and the African Return* (New York, 1972); Lamont D. Thomas, *Rise to Be a People: A Biography of Paul Cuffe* (Urbana, Ill., 1986).

<sup>122</sup> When he needed short-term laborers, he recruited from among migrant Kru living in Freetown, and not from among the “captured Negroes.” See Cuffe’s remarks, March 6, 1811, in Wiggins, *Captain Paul Cuffe’s Logs and Letters*, 107.

<sup>123</sup> Cuffe’s remarks, December 23, 1811, *ibid.*, 176.

<sup>124</sup> For a history of Kizell’s life, see Lowther, *The African American Odyssey of John Kizell*.

<sup>125</sup> African Institution, *Special Report of the Directors of the African Institution: Made at the Annual General Meeting, on the 12th of April, 1815, Respecting the Allegations Contained in a Pamphlet Entitled “A Letter to William Wilberforce, Esq. &c. By R. Thorpe, Esq. &c.”* (London, 1815), 33–34. Columbine and Kizell’s correspondence is preserved in manuscript in Series III: Captain Edward H. Columbine (d. 1811)—Governor of Sierra Leone, 1809–1811, box 1, folder 11: Public Papers, Africa, Sierra Leone Collection, Special Collections, University of Illinois–Chicago. It was also excerpted often, notably in African Institution, *Sixth Report of the Directors of the African Institution: Read at the Annual General Meeting on the 25th of March, 1812* (London, 1812), 113–153.

<sup>126</sup> Paul Cuffe to William Allen, February 1816, in Wiggins, *Captain Paul Cuffe’s Logs and Letters*, 404.

<sup>127</sup> The correspondence with Mills is excerpted in American Colonization Society, *The First Annual Report*. On Cuffe and Finley, see Campbell, *Middle Passages*, 24–28.

<sup>128</sup> Extract, Cuffe to Mills, January 6, 1817, 27.

<sup>129</sup> Journal entry, March 27, 1818, in Gardiner Spring, ed., *Memoirs of the Rev. Samuel J. Mills: Late Missionary to the South Western Section of the United States, and Agent of the American Colonization Society, Deputed to Explore the Coast of Africa* (New York, 1820), 165–166.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 182–183.

white supremacy. The Society praised Sierra Leone for controlling “the fugitive slaves of the southern states . . . a useless and pernicious, if not a dangerous” population.<sup>131</sup> Those “fugitive slaves” were the Freetown settlers, precisely the people with whom Cuffe had proposed to trade.

In 1818, when Samuel Mills and Ebenezer Burgess arrived in Sierra Leone, Mills was awestruck by “a spectacle of grateful admiration” in Regent.<sup>132</sup> The colonizationists projected their own understanding of slavery and colonization in the United States onto the village. They did not grasp that Sierra Leone was, for Britain, an imperial foothold in West Africa. While it was unquestionably founded on a principle of white supremacy—on British claims to control Africans “for their own good”—it was not a scheme for liquidating free people of African descent from the empire, but rather a way of making former slaves an imperial asset. MacCarthy was privately furious at the idea of an American colony so close to Freetown.<sup>133</sup> To the governor’s horror, the ACS sent the *Elizabeth*, with settlers aboard, in 1820. Campelar, Kizell’s village on Sherbro’ Island, was designated as the staging area for an American colony on the mainland. However, a deal Kizell had promised to make with local chiefs collapsed, stranding the settlers.<sup>134</sup> Nearly two dozen died of fever, along with two ACS agents.<sup>135</sup>

Two more agents, Ephraim Bacon and Joseph Andrus, arrived to evacuate Campelar. On their way to the Sherbro’, they too visited Regent. Andrus told Johnson that “he never had seen a Church in America filled with more attentive hearers.” Johnson, who knew that William Tamba and William Davis hoped to preach outside the colony, suggested that they accompany the Americans as interpreters and negotiators.<sup>136</sup> On April 22, 1822, at the edge of a makeshift cemetery dug too close to the waterline, Atlantic worlds, people, and ideologies collided, as Bacon and Andrus, two white Americans, argued with Kizell, the former slave who had lived in the Carolinas. Tamba and Davis, two men rescued from the Middle Passage who had risen to positions of power in Regent, looked on.<sup>137</sup> After the evacuation, Andrus and Bacon began to search for a new site for the colony. Davis and several other leading communicants were from the Grand Bassa region of present-day Liberia, and Johnson advised the American agents to choose that region (about sixty miles along the coast from Cape Mesurado, where the Americans eventually settled) as the site for their next attempt at forming a colony.<sup>138</sup> Davis and Tamba even negotiated with a local king in Grand Bassa on behalf of

<sup>131</sup> American Colonization Society, *A View of Exertions Lately Made for the Purpose of Colonizing the Free People of Colour, in the United States, in Africa, or Elsewhere* (Washington, D.C., 1817), 17.

<sup>132</sup> Archibald Alexander, *A History of Colonization on the Western Coast of Africa* (Philadelphia, 1846), 101.

<sup>133</sup> MacCarthy to Bathurst, May 9, 1818, CO 267/47. See also *Royal Gazette and Sierra Leone Advertiser* (Freetown), April 25, 1818; MacCarthy to Bathurst, January 2, 1818, CO 267/47; Mouser, *American Colony on the Rio Pongo*, 83.

<sup>134</sup> Bacon, *Abstract of a Journal*, 37.

<sup>135</sup> Bacon, *Abstract of a Journal*. See also the extract of a letter from the Rev. Daniel Coker, “the present agent of the Colonization Society,” dated September 25, 1820, in American Colonization Society, *The Fourth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States: With an Appendix* (Washington D.C., 1821), 18.

<sup>136</sup> Johnson to the Secretaries, March 20, 1821, Mission Book, 22nd Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/3.

<sup>137</sup> Bacon, *Abstract of a Journal*, 24. See also “Copy of a Letter from Captain Edward Trenchard, to the Secretary of the Navy,” December 25, 1820, published in American Colonization Society, *The Fourth Annual Report*, 54–56, here 55.

<sup>138</sup> Johnson to Pratt and Bickersteth, March 20, 1821, Mission Book, 22nd Year, CMS C/A/1M1/3.



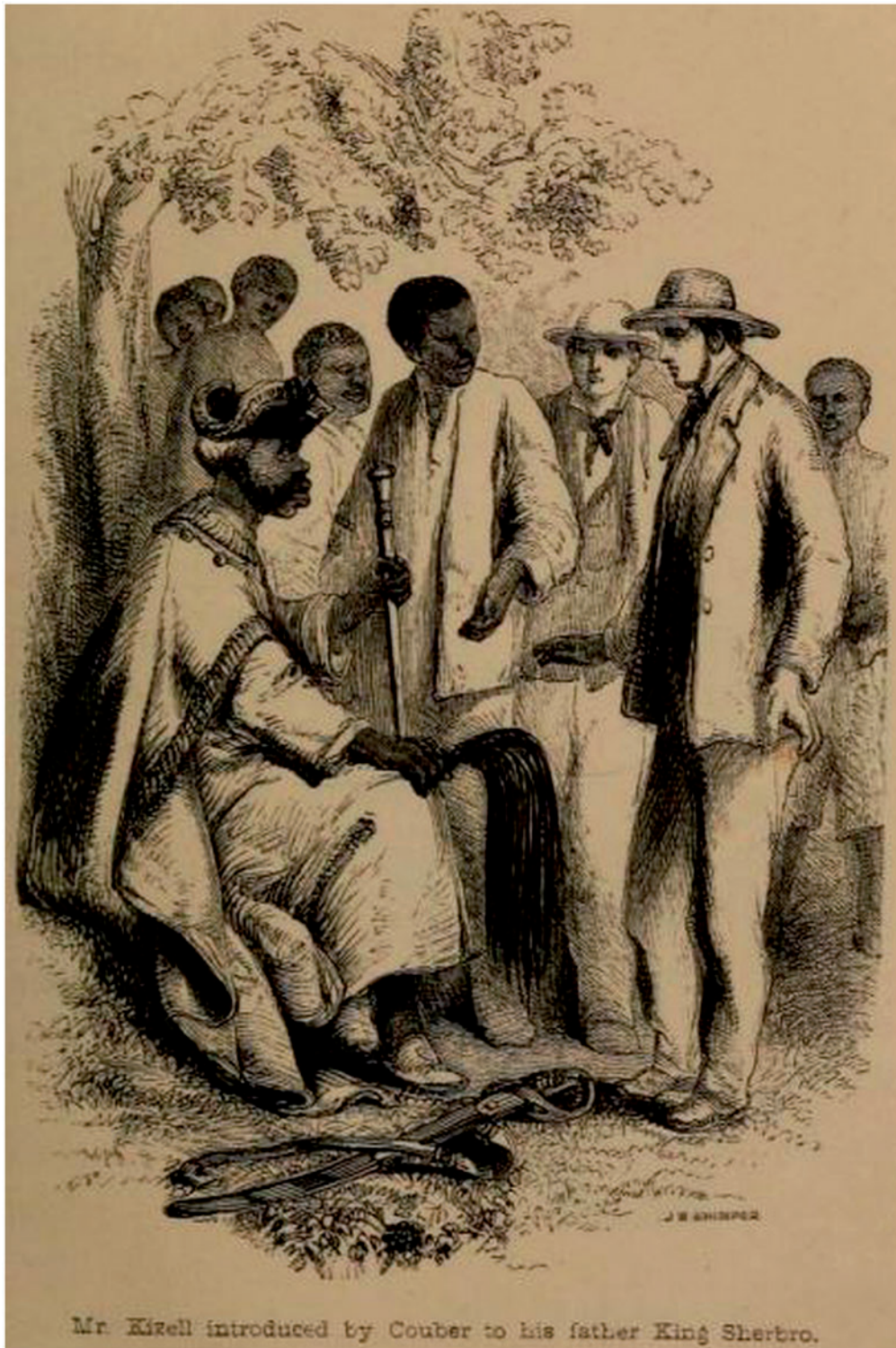


FIGURE 7: John Kizell, as imagined by missionary fundraisers and publicists in the 1850s. Note the mistaken caption, which seems to suggest that Kizell is the white traveler being introduced to the Sherbro' king. From *Africa Redeemed; or, The Means of Her Relief Illustrated by the Growth and Prospects of Liberia* (London, 1851), following 32.



the ACS.<sup>139</sup> The bargain struck between the ACS and the king included a provision for the education of the king's son at the missionary school in Regent—where the prince died about a year later.<sup>140</sup>

In 1821, after the negotiations in Grand Bassa, Eli Ayers arrived to take the surviving colonists, who had been living near Freetown, to the new colony. He took the now-routine tour of Regent, and was also enthralled with the sight of young men “proceeding Indian file, with their Bibles under their arms.”<sup>141</sup> And yet, when Johnson offered Davis's services a second time, the Americans set sail without him. Perhaps the colonizationists were unsettled by an African translator with his own missionary agenda. Ayers also abandoned the ACS's plans in Grand Bassa, and made a deal for land at Cape Mesurado instead. When the Bassa prince died, the Americans did not visit the king or send respects, and Johnson mourned the low morale of his communicants, particularly Davis and Noah.<sup>142</sup> The missionary resolved to cut ties with the colonizationists. “They are so whimsical,” he wrote, “I think it most prudent to keep at a distance.”<sup>143</sup> The ACS's flirtation with the village system and with Sierra Leone was abortive, but it is illuminating. Both British anti-slavery and white American colonizationism relied on an assumption of white supremacy. But where the ACS imagined its colony as a way to transform the United States and remove the “problem” of black freedom to Africa, a different version of Anglo-American “freedom,” shaped by the expectations of colonialism and justified by the self-righteousness of British anti-slavery, was building in Sierra Leone.

IN 1823, JOHNSON DIED OF YELLOW FEVER. In 1824, MacCarthy died in the Anglo-Asante War. Without MacCarthy's energy and advocacy, the Liberated African Department's budget fell from more than £41,133 in 1823 to £18,201 in 1825.<sup>144</sup> Regent remained—and so did the communicants, the fathers and mothers of the Krio, as the descendants of Liberated Africans came to be known. However, without a charismatic white missionary to cast in the starring role, the villages all but disappeared from the missionary press. Even in the 1850s, writers returned to Johnson's diaries for material, and to Regent, the “lovely dwelling-place of freedom.”<sup>145</sup> But what was that freedom?

In the village system, “freedom” was acquiescence to “civilization.” Before a Liberated African could be “free,” he or she would be recorded as a datum of labor and demography by the Liberated African Department, and then set to work, and ideally to prayer, by a CMS missionary superintendent in a Liberated African village. In the 1810s and early 1820s, the voices and everyday lives of individual Liberated Africans—the stuff that might actually have constituted their freedom—are concealed or distorted

<sup>139</sup> Entry for April 5, 1821, in Bacon, *Abstract of a Journal*, 21.

<sup>140</sup> Entry for April 10, 1821, *ibid.*, 27. See also Johnson, journal entry for April 28, 1821, Mission Book, 22nd Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/34. On the Bassa prince's death, see Johnson, journal entry for March 15, 1822, Mission Book, 23rd Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/14.

<sup>141</sup> American Colonization Society, *The Sixth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States: With an Appendix* (Washington, D.C., 1823), 43.

<sup>142</sup> Johnson, journal entry for March 1822, CMS C/A/1/M1/23/14.

<sup>143</sup> Johnson to the Secretaries, December 29, 1821, Mission Book, 23rd Year, CMS C/A/1/M1/2.

<sup>144</sup> Rowan and Wellington, “Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry. First Part,” 87.

<sup>145</sup> Charlesworth, *Africa's Mountain Valley*, 12.

by the recordkeeping of the institutions that archived them. Anti-slavery became colonialism in Sierra Leone. A cohort of people whose previous cultural lives were presumed to have been functionally (if not literally) erased by the experience of enslavement in Africa were recruited as workers and settlers, and expected to adopt a new set of norms of conduct based on British folkways. The most “civilized” were those who seemed most to have accepted those new norms. At the same time, a familiar problem of labor in a post-emancipation society was complicated by the nascent imperial ambitions of Britain in West Africa.

The meaning of the villages shifted according to the view of the observer. To MacCarthy and the LAD, they were a tool for governance; to the CMS, a source of missionary anecdotes; to Johnson and the communicants, a spiritual home and a material culture; to the ACS, a fantasy of black subordination. In Britain, anti-slavery activists sometimes called the end of colonial slavery “the Great Experiment.”<sup>146</sup> Emancipation, in this view, was a test of the economic superiority of wage labor, and of the ability of emancipated people to live up to British expectations for their “civilization,” labor, and gratitude to Britain. The “experiment” found an early laboratory in Sierra Leone, when former slaves were put at the “disposal” of the colonial governor under the terms of the abolition of the slave trade. The village system was made in response to an economic crisis, but was not only a colonial bricolage. It turned out, in practice, that British abolitionist ideology was not tarnished or distorted when applied to the quotidian business of colonial government—it was made for it.

<sup>146</sup> For discussions of the consequences of this characterization, see Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*; Catherine Hall, “‘From Greenland’s Icy Mountains . . . to Afric’s Golden Sand’: Ethnicity, Race and Nation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England,” *Gender & History* 5, no. 2 (1993): 212–230; Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.

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