

## The Crisis of The 1850's

In the decade preceding the Civil War, new challenges tested the physical and moral stamina of the North's two hundred thousand Negroes. During the previous fifty years, the nation's political and material advances had been largely confined to whites. Disfranchised and segregated in most states, legally barred from settling in some, confined to a diminishing number of inferior jobs, American Negroes found little cause for optimism in the era that witnessed the election of Abraham Lincoln and the dissolution of the Union. Instead, they looked with dismay at the passage of more repressive state and federal legislation, a Supreme Court decision that stripped them of citizenship, a revived colonization movement, and a new anti-slavery political party which demonstrated little regard for the plight of northern blacks.

Nevertheless, some encouraging signs did brighten an otherwise dismal outlook. The Negro community, bolstered by vigorous leadership, had never been stronger, and it had joined

with abolitionist sympathizers to effect some notable advances in civil rights, especially in New England. At the same time, the threatened expansion of southern slavery had awakened the dormant consciences of many whites; it had increased public interest in the Negro's plight, spurred the organization of a new political movement, forced the old parties to commit themselves, and produced a new group of national leaders to challenge the alleged aggressions of the "slavocracy." Anti-slavery tracts and fugitive-slave memoirs appeared in growing numbers to arouse white sympathies, and Harriet Beecher Stowe's description of "Life among the Lowly" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was moving white audiences to tears in the North's segregated theaters. Beyond this, however, there appeared to be little hope for any early integration of northern Negroes into American society.

Submitting to the southern demand for strengthened fugitive-slave legislation, northern political leaders obtained a momentary sectional truce but simultaneously created an atmosphere of fear in the Negro community. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 sought to insure a speedier return of runaway bondsmen to the South; any claimant who could establish affidavit proof of ownership before a special federal commissioner could take possession of a Negro. The captive had no recourse to common legal safeguards, such as a jury trial or a judicial hearing. In fact, the new law awarded ten dollars to the commissioner if he directed the captive's return, but only five dollars if he ordered the runaway's release. The relative cost of paper-work involved in the two transactions allegedly justified this differential. Critics, however, called it an open bribe. The Act further empowered federal officers to call upon all citizens to help enforce its provisions and imposed fines, imprisonment, and civil damages for concealing or rescuing a fugitive. It posed an obvious threat to free northern-born Ne-

groes: any of them might be "mistakenly" identified as fugitives and carried to the South.

Encouraged by the new legislation, slaveholders appeared in northern communities or employed agents to reclaim their lost chattel. Paid informers of both races, some of whom gave false testimony, heightened the tension under which northern Negroes lived.<sup>1</sup> In the first six years of the Act, more than two hundred alleged fugitives were arrested, approximately twelve of whom successfully defended their claim to freedom. Rather than risk consignment to southern bondage, many Negroes, including some of the leading figures of the Negro community who had been active abolitionists and admitted fugitives, fled to Canada or England. "The night is a dark and stormy one," *Frederick Douglass' Paper* lamented in 1851. "We have lost some of our strong men.—Ward has been driven into exile; Loguen has been hunted from our shores; Brown, Garnet and Crummell, men who were our pride and hope, we have heard signified their unwillingness to return again to their National field of labors in this country. Bibb has *chosen* Canada as his field of labor—and the eloquent Remond is comparatively silent."<sup>2</sup> Although an estimated twenty thousand fled to Canada between 1850 and 1860, most Negroes chose to remain in the North and resist this latest threat to their precarious freedom. "The only way to make the Fugitive Slave Law a dead letter," Frederick Douglass told them, "is to make half a dozen or more dead kidnappers."<sup>3</sup>

While the South demanded full compliance with the new act, the North divided in its response. Several northern communities and states decided that enforcement was too great a

<sup>1</sup> For the fate of one such Negro informer, see Woodson (ed.), *Mind of the Negro*, pp. 346-48.

<sup>2</sup> Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1898), pp. 240-42, 249-51; Fred Landon, "The Negro Migration to Canada after the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850," *Journal of Negro History*, V (1920), 22-23; *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, November 27, 1851.

<sup>3</sup> *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 20, 1852.

price to pay, even for sectional peace. Whites might differ on extending political and social rights to Negroes, but many of them shared a common revulsion at the sight of slave-hunters searching for human prey in northern neighborhoods. The uprooting of respectable Negroes from their jobs and families to be returned to slavery seemed to defy any code of common decency. Consequently, some communities openly defied the law, forcibly ejected claimants, or collected money to buy the victim's freedom. Several states virtually annulled the Fugitive Slave Act through the passage of personal-liberty laws which enabled alleged fugitives to secure legal counsel, guaranteed them a hearing and a jury trial, forbade their confinement in state jails, and enjoined state officers from issuing writs or granting any assistance to claimants. Such legislation made it increasingly difficult to capture alleged runaways and soon prompted the South to charge that northerners had betrayed a solemn promise.<sup>4</sup>

With personal freedom at stake, northern Negroes organized and, when necessary, armed themselves to sabotage the operation of the new law. This gave some substance to the sentiments of a New York City protest rally that the Fugitive Slave Act "must be trampled under foot, resisted, disobeyed, and violated at all hazards."<sup>5</sup> Turning to direct action, Negroes assisted escaped slaves and joined with abolitionists to hamper the efforts of southern slaveholders to recover them. In one dramatic case, the Boston Vigilance Committee kidnaped an accused fugitive from the courtroom during a recess in his trial and sent him to Canada. Although unsuccessful in another such attempt, the Committee prompted Boston authorities to call out three hundred policemen to escort a fugitive from the court-

<sup>4</sup> Siebert, *Underground Railroad*, pp. 245-46.

<sup>5</sup> *The Fugitive Slave Bill: Its History and Unconstitutionality* (New York, 1850), p. 32. See also *North Star*, April 5, October 24, 31, 1850; *The Liberator*, October 4, 11, November 8, 1850; *New York Colored Convention of 1851*, pp. 29-30; *Ohio Colored Convention of 1851*, p. 16.

house to the wharf. In other northern communities, similar rescue attempts, many of them classics in abolitionist history, resulted in freeing fugitives or causing claimants considerable expense.<sup>6</sup>

As bitterness and tension mounted, resistance frequently erupted into violence. In Christiana, Pennsylvania, for example, the efforts of a slaveholder to recover some fugitives cost him his life. The accused Negro assailants, ably defended by Thaddeus Stevens, were subsequently acquitted. An abolitionist attack on the Boston Court House to free a fugitive slave took the life of an acting United States marshal and quickly brought President Franklin Pierce to order federal troops to the scene. Commenting on this incident, Frederick Douglass discussed a question that must have occasioned some interesting debates among abolitionists: "Is it Right and Wise to Kill a Kidnapper?" Although he had once identified himself with the Garrisonian principle of nonviolence, Douglass now urged Negroes to abandon any scruples about force when dealing with a slave-hunter, for such a person had forfeited his right to live. Moreover, Douglass insisted, Negroes had long been stereotyped as patient, passive, and meek. "This reproach must be wiped out," he declared, "and nothing short of resistance on the part of colored men, can wipe it out. Every Slavehunter who meets a bloody death in his infernal business, is an argument in favor of the manhood of our race."<sup>7</sup>

Already shaken by the personal-liberty laws, southern defenders expressed their shock at the sight of organized and armed Negroes openly defying federal authority. Ignoring its own repeated suppression of the rights of antislavery advocates and free Negroes, the South demanded full recognition of the

<sup>6</sup> Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad in Massachusetts* (Worcester, 1936), pp. 45-53, 57-63; Siebert, *Underground Railroad*, pp. 327-33; Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union* (2 vols.; New York, 1947), I, 387-89.

<sup>7</sup> Aptheker (ed.), *Documentary History*, pp. 323-24; *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, June 2, 1854.

rights of slaveowners to repossess their human property and urged that steps be taken to break northern resistance. When news of the successful abolitionist rescue of a fugitive slave reached Washington, D.C., Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky suggested that the President immediately investigate the outrage and recommend appropriate congressional action. Vigorously condemning the Boston rescue, Clay cited with particular alarm the color of the participants and the obvious implications. "By whom was this mob impelled onward?" he asked. "By our own race? No, sir, but by negroes; by African descendants; by people who possess no part, as I contend, in our political system; and the question which arises is, whether we shall have law, and whether the majesty of the Government shall be maintained or not; whether we shall have a Government of white men or black men in the cities of this country."<sup>8</sup> Despite Clay's alarm, a frequently sympathetic public opinion encouraged Negroes and abolitionists to continue their resistance until enforcement of the detested law became impractical, if not impossible.

Against a background of sectional bitterness and growing concern over the future of American Negroes, the Colonization Society found even more compelling reasons to urge support of its Liberian colony. The Fugitive Slave Act, the Dred Scott decision, anti-immigration laws, and the overwhelming defeat of suffrage proposals bolstered previous colonizationist arguments that Negroes could never secure equal rights within the United States. Adding to this plight, new waves of foreign immigrants drove many Negroes from the menial employments they had once monopolized and threatened what little economic security they possessed. What more evidence could be adduced to demonstrate to hitherto skeptical Negroes the impossibility of integration into white society and thus the

<sup>8</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 31 Cong., 2 sess., p. 597.

desirability, if not the inevitability, of African colonization? "He cannot stay where he is," a colonization leader declared in 1860. "He is excluded from other parts of the United States; he can find no enduring home in the west; . . . where is he to find a home?" Fortunately, God himself had at one time supplied the answer—the western coast of Africa.<sup>9</sup>

In its appeals for Negro volunteers and white support, the Colonization Society repeated the familiar arguments of the 1820's and indicated how recent events had merely added to the urgency of the problem. Several states, through constitutional conventions or the legislature, renewed their indorsement of colonization, and some hoped to make it virtually obligatory by further proscribing Negro rights. The Indiana constitutional convention agreed to contribute all fines collected from violations of the new anti-immigration law to the cause of colonization. The state legislature subsequently appropriated \$5,000 for a special colonization fund. In Ohio, the state house of representatives petitioned Congress to inquire into the expediency of surveying and appropriating a portion of the territory recently acquired from Mexico for the exclusive benefit of Negro settlers; a Connecticut legislative committee indorsed the Liberian project after affirming the hopelessness of Negroes' ever attaining social or political equality in the United States; and Governor Washington Hunt of New York, after discussing in his annual message to the legislature the "anomalous position" of the Negro, pointed to the practicality and desirability of colonization and urged liberal state and federal financial support.<sup>10</sup>

Aside from state indorsements, colonization attracted sup-

<sup>9</sup> *Forty-third Annual Report of the American Colonization Society* (Washington, D.C., 1860), p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> *Indiana Constitutional Debates of 1850*, II, 1586, 1793-96, 2045; Richard W. Leopold, *Robert Dale Owen* (Cambridge, Mass., 1940), p. 285; *House Miscellaneous Document*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., No. 19 (1850); Warner, *New Haven Negroes*, p. 107; Lincoln (ed.), *Messages from the Governors*, IV, 619-23.

port in the 1850's from various sources and for different reasons. Some southerners urged the removal of free Negroes as a nuisance and a subversive influence on the slave population. Most colonizationists, however, apparently hoped that colonization would solve an admittedly hopeless problem and benefit both races, but this did not necessarily tie them to the Liberian plan. A Cleveland Free Soil newspaper, for example, suggested in 1851 that some productive section of the United States be set aside for the exclusive residence of free Negroes. On the eve of the Civil War a Springfield, Massachusetts, journal, discussing the question "What Shall Be Done With The Darkies?" berated Negro leaders for dereliction of duty, lack of racial pride and independence, and a tendency to cling to the coattails of white society. Colonization, it maintained, was not a degrading removal but an opportunity to build a new and constructive society. When Negroes demonstrated that they possessed the necessary spirit, enterprise, and intelligence to create and properly govern an independent colony the editorial concluded, they would have taken a crucial step toward universal emancipation.<sup>11</sup>

Most abolitionists maintained a strong anticolonizationist stand and continued to view the Colonization Society as a "bitter, malignant and active enemy" of the antislavery cause. In the 1850's, however, a growing uncertainty concerning the wisdom of this long-held opposition manifested itself in abolitionist ranks. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for example, evoked considerable controversy by dealing sympathetically with colonization. In the closing pages of the book George Harris departs, with his family, for Liberia, where a

<sup>11</sup> Cleveland *Daily True Democrat*, February 27, 1851, in Works Projects Administration (eds.), *Annals of Cleveland, 1818-1935* (59 vols.; Cleveland, 1937-38), XXXIV, 175; *The Liberator*, August 31, 1860. See also Jacob Dewees, *The Great Future of America and Africa* (Philadelphia, 1854), and W. S. Brown, "A Plan of National Colonization," in Josiah Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery* (Glasgow, Kentucky, 1853), pp. 491-509.

"new and promising republic has arisen. Although this land has been used by his oppressors to retard emancipation, Harris maintains that such sinister designs cannot obstruct its value as the nucleus of a new Negro nation. "I want a country, a nation, of my own," he declares. "I think that the African race has peculiarities, yet to be unfolded in the light of civilization and Christianity, which, if not the same with those of the Anglo-Saxon, may prove to be, morally, of even a higher type. . . . As a Christian patriot, as a teacher of Christianity, I go to my country, — my chosen, my glorious Africa!" Unmoved by Mrs. Stowe's eloquent plea for the new republic, Negro delegates to the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery convention called this passage an "evil influence," referred to its enthusiastic acceptance by a recent colonization meeting, and hoped that something would be done to counteract its influence. In a note to the convention, Mrs. Stowe reaffirmed her opposition to the American Colonization Society, assured the delegates that she was not a colonizationist, and admitted that if she were to rewrite the book, Harris would not be sent to Liberia. At the same time, however, she called the African colony "a fixed fact" and advised Negroes not to disregard completely this opportunity to construct an independent nation.<sup>12</sup>

While Mrs. Stowe suggested the need for another look at Liberia, several other abolitionists sought to draw a line — though an admittedly precarious one — between the general merits of colonization and the questionable designs of the American Colonization Society. James Birney, who had abandoned colonization for abolitionism in the 1830's, dismally concluded in 1852 that little hope remained for the Negro in the United States. Although he refused to indorse the Society,

<sup>12</sup> *Proceedings of the American Anti-Slavery Society, at its Second Decade* (New York, 1854), p. 15; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (2 vols.; Boston, 1852), II, 302-3; American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *Twelfth Annual Report*, p. 28, *Thirteenth Annual Report*, pp. 192-93; *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, May 20, 1852.

Birney called upon each Negro to decide for himself whether or not he could best better his position here or elsewhere. Some abolitionists went even further and maintained that the Colonization Society had had a change of heart, that it had altered its tactics and thus deserved more careful consideration. Moreover, Liberia now stood as an independent Negro state, rather than as an appendage of the Society, so why not urge Negroes to go there and demonstrate to the world their capabilities? But few abolitionists actually joined in these sporadic calls for a re-evaluation of colonization; most of them reaffirmed their previous opposition to the Society, and even those who appeared otherwise sympathetic concluded that the entire scheme was inexpedient and impractical. Apparently, the federal government had reached a similiar conclusion.<sup>13</sup>

Despite state and public appeals, the federal government remained largely indifferent to the colonization scheme. President Millard Fillmore indorsed it but at the same time deleted from his 1852 Message to Congress some intended remarks on the subject. After citing the deplorable condition of the free Negro population, Fillmore had planned to demonstrate the practicality and necessity of African colonization. "There can be no well-grounded hope," he had written, "for the improvement of either their moral or social condition, until they are removed from a humiliating sense of inferiority in the presence of a superior race." Although the proposed remarks were omitted from the delivered address, several newspapers alluded to them.<sup>14</sup> One year later, the Senate also indicated an unwillingness to take any specific action. During the debate on the naval appropriations bill, a New Jersey senator offered an amendment which would have appropriated \$125,000 to equip

<sup>13</sup> Betty L. Fladeland, *James Gillespie Birney* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1955), pp. 280-81; *Twelfth Annual Report of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society*, p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> Frank H. Severance (ed.), *Millard Fillmore Papers* (2 vols.; Buffalo, 1907), I, 313 n., 320-24.

and maintain an exploratory expedition to Africa to ascertain its resources and to aid the colonization of free Negroes. Urging approval of the measure, the senator declared that "the negro is a timid creature; he feels in his soul that which the white man boldly avows: that he is an inferior being, and therefore the subject of deception and wrong." Government support, he pointed out, would enhance the prestige of the colonization cause, remove previous suspicions about its motives, and encourage Negro participation. Congress rejected the amendment and continued to maintain a hands-off position.<sup>15</sup>

Although Negro conventions and newspapers reiterated their opposition to African colonization, the hard-pressed Negro community reacted much more favorably in the 1850's to the idea of emigration, particularly to other parts of the Western Hemisphere. After the establishment of the "independent" Liberian Republic, some Negroes even urged a new approach to that area. Henry Highland Garnet, once a vigorous critic of colonization, now praised the beneficial influence of Liberia on the rest of Africa and recommended emigration to those Negroes who despaired of ever improving their position in the United States.<sup>16</sup> Agreeing that colonization should be re-evaluated, a Hartford, Connecticut, Negro businessman charged that colored leadership had betrayed its responsibility by encouraging hopes that could never be realized in this country. After a realistic look at the present plight of free Negroes, how could anyone not conclude "that the friendly and mutual separation of the two races is not only necessary to the peace, happiness and prosperity of both, but indispensable to the preservation of the one and the glory of the other?"<sup>17</sup> Most Negroes undoubtedly denied—or at least wanted to deny—

<sup>15</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 32 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 1064-65; *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 32 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 231-34.

<sup>16</sup> *North Star*, January 26, March 2, 1849.

<sup>17</sup> Woodson (ed.), *Mind of the Negro*, pp. 133-44.

such a pessimistic conclusion, but a growing minority nevertheless felt that it warranted further consideration and that some outlet should be opened, either overseas or on this continent, for the emigration of the restless, the disgruntled, and the ambitious.

In the 1850's, Negro emigrationist sentiment looked more to Central America than to Africa as a place of permanent refuge. Martin R. Delany, a prominent Negro leader, physician, and journalist, took a leading part in encouraging interest in these areas and in the general value of emigration. The United States, he wrote in 1852, had violated its professed principles of republican equality by maintaining the Negro population in political and economic bondage. The appearance of respectable and competent Negro businessmen, literary figures, and professionals had done little to alter white hostility. Meanwhile, most Negroes had become so accustomed to economic inferiority that they now regarded the menial jobs as "fashionable" and "second nature." Under these circumstances, Delany argued, the Negro was compelled to choose between two alternatives: continued degradation here or emigration and the establishment of a useful and free community elsewhere. However, all colonization roads did not necessarily lead to Liberia or require support of the "anti-Christian" and "misanthropic" Colonization Society. If anything, the Liberian colony was geographically and climatically unacceptable, a slaveholder's device to secure his chattel, and "a burlesque" on government. The destiny of American Negroes, Delany concluded, lay in the Western Hemisphere; not in Canada, which faced imminent annexation to the United States, but in Central and South America, which afforded the Negro a favorable geographic location and climate, untapped natural resources, unlimited opportunities for individual enterprise, and a "Promised Land" where he could live with-

out any fear of annexation or political and economic oppression.<sup>18</sup>

To promote and organize emigrationist sentiment, Negro proponents called a national convention for 1854 and invited only those who favored colonization in the Western Hemisphere to participate in the proceedings. The proposed meeting immediately set off a lively debate among northern Negroes. Calling it "unwise, unfortunate, and premature," Frederick Douglass charged that such a project contemplated a separate nationality. "We are Americans," he asserted. "We are not aliens. We are a component part of the nation. Though in only some of the States, are we an acknowledged necessary part of the 'ruling element,' we have no disposition, to renounce our nationality. We do not wish to form a separate nation in these United States." Some day, Douglass optimistically concluded, the whites would grant full citizenship rights to the Negro. Until that time, his people should not allow themselves to be distracted from immediate goals by far-fetched plans based upon "despondency and despair." Indorsing Douglass' position, Negro conventions in Illinois, California, and Massachusetts opposed the pending emigrationist convention as impeding the struggle for equal rights; an Ohio meeting had previously rejected a resolution urging voluntary emigration on the grounds that no Negro should leave the United States while any of his southern brethren remained in bondage.<sup>19</sup>

On August 24, 1854, despite mounting opposition, delegates from eleven states convened in Cleveland for the National Emigration Convention of the Colored People. Drawing

<sup>18</sup> Delany, *Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People*, pp. 14-15, 30-35, 159-98.

<sup>19</sup> *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 26, September 30, October 28, 1853, March 10, July 6, 1854; *Illinois Colored Convention of 1853*, p. 13; *Ohio Colored Convention of 1852*, p. 9. See also Frederick Douglass, William J. Watkins, James M. Whitfield, *Arguments, Pro and Con, on the Call for a National Emigration Convention, to be held in Cleveland, Ohio, August, 1854* (Detroit, 1854).

its support primarily from Pennsylvania and Ohio, the Convention attracted the most outspoken emigrationists of the 1850's—Delany, James T. Holly, James M. Whitfield, and H. Ford Douglass. The Platform and Address to the Negro People neatly summarized their position. Despite years of patient waiting and agitation, the Negro had been doomed to constant "disappointment, discouragement and degradation." Disfranchisement had deprived him of any political power; statutes and extralegal customs had relegated him to an inferior position and had paralyzed his creative energies; the Fugitive Slave Act now threatened him with enslavement. The American Negro had thus carefully to consider emigration or face deterioration.

Emigrationists made it quite clear, however, that the establishment of an independent Negro colony signified more than a simple desire to escape political oppression: it also symbolized a growing feeling of national consciousness and racial pride. Negroes had to be made to realize that they were a different race, that they had little in common with the Anglo-Saxons, and that they possessed certain commendable "inherent traits" and "native characteristics" which required only cultivation before the rest of the world would attempt to emulate them. In the various arts and sciences, ethics, metaphysics, theology, and legal jurisprudence, "there is no doubt but the black race will yet instruct the world."

Some day, the Cleveland delegates agreed, the "question of black and white" will decide the world's destiny. In the past three centuries the territorial aggrandizement of the whites had been based upon the subjugation of the colored peoples of the world; in fact, "the Anglo-American stands pre-eminent for deeds of injustice and acts of oppression, unparalleled perhaps in the annals of world history." But this imbalance could not persist, the convention warned, and every individual would soon have to identify himself with the whites

or the blacks. The colored races formed two-thirds of the world's population and were drawing closer together; the white races comprised but one-third. How much longer would "that two-thirds . . . passively submit to the universal domination of this one-third?"

After this prophetic glance at the future, the delegates returned to more immediate matters and noted the important changes that had taken place among American Negroes. While their fathers had submitted to slavery and had contented themselves with small favors from their white masters, the new generation was securing an education and learning the meaning of natural rights. Previously satisfied with white sufferance, Negroes now demanded their rights as "an innate inheritance." Since these could not be acquired within the United States, Negroes would have to go elsewhere—settle in the West Indies or Central or South America—assert their manhood, and develop a new civilization. In these areas the Negro would finally achieve political equality and social and economic betterment, and the natives would most certainly encourage such development as "a check to European presumption, and insufferable Yankee intrusion and impudence." Emigration, then, afforded American Negroes an opportunity to escape a degraded position and commence a new and productive life. Not only did the Cleveland delegates enthusiastically indorse this position, but they also proceeded to form a "National Board of Commissioners," headed by Delany, to begin immediate implementation of it.<sup>20</sup>

The Cleveland convention ably publicized the emigrationist cause, but it did not win the support of the Negro community. Many whites expressed their approval, and this undoubtedly helped to increase Negro suspicions concerning the motives and aims of the emigrationists. "We are surprised to learn,"

<sup>20</sup> *Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People; held at Cleveland, Ohio . . . the 24th, 25th and 26th of August, 1854* (Pittsburgh, 1854), pp. 16-18, 23-27, 33-37, 40-41, 43-46, 55-56, 71-77.



a Cleveland newspaper remarked, "that the objects of the convention met with but little favor from our colored citizens."<sup>21</sup> This lack of enthusiasm doomed the project from the beginning. Moreover, the emigrationists themselves divided into various factions. Each proposed area of settlement—Canada, Haiti, Central America, South America, and Africa—had its adherents and colonizing companies. Indeed, in some cases the emigrationist leaders appeared to outnumber their followers.

After the outbreak of the Civil War, emigrationist interest diminished considerably among Negroes but increased among whites, especially when emancipation seemed inevitable. Some Negroes, however, continued to press for emigration as the only alternative to continued oppression in the United States, regardless of the outcome of the civil conflict. In 1862, for example, 242 California Negroes petitioned Congress to colonize them "in some country in which their color will not be a badge of degradation." The true interests of both races, they maintained, required such a separation; any of the proposed sites would be preferable to this country, where the future of the Negro appeared to be dismal, if not hopeless. "It seems to be the settled policy of the nation," the petitioners concluded, "as evinced in the action of both the State and federal governments, to discountenance in every manner the increase of persons of color in their midst, and to use every legal means to induce those now here to emigrate; and there is probably no point on which the public sentiment of every section of the country and of every class of society is so perfectly unanimous as upon this."<sup>22</sup> Most Negroes, however, refused to leave, hoping instead that the impact of the Civil War might create for them a "Promised Land" in the United States.

<sup>21</sup> *Cleveland Leader*, August 25, 1854, in W.P.A. (eds.), *Annals of Cleveland*, XXXVII, 197-98.

<sup>22</sup> *House Miscellaneous Document*, 37 Cong., 2 sess., No. 31 (1862).

While conceding the right of fugitive slaves and free Negroes to claim adequate legal protection, northern public sentiment continued to sanction the political and social inferiority of the African race. By 1860, the five states which granted equal-suffrage rights—Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Rhode Island—contained only 6 per cent of the total northern Negro population. Proposals to extend the suffrage appeared on the ballot in various states during the 1850's, but none were approved. In addition to maintaining disfranchisement, constitutional conventions and legislatures in four states—Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Oregon—agreed between 1850 and 1857 to prohibit the further entry of Negroes, and white voters gave these enactments their overwhelming approval. Not only did Negroes continue to face political, social, and economic proscription, but they also encountered a large number of petty persecutions. The Ohio state senate, for example, voted to expel a Negro editor from his seat in the reporter's section and justified this unprecedented action by observing that the laws of nature and the moral and political well-being of both races required a strict separation.<sup>23</sup>

While southern congressional spokesmen continued to cite the proscription of the Negro in the free states, a growing number of northern proslavery pamphleteers, anxious to offset the influence of abolitionist tracts and broadsides, further lampooned the inferior race. Bearing such titles as *Abolitionism Unveiled!*, *Is the North Right!*, *The Laws of Race*, and *Free Negroism*, these publications varied little in content and emphasis. Divine or natural laws, they claimed, had destined the Anglo-Saxon race to command and the African race to obey. Using pseudo-scientific, biblical, and moral arguments, these pamphleteers further contended that Negroes could not possibly comprehend or properly exercise the ordinary rights

<sup>23</sup> *Forest City Democrat*, January 23, 24, 30, February 17, 1854, in W.P.A. (eds.), *Annals of Cleveland*, XXXVII, 279-80; *The Liberator*, February 10, 1854.

and privileges of free men. Such a person as Frederick Douglass was an exceptional case, for few Negroes could ever attain so much as he had. Did not the general status of free Negroes in the "abolition-loving states" prove beyond any doubt the inherent inferiority of the Africans, the folly of emancipation, and the utter hypocrisy of antislavery arguments? Agreeing with these critics, George Fitzhugh, a leading southern publicist and slavery apologist, looked at the degraded position of northern Negroes and concluded that "humanity, self-interest, consistency, all require that we should enslave the free Negro."<sup>24</sup> Several southern legislatures, in fact, offered free Negroes at least one legally recognized right: that of selling themselves into permanent bondage. But most northerners recoiled at such a proposal and hoped instead that colonization might provide a permanent remedy.

Against this rather dismal background, northern Negroes sought to organize their forces and effect a change in public opinion and legislation. In Illinois, the Repeal Association was formed to secure the abrogation of the Black Laws; Ohio Negroes organized the Colored American League to assist runaway slaves, to improve the condition of the freedmen, and to encourage Negro communities to form military companies; New York Negroes established the State Suffrage Association to press for a constitutional amendment giving them equal voting rights and the Legal Rights Association to combat continued harassment in the public conveyances.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> T. V. Paterson, *Abolitionism Unveiled! Hypocrisy Unmasked! and Knavery Scourged!* (New York, 1850); "Is the North Right!" Or, *A Word about Slavery and the Colored Race. Addressed to the People of Massachusetts. By a Fellow Citizen* (Boston, 1855); Sidney George Fisher, *The Laws of Race* (Philadelphia, 1860); David Christy, "Cotton Is King," in E. N. Elliott (ed.), *Cotton Is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments* (Augusta, Ga., 1860); *Free Negroism; or, Results of Emancipation in the North and the West India Islands* (New York, 1862); George Fitzhugh, *What Shall Be Done with the Free Negroes* (Fredericksburg, Va., 1851).

<sup>25</sup> *Proceedings of the State Convention of Colored Citizens of the State of Illinois* (Chicago, 1856), pp. 7, 13; *Ohio Colored Convention of 1850*, p. 13;

Moreover, Negroes moved toward co-ordinating their efforts nationally. On July 6, 1853, delegates from various states met in Rochester, recorded their grievances, and elected the National Council of the Colored People. But this and other national organizations became involved in factional struggles and accomplished little, thus leaving the primary responsibility for effective action in the hands of the state groups.<sup>26</sup>

The rise of antislavery feeling in the North, coincident with the defiance of the Fugitive Slave Act, also encouraged Negroes to take more aggressive action against southern bondage. By 1858, Negro abolitionism not only incorporated the once controversial appeals of David Walker and Henry Highland Garnet but went even further in some cases and welcomed the overthrow of the American government. To this group, the Fugitive Slave Act and the Dred Scott decision deprived Negroes of legal protection and thus absolved them from any allegiance to the federal union. To support the government and the Constitution upon which it was based, Robert Purvis declared, was to indorse "one of the basest, meanest, most atrocious despotisms that ever saw the face of the sun"; any man claiming self-respect would look upon this "piebald and rotten Democracy" with "contempt, loathing, and unutterable abhorrence!" Why not, then, Purvis urged, welcome the overthrow of "this atrocious government" and construct a better one in its place? Along similar lines, a delegate to the California Negro convention of 1856 bitterly assailed a patriotic resolution favoring support of the United States against foreign invasion. "I would hail the advent of a foreign army upon our shores," he declared, "if that army provided liberty to me and my people in bondage." Emigrationist leader H. Ford

*Proceedings of the State Convention of the Colored Men of the State of Ohio* (Columbus, 1857), p. 7; *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 7, 14, 1855; *New York Daily Times*, August 27, 1855.

<sup>26</sup> *Proceedings of the Colored National Convention* (Rochester, 1853); *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, July 28, 1854, May 18, 1855.

Douglass agreed. "I can hate this Government without being disloyal," he said, "because it has stricken down my manhood, and treated me as a saleable commodity. I can join a foreign enemy and fight against it, without being a traitor, because it treats me as an ALIEN and a STRANGER, and I am free to avow that should such a contingency arise I should not hesitate to take any advantage in order to procure such indemnity for the future."<sup>27</sup>

Most Negroes did not indorse the sentiments of this small but vocal minority; nevertheless, they did welcome John Brown's direct thrust at slavery as the obvious work of a saint. Prior to his dramatic raid on Harper's Ferry, Brown had urged Frederick Douglass to join him in a declaration of war on slavery, but the Negro leader had refused on the grounds that such an attack was doomed to tragic failure. Once the plan had been executed, however, Douglass applauded it as an act of courage and devotion and denounced Brown's detractors as the products of "an effeminate and cowardly age" which was "too gross and sensual to appreciate his deeds, and so calls him mad." Any act which created restless nights for slaveholders, Douglass declared, should be a cause for rejoicing. Knowing the futility of moral appeals to the South, Brown had struck at bondage "with the weapons precisely adapted to bring it to the death." Since slavery existed only through "brute force," Douglass concluded, why not turn its own weapons against it?<sup>28</sup>

Brown's raid and subsequent death by hanging aroused Negro sympathies in the North—he had executed a "glorious act for the cause of humanity"; he had "rocked the bloody Bastille" in a desperate attempt to redeem Americans from

<sup>27</sup> *Proceedings of a Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio* (Cincinnati, 1858), pp. 6-7; *The Liberator*, May 22, 1857, May 18, 1860; *Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California* (San Francisco, 1856), pp. 14, 19; Aptheker (ed.), *Documentary History*, p. 368.

<sup>28</sup> *Douglass' Monthly*, November, 1859.

the national sin of slavery; he clearly deserved commendation, not condemnation. If the historical role assigned to Brown seemed dubious in a terrorized South and a frightened though awed North, it had already been assured in the Negro community, for no white had ever made such a dramatic sacrifice for the cause of human freedom. "The memory of John Brown," one Negro proclaimed, "shall be indelibly written upon the tablets of our hearts, and when tyrants cease to oppress the enslaved, we will teach our children to revive his name, and transmit it to the latest posterity, as being the greatest man in the 19th century."<sup>29</sup>

Despite the impact of John Brown, most American Negroes indorsed political action rather than violence, although neither alternative seemed particularly promising. Violence could result only in tragic failure—Nat Turner and John Brown symbolized the hopelessness of this approach. Disfranchisement severely curtailed the Negro's political power, and in any case the major political parties had little to offer. Until the organization of the Republican party, Negroes either had to adopt a lesser-of-two-evils political philosophy or give their support to third-party movements. Many of them did participate actively in the Liberty and Free Soil parties; in fact, the New York Liberty party went so far as to nominate Frederick Douglass for a state office—the first time such an honor had ever been accorded a Negro.<sup>30</sup> The appearance of the Republican party raised Negro hopes and attracted enthusiastic supporters, but, as some Negroes soon discovered, the new party offered few reasons for any great optimism. It promised to resist southern aggression and keep the territories free—but that was all. This, too, was to be a white man's party devoted to the supremacy of the white race. Although most Negroes

<sup>29</sup> Woodson (ed.), *Mind of the Negro*, pp. 508-10; *The Liberator*, December 16, 1859, March 16, May 18, July 13, 1860.

<sup>30</sup> Wesley, "The Participation of Negroes in Anti-Slavery Parties," p. 69.

continued to favor the Republicans, this often reflected desperation rather than real conviction.

If the Negro had any expectations of a fundamental change in his condition under Republican rule, they were quickly banished as Republicans proceeded to clarify their position in response to partisan attacks. To offset growing Republican popularity in the North, the Democrats seized upon those issues which could excite the most heated passions and prejudices—racial equality, amalgamation, and white supremacy. The Republicans had to be portrayed as a party that would be “soft” on the race issue, as a pro-amalgamation, “nigger loving” political conglomeration bent on raising Negroes to full legal and social equality with whites. Indeed, the very supremacy of the white race would be placed in grave jeopardy. Once in power, Democrats warned, the “Black Republicans” would appoint Negroes to government offices, elect them to legislative bodies, and grant them the right to vote, to act as witnesses in court, and to sit in classrooms with white students. “Negro equality,” an Indiana congressman charged, “is the necessary, logical, and inevitable sequence of their principles.”<sup>31</sup> Exploiting this issue to the fullest, Senator Stephen Douglas castigated his Illinois rival, Abraham Lincoln, as a friend of the Negro and the candidate of Frederick Douglass and warned that a Republican triumph would cover the western prairies with black settlements. “If you desire negro citizenship,” he told a political rally, “if you desire to allow them to come into the State and settle with the white man, if you desire them to vote on an equality with yourselves, and to make them eligible to office, to serve on juries, and to adjudge your rights, then support Mr. Lincoln and the Black Republican party.” Douglas, on the other hand, promised to stand on the principle that the American government had

<sup>31</sup> *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 sess., p. 282. See also *Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 238-39; *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 282-88.

been formed “on the white basis, by white men, for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever.”<sup>32</sup>

Seeking to press these charges in a more spectacular manner, some thirty thousand anti-Republicans staged a torchlight procession in New York City a few days before the election of 1860. Many of the floats, placards, and banners identified Republicans with miscegenation and racial equality. One float pictured Lincoln holding a black flag labeled “Discord” and Horace Greeley clutching a *Tribune* while between them sat a thick-lipped Negro embracing a white girl; another depicted, under the standard “Republicanism,” a Negro leading a white woman into the White House. The banners carried by the marchers bore such slogans as “Republican Platform—Rails and Wool!”; “No Negro Equality”; “Massa Greeley and Master Sambo”; and “Free Love, Free Niggers, and Free Women.” Since a Republican-dominated legislature had voted to place the Negro-suffrage question on the November ballot, these charges appeared to have particular relevance.<sup>33</sup>

Actually, both political parties agreed on the need to contain the menace of racial equality, and each sought to outdo the other in professions of allegiance to the principles of white supremacy. “We, the Republican party, are the white man’s party,” declared Senator Lyman Trumbull, Illinois Republican leader and a close associate of Lincoln. “We are for free white men, and for making white labor respectable and honorable, which it can never be when negro slave labor is brought into competition with it.”<sup>34</sup> Republicans repeatedly stressed this point, assuring the electorate that opposition to slavery

<sup>32</sup> Basler (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, III, 9. See also III, 55-56, 112-14, 171-72.

<sup>33</sup> *New York Herald* and *New York Express*, as quoted in *The Liberator*, November 2, 1860.

<sup>34</sup> Address of Senator Lyman Trumbull, delivered at Chicago, August 7, 1858, as quoted in Francis P. Blair, Jr., *The Destiny of the Races of this Continent* (Washington, D.C., 1859), p. 30. See also *Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 sess., p. 102.

expansion made them "the only white man's party in this country." Taking this one step further, Republican leaders, while denouncing the Dred Scott decision and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, made few efforts to sympathize with the plight of the Negro. This was irrelevant. "The 'negro question,' as we understand it," an Ohio Republican wrote, "is a *white man's question*, the question of the right of free white laborers to the soil of the territories. It is not to be crushed or retarded by shouting 'Sambo' at us. We have no Sambo in our platform. . . . We object to Sambo. We don't want him about. We insist that he shall not be forced upon us."<sup>35</sup>

While stressing this incompatibility of free and slave labor, most Republicans also denied any intention to extend political rights to free Negroes and expressed revulsion at the idea of social intercourse with them. Full legal protection should be accorded both races, but according to Republican logic, it did not necessarily follow that Negroes should be granted the right to vote, sit on juries, or testify in cases involving whites. To the Negro, this must have been a strange logic indeed. In many areas, party leaders contended that any concessions to Negroes would constitute political suicide. In 1860, for example, an Ohio leader declared that a poll of the Republican party in the Old Northwest would not find "one in every thousand" favoring social and political rights for Negroes.<sup>36</sup> Even such a firm and outspoken abolitionist as Congressman Joshua Giddings of Ohio hesitated to commit his party too far on this potentially explosive issue. "We do not say the black man is, or shall be, the equal of the white man," Giddings declared in 1859, "or that he shall vote or hold office, however just such a position may be; but we assert that he who murders

<sup>35</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 35 Cong., 2 sess., p. 981; 36 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 239, 1903, 1910; *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 3 sess., p. 91; Earl B. Wiley, "Governor John Greiner and Chase's Bid for the Presidency in 1860," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, LVIII (1949), 261-62.

<sup>36</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1910.

a black man shall be hanged; that he who robs the black man of his liberty or his property shall be punished like other criminals."<sup>37</sup> And few Republicans were as radical as Giddings on this question! Meanwhile, Republican-dominated legislatures and constitutional conventions made few efforts to extend political rights. If their conservatism required any further demonstration, a New York City Republican proudly noted that of the 32,000 who voted for Lincoln in 1860, only 1,600 indorsed the state Negro-suffrage amendment.<sup>38</sup>

The expediencies and compromises of politics only partially explain the Republican aversion to equal rights, for this aversion also reflected the popular conviction that an inferior race had no place in the body politic. Some Republican newspapers not only openly proclaimed the superiority of the Caucasian race over the African, but assured the electorate that the Republican party would preserve this supremacy and protect the nation as much as possible "from the pestilential presence of the black man."<sup>39</sup> Even the professed friends of the Negro—those who went so far as to advocate equal political rights—could claim no immunity from prevailing racial theories and prejudices. William H. Seward, for example, described the American Negro to an 1860 political rally as "a foreign and feeble element like the Indians, incapable of assimilation . . . a pitiful exotic unwisely and unnecessarily transplanted into our fields, and which it is unprofitable to cultivate at the cost of the desolation of the native vineyard." But the Negro still had a right "to such care and protection as the weak everywhere may require from the strong." While indorsing the cause of Negro education in Washington, D.C., abolitionist Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts made it clear that he did not believe "in the mental or the intellectual

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 35 Cong., 2 sess., p. 346.

<sup>38</sup> Nevins and Thomas (eds.), *Diary of George Templeton Strong*, III, 76.

<sup>39</sup> Bernard Mandel, *Labor: Free and Slave* (New York, 1955), p. 150.

equality of the African race with this proud and domineering white race of ours." Fearing no competition from an admittedly inferior race, Wilson could see no reason why Congress should not extend to Negroes educational opportunities and even full citizenship.<sup>40</sup>

Despite this rather clear opposition to racial equality, several Republican leaders felt that something more had to be done before the crucial election of 1860. The party needed a still firmer and more positive position on the troublesome Negro question, one that would appeal to northern and border-state sentiment without altogether alienating the abolitionists. By 1858, this group, which included such party dignitaries as Francis P. Blair, Jr., and Edward Bates of Missouri, Montgomery Blair of Maryland, and Senator James Doolittle of Wisconsin, had found an ideal solution: the Republican party should press for the colonization of American Negroes in Central America under the direction of the federal government. "It would do more than ten thousand speeches," Montgomery Blair wrote, "to define accurately our objects and disabuse the minds of the great body of the Southern people . . . that the Republicans wish to set negroes free among them to be their equals and consequently their rulers when they are numerous."<sup>41</sup>

To promote this plan, Representative Francis P. Blair, Jr., proposed to the House in January, 1858, that a committee inquire into the expediency of acquiring territory in Central or South America for the purpose of Negro colonization. Not only would this check the expansion of slavery into those areas, Blair explained, but it might secure for "a class of men who are worse than useless to us" innumerable opportunities which would never be available to them in the United States. Indeed,

<sup>40</sup> Baker (ed.), *Works of William H. Seward*, IV, 317; *Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1684.

<sup>41</sup> Reinhard H. Luthin, *The First Lincoln Campaign* (Cambridge, Mass., 1944), p. 66.

colonization appeared to be the only alternative to forcible expulsion. In the Senate, James Doolittle introduced a similar proposal and spoke in glowing terms of the attractions of Central and South America, including a political and physical climate better adapted to the Negro's constitution and creative energies.<sup>42</sup>

Various Republican and abolitionist spokesmen enthusiastically indorsed the Blair-Doolittle proposals. Senator Trumbull welcomed the plan and wished "Godspeed" to any measure for the removal of the Negro population. Placing more emphasis on the voluntary nature of the plan, Representative Giddings gave his blessing to the Central American project for those Negroes who desired to settle in a more congenial climate. Gerrit Smith, antislavery leader and outspoken critic of the American Colonization Society, told Blair that the proposal had "enlightened and gratified" him, but such emigration would have to be voluntary and "be couched in words that would [not] offend the black, or invade their self-respect." Several Negro emigrationists, including James T. Holly, James M. Whitfield, and J. Dennis Harris, hailed the plan as inaugurating "a new era in their hopes" and promised full co-operation.<sup>43</sup>

The federal government and most Negroes remained unenthusiastic. The old spirit of African colonization had been revived under a new name, one Negro leader charged, but the principle had not changed — "the old snake with a new skin — nothing more, nothing less." Nor did the voluntary nature of the plan increase its attractiveness, for repressive legislation could easily force a "voluntary" departure. Noticing the

<sup>42</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 35 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 293-98, 3034; *Senate Miscellaneous Document*, 35 Cong., 2 sess., No. 26 (1858).

<sup>43</sup> Blair, *Destiny of the Races*, pp. 30, 32, 33-38; J. Dennis Harris, *A Summer on the Borders of the Caribbean Sea* (New York, 1860), pp. iii, 178. For Edward Bates' support, see Howard K. Beale (ed.), *The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866* (Washington, D.C., 1933), p. 113.

rather obvious connection between the new emigration proposals and the Republicans, Frederick Douglass expressed the hope that Negroes might be able to expect better things from that avowedly antislavery party. Should the Republican party triumph in 1860, he wrote, "we earnestly hope and pray, for its own sake, for the sake of the country, and for the sake of humanity, that it will first assume a higher level than this in regard to the black man." Otherwise, Douglass warned, the white American faced tragic consequences. If enfranchised, the Negro would remain forever a part of the Union; if further oppressed, he would "send it into a thousand fragments."<sup>44</sup>

In view of the avowed principles and policies of the Republican party, northern Negroes obviously faced a political dilemma. Although they rejoiced at its vigorous stand against slavery expansion, Negro leaders found it difficult to register any great enthusiasm over a party which promised them no relief from oppressive legislation, recognized the constitutional right of slavery to exist and be protected in the South, showed an aversion to social and political equality, and ignored the Fugitive Slave Act and bondage in the District of Columbia. In the current political struggle, one Negro lamented, neither party had any regard for the doctrine of equal rights: "Despotism is the avowed object of one, whilst self-interest is the all controlling power and ruling motive of the other. The philanthropic doctrine of equal rights is totally ignored. The poor negro, although the cause of this agitation, is denied by both parties as having any rights in common with humanity. They both worship at the shrine of Avarice and Cupidity, and sacrifice the rights of men to propitiate their gods."<sup>45</sup>

Recognizing the even drearier alternatives, many Negroes decided that political expediency justified support of the Re-

<sup>44</sup> *The Liberator*, May 18, 1860; *Douglass' Monthly*, March, 1859.

<sup>45</sup> Charles M. Wilson, "What Is Our True Condition?" *Anglo-African Magazine*, II (January, 1860), 19.

publican party. After all, Frederick Douglass pointed out, the Republicans did symbolize northern antislavery sentiment and might, in time, establish a more favorable climate for equal-rights legislation. In New England, Ohio, and New York, Negro conventions expressed sympathy for the Republican movement, though recognizing at the same time its serious limitations.<sup>46</sup> Such support, although qualified, did not go unchallenged. "No, sir, I am not a Republican," Robert Purvis told the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1860. "I can never join a party, the leaders of which conspire to expel us from the country." Asking forgiveness for having once supported that party, another Negro leader—John Jones of Illinois—charged that the Republicans had impeded the antislavery struggle by making abolitionism an ugly word.<sup>47</sup>

The nomination of Abraham Lincoln afforded little promise of a change in Republican policy. H. Ford Douglass, an Illinois Negro leader, recalled that the Republican nominee had once refused to sign a legislative petition asking for the repeal of the state law barring Negro testimony in cases involving whites. If blacks dared to send their children to the schools of Illinois, the Negro leader charged, "Abraham Lincoln would kick them out, in the name of Republicanism and anti-slavery!" Both parties, he concluded, "are barren and unfruitful. . . . I care nothing about that anti-slavery which wants to make the Territories free, while it is unwilling to extend to me, as a man, in the free States, all the rights of a man." Even Frederick Douglass, otherwise a reluctant Republican supporter, recognized the deficiencies of the victorious Republican candidate and mournfully predicted that Lincoln's administration would probably appease the slavery

<sup>46</sup> *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 15, 1856; *New York Daily Times*, July 31, 1856; *The Liberator*, September 5, 1856, April 10, July 3, October 23, 1857, October 1, December 3, 1858, August 1, 1859; *Proceedings of the State Convention of Colored Men* (Columbus, 1856), p. 2; *Ohio Colored Convention of 1858*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>47</sup> *The Liberator*, May 18, 1860; *Illinois Colored Convention of 1856*, p. 18.

interests rather than engage in any effective antislavery activity. But the South did not give Douglass a chance to prove his point.<sup>48</sup>

Always a masterful politician, Abraham Lincoln possessed an extraordinary insight into the public mind. On the question of political and social equality of the races, he accurately and consistently reflected the thoughts and prejudices of most Americans. By November, 1860, candidate Lincoln had apparently convinced a majority of northerners that the Republican party stood for checking the advance of slavery, not for extending political and social rights to an inferior race. Had he held any other position on this explosive issue, his nomination and election would have been problematical. No man who has supported Negro suffrage, a Republican editor asserted, could be elected President of the United States. In 1860, the party had found a "safe" candidate.

As a spokesman for the Republican party, Lincoln made quite clear his position on Negro rights. Even if his own feelings could admit the desirability of racial equality—and he vigorously denied this possibility—he could not make it any less repugnant to most whites. "A universal feeling, whether well or ill-founded," he remarked, "can not be safely disregarded. We can not, then, make them equals." Accordingly, the Negro had to be kept in an inferior position. "I will say then," Lincoln told a political rally in 1858, "that I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, [applause]—that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people." Physical differences, he continued, made political and social equality between Negroes and whites impossible. As long as both races

<sup>48</sup> *The Liberator*, July 13, 1860; *Douglass' Monthly*, December, 1860.

remained in the United States, "there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race."<sup>49</sup>

The recognition of white supremacy, Lincoln insisted, should not deprive the Negro of common legal protection. Although the Negro could hardly be considered the moral or intellectual equal of the white man, he was still entitled to those natural rights enumerated by the Declaration of Independence: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. "All I ask for the Negro," Lincoln stated, "is that if you do not like him, let him alone. If God gave him but little, that little let him enjoy." Of course legal protection did not imply a recognition of Negro citizenship. Despite the Dred Scott decision, Lincoln defended the right of each state to decide this important question for itself. Anticipating a problem of Reconstruction, he made it clear in 1858 that only a state legislature—not Congress—could recognize Negro citizenship or alter the social and political relations of the races. If Illinois should entertain such a proposal, however, Lincoln assured his followers that he would oppose it.<sup>50</sup> One question Lincoln left unanswered: How could a disfranchised Negro, unable to testify in a case involving a white man or to sit on a jury, enjoy common legal protection at the same time?

Since nearly all whites felt "a natural disgust" for any indiscriminate mixing of the races, Lincoln concluded that colonization offered the only hope of solving the racial problem. Prior to 1860, he had urged that the African be returned to his native climate; this was morally correct and would benefit both races. During the war, Lincoln maintained this position; indeed, the inevitability of emancipation redoubled his efforts in that direction. Addressing a Negro delegation in 1862, the

<sup>49</sup> Basler (ed.), *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, II, 256, III, 145-46.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 520, III, 16, 179, 299-300.



President stressed the physical incompatibility of the two races and the fact that "on this broad continent, not a single man of your race is made the equal of a single man of ours." Inasmuch as Americans did not desire the further presence of the Negro population, Lincoln urged the black man to look elsewhere — to Liberia, which had had a limited success, or, preferably, to Central America, where location, natural resources, and climate offered splendid opportunities.<sup>51</sup>

On some occasions, Lincoln appeared to temper his advocacy of the political and social proscription of Negroes. In 1858, for example, he told a Chicago audience to discard "all this quibbling about this man and the other man — this race and that race and the other race being inferior, and therefore they must be placed in an inferior position." Instead, Americans should reassert their belief that all men are created equal. Of course Lincoln often reserved these sentiments for strongly antislavery audiences in northern Illinois. This "chameleon-like" position of Republicans in various parts of the state enraged the Democrats. In northern Illinois, Stephen Douglas charged, abolitionists were told to vote for Lincoln because of his advocacy of racial equality, while in the southern portion of the state, white supremacy was emphasized. But Lincoln denied any inconsistency: "Anything that argues me into . . . social and political equality with the negro, is but a specious and fantastic arrangement of words, by which a man can prove a horse chestnut to be a chestnut horse."<sup>52</sup>

Despite Democratic charges of hypocrisy, Abraham Lincoln and the Republican party had correctly gauged public opinion. Protect the Negro's life and property, but deny him the vote, jury service, the right to testify in cases involving whites, and social equality, and — if possible — colonize him outside the United States. Until the death of Lincoln and the triumph of

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 405, 409, 521, V, 370-75.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 16, 105, 176-77, 214-15.

the Radicals, Republicanism refused to advance beyond this position. Northern Negroes, in the meantime, welcomed the success of the Republican party and hoped for a liberalization of its racial policies and a consequent improvement of their own political, social, and economic position.

In 1860, such a change did not seem imminent. Despite some notable advances, the northern Negro remained largely disfranchised, segregated, and economically oppressed. Discrimination still barred him from most polls, juries, schools, and workshops, as well as from many libraries, theaters, lyceums, museums, public conveyances, and literary societies. Although he himself was responsible for this exclusion, the white man effectively turned it against the Negro. Having excluded the Negro from profitable employments, the whites scorned his idleness and poverty; having taxed him in some states for the support of public education, they excluded his children from the schools or placed them in separate and inferior institutions and then deplored the ignorance of his race; having excluded him from various lecture halls and libraries, they pointed to his lack of culture and refinement; and, finally, having stripped him of his claims to citizenship and having deprived him of opportunities for political and economic advancement, the whites concluded that the Negro had demonstrated an incapacity for improvement in this country and should be colonized in Africa. Nevertheless, most Negroes remained in the United States and chose to die on American soil, knowing full well that social proscription would follow them to the grave. Symbolic of the Negro's position in the ante bellum North was the public cemetery, or potter's field, of Cincinnati: whites were buried east to west and Negroes north to south.<sup>53</sup> After all, white supremacy had to be preserved, even among the dead.

<sup>53</sup> *Abdy, Journal of a Residence and Tour*, III, 7.