

THE *MARY CARVER* AFFAIR: UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY
AND THE AFRICA SQUADRON, 1841 – 1845

by

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Abstract

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Diplomatic historians have ignored the U.S. Africa squadron, leaving the subject to slave trade historians. Consequently, the squadron has only been interpreted through the narrow lens of the slave trade, resulting in a distorted view of a failed squadron disconnected from foreign policy. This dissertation re-evaluates the squadron from a foreign policy perspective and concludes that it was not created to suppress the slave trade. Instead, it argues that the United States created the squadron in response to an escalating dispute with Britain over the future of international law.

Britain wanted the United States to concede the right of search to facilitate slave trade suppression, but the United States refused. Granting Britain the peacetime right of search would change international law, threatening free navigation of the seas. Americans argued that such a change would make slaves of us all. Britain increased pressure on the United States to concede by illegally searching more merchant vessels flying the American flag, provoking a serious diplomatic dispute. As this situation escalated, Americans dispatched naval cruisers to protect their merchant vessels from British interference. The dispute worsened to the point that the United States needed a permanent Africa squadron to protect Americans from ongoing British abuse.

The proposed squadron faced many political obstacles. Ultimately, the tragedy of the merchantman *Mary Carver* helped the Tyler administration secure the necessary support and funding. The *Mary Carver* had been trading along the coast of West Africa when natives murdered her crew and destroyed the schooner. The attack provided the administration with a new justification for the squadron. Squadron supporters created an exaggerated portrait of

Africans as savage pirates who preyed on American shipping, arguing that the incident proved the need for a squadron.

Historians have mistakenly assumed that the United States created the squadron to suppress the slave trade and consequently judged it a failure. But the squadron was primarily created to protect Americans and their interests in West Africa; suppressing the slave trade was only a secondary concern. Considered in light of its total purpose and mission, the first U.S. Africa squadron was far from a failure.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABCFM	American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
ACS	American Colonization Society
BW	George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine
FMSPEC	Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church
KHS	Kennebec Historical Society, Augusta, Maine
MSA	Maine State Archives, Augusta, Maine
MSL	Maine State Library, Augusta, Maine
MeHS	Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine
MMM	Maine Maritime Museum, Bath, Maine
MSCS	Maryland State Colonization Society
MSCSP	Maryland State Colonization Society Papers
MdHS	Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NHC	Naval Historical Center, Washington DC
NASP-NA-DA	New American State Papers, Naval Affairs, Diplomatic Affairs
NYPL	New York Public Library, New York, N.Y.
ORO	University of Maine, Orono
VHS	Vassalboro Historical Society, Vassalboro, Maine
WFMS	Western Foreign Missionary Society

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1842, the American merchantman *Mary Carver* was trading along the coast of West Africa when natives from a small African village murdered her captain and crew and destroyed the schooner. Coincidentally, just as the news of this brutal attack reached the United States, the U.S. government was debating a proposal to form the first permanent U.S. Africa squadron. The U.S. government had just concluded the Webster-Ashburton treaty with Britain, in which the United States pledged to maintain a naval squadron off the coast of West Africa, but Congress had yet to fund the measure. Although this pledge seemed straightforward, it touched sensitive political nerves, and in order to secure funding for this new naval squadron, President John Tyler's administration needed to win support from Congress and the American people. Through carefully worded speeches and newspaper articles, the Tyler administration and other interested parties successfully used the news of the *Mary Carver* attack to help promote the new squadron.

This dissertation studies the *Mary Carver* affair and its relationship to the Africa squadron, posing a series of questions. Why did the United States avenge the *Mary Carver*? How and why did the United States create an Africa squadron? What was the squadron's mission? And was the squadron a success or a failure? This dissertation challenges the prevailing historical assumption that the United States created the squadron spontaneously in the midst of the Webster-Ashburton treaty negotiations for the purpose of suppressing the slave trade. Instead, it demonstrates that Secretary of the Navy Abel P. Upshur had formally proposed creating an Africa squadron the previous year and argues that two factors drove the Tyler administration's decision to send a naval squadron to West Africa. First, the administration determined that a squadron was necessary to resolve the ongoing diplomatic conflict with Britain over commerce in West Africa. And second, it wanted to extend the

practice of using the navy to protect and foster American commerce to the coast of western Africa. Other factors, such as the desire to suppress the slave trade and to assist the Liberian colonies, ranked far below these two primary concerns. This chapter outlines these arguments and the relevant historiography.

The United States formally pledged to form an Africa squadron in the 1842 Webster-Ashburton treaty, but the underlying issues that shaped U.S. policy and the decision to form the squadron had developed over the previous twenty years. The primary factor driving the Tyler administration's decision to form an Africa squadron was the ongoing diplomatic dispute with Britain over the so-called right of search. For two decades, Britain had wanted the United States to allow the British navy to search American merchant vessels for evidence of slave trading, but the United States had consistently refused to grant Britain such extraordinary powers to police the seas. By the late 1830s, this dispute escalated to the point where President Martin Van Buren found it necessary to dispatch naval cruisers to West Africa to physically defend U.S. policy. In the years that followed, the Tyler administration sought to continue and expand Van Buren's action by forming a permanent Africa squadron.

Chapter two is a brief prologue that provides relevant background information about early U.S. policies regarding the slave trade and West Africa in the early nineteenth century. For Americans, defending their rights, especially from British infringement, had long been a higher priority than suppressing the slave trade. Since outlawing the slave trade, Britain had steadily increased its efforts to police the seas, expanding its power over other nations in the process. Americans worried that Britain was abusing this power and did not want to help further the growth of British power, especially at the expense of their own. In 1822, when a British representative asked John Quincy Adams if he "could conceive of a greater and more atrocious evil than this slave-trade," to which Adams replied: "Yes: admitting the right of search by foreign officers of our vessels upon the seas in time of peace; for that would be making slaves of ourselves."¹ Twenty years later, when Daniel Webster negotiated the treaty for the United States, American attitudes remained largely the same. Americans refused to

¹ John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, vol. VI (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1874), 37.

grant Britain the right of search because they placed greater importance on protecting their rights and the freedom of the seas than they did on suppressing the slave trade. American fears were reasonable. As David Eltis describes, Britain used illegal means to suppress the trade and systematically violated the sovereignty, jurisdiction, and territorial rights of independent nations who stood in their way. These actions undermined basic principles of international law and helped pave the way for the partition of Africa.² By refusing to cooperate and grant Britain the right of search the United States was resisting Britain's alterations to international law. When diplomacy failed to resolve this escalating contest, the United States deployed the navy to defend its position.³

The second factor driving the U.S. decision to send a naval squadron to West Africa concerned the practice of employing the navy to protect and foster American commerce around the world. Chapter three describes President Andrew Jackson's aggressive use of the navy to expand American commerce, precedents that would influence the Tyler administration's decision to form the Africa squadron. Chapter three also describes a period of increased interest in West Africa and the various seeds that Americans planted on that coast during Jackson's presidency. It was a time of beginnings and opportunities for ambitious young men; those who were willing to risk the dangers of Africa had the chance to advance quickly into positions of power and authority, and to make a name or a fortune for themselves. A revived colonization movement in Maryland established a new African colony, newly ordained ministers founded the first American missions in Africa, and enterprising merchants developed new trading interests along the coast. Initially these fledgling enterprises did not warrant much attention from the government, but as time passed they grew in size and significance.

Chapter four follows the development of American interests in West Africa during President Van Buren's administration. American trade, colonies, and missions grew during the later 1830s, but so did American involvement in the slave trade. The new equipment clause, part of a slave trade suppression treaty between Britain and Spain, allowed the British to seize

² David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 102-124.

³ For a discussion of the contested nature of international law throughout history see: Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Spanish vessels for carrying slaving equipment. In response, Spanish slavers began to fly the American flag for protection on their outbound voyages to Africa. The growing presence of the American flag in the slave trade revived the then dormant diplomatic dispute between the United States and Britain over the right of search. Britain pressured the United States to give up its rights, like Spain and Portugal, but the Americans refused. Frustrations mounted, and by the end of the decade Britain was accusing practically every American vessel sailing the Atlantic of involvement in the slave trade. Refusing to allow slavers to hide behind the American flag, Britain found excuses to stop and search vessels flying the Stars and Stripes. This interference outraged Americans, caused a flurry of diplomatic activity, and ultimately forced Van Buren to deploy U.S. naval cruisers to protect American merchantmen sailing the Atlantic. By the end of his presidency, Van Buren openly admitted the need for a regular naval presence on the African coast to protect American interests from the British, discourage abuse of the U.S. flag, and protect American honor.

By the time Van Buren left office, U.S. relations with Britain regarding West Africa had grown extremely tense.⁴ Chapter five follows U.S. foreign relations with Britain during 1841 when John Tyler assumed the presidency and describes how for the first time the government began to see West Africa as a region of national interest. Americans involved with West Africa repeatedly warned their countrymen of growing European encroachment in that region. They suspected that Europeans, especially the British, were trying to monopolize trade along the coast, destroy the Liberian colonies, and drive off American missionaries. The new secretary of the navy, Abel Upshur, listened to their complaints and determined that the navy's temporary presence off West Africa should be expanded into a regular squadron used to protect and foster American commerce.

Interested Americans suspected European navies of playing a central part in these plots to take control of West Africa. In particular, Americans suspected the British navy of colluding with British merchants to monopolize trade and undermine American interests throughout western Africa. Americans increasingly came to view the British as self-interested hypocrites

⁴ Don Edward Fehrenbacher and Ward McAfee, *The Slaveholding Republic : An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 164-166.

who sabotaged or contradicted suppression work when it suited their own commercial interests. Liberians, for example, complained that the British were actively undermining them and threatening their colony's existence. British anti-slavery activists shared these suspicions. Charles Wilson writes, "the British Anti-Slavery Society continued to accuse the high command of Her Majesty's Navy of perpetuating slaver patrols as a guise for locating trading beachheads along the potentially rich West African coast."⁵ Distrustful of the British, Americans persistently defended their rights as a way of protecting their own national self-interests from unscrupulous European competitors.

In 1842, the United States and Britain negotiated the Webster-Ashburton treaty to resolve a number of outstanding issues. Chapter six examines how this diplomatic conflict forced President Tyler and Secretary of State Daniel Webster to take a greater interest in West Africa. Upshur had been convinced of the need for an Africa squadron the previous year, and by the time treaty negotiations began, both Tyler and Webster had come to agree that the only way to protect American rights from British abuse was to maintain a regular naval presence off West Africa. So, in order to protect American rights and prevent the dispute from escalating, the Tyler administration added an Africa squadron provision to the treaty.

In article eight of the Webster-Ashburton treaty, both nations pledged to maintain minimal naval squadrons off the coast of West Africa. Although this provision was created in response to the conflict over the right of search, it did not resolve the underlying contest over the shape of international law. The U.S. and British positions on that question had hardened to such a point that the negotiators could not even discuss the issue openly.⁶ Unable to address the question of the right of search directly, the Webster-Ashburton treaty referenced the slave trade instead. The British ostensibly wanted the right of search to police the slave trade, and therefore the United States agreed to maintain its own squadron to ostensibly police the slave trade. But diplomatic language can not be taken simply at face value.⁷ No one with a basic

⁵ Charles Morrow Wilson, *Liberia: Black Africa in Microcosm* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 48.

⁶ Howard Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 142-143.

⁷ In his study of the U.S. government's relations to slavery, Don Fehrenbacher devotes two chapters to the slave trade. He argues that the squadron grew out of the right of search debate between the United States and Britain, beginning

understanding of the issue could have seriously believed that the U.S. Africa squadron defined in the treaty would be sufficient to suppress the slave trade or to capture many of those Americans who may have been involved in the illicit traffic.⁸ Although the British probably did not fully understand the American position, they did have extensive experience policing the slave trade and could not have reasonably expected that such a small squadron as the treaty required would be effective.

In the 1840s, Americans believed that the number of actual American citizens guilty of criminal participation in the slave trade was quite small and that most slave traders were foreigners who sometimes hid behind a false U.S. flag, and the British government agreed with them.⁹ The United States did not have the authority to police foreign involvement in the slave trade and consequently Americans concluded that they had little reason to invest millions of dollars to mount an expensive suppression campaign, and their skepticism of Britain's motives made them even less interested in joining the British-led suppression effort.¹⁰ Americans certainly did not want to spend tax dollars to help their rivals use the guise of suppression to gain a commercial advantage over them. The United States did not intend to use its new squadron primarily to suppress the slave trade, although that was a concern, but rather it intended to use the squadron to protect its own interests from British threats.

with Van Buren's decision to send cruisers to West Africa in 1839. While his description and analysis of the creation of the squadron does situate it in the context of the right of search debate, it is limited to the subject the slave trade. Fehrenbacher's work is most valuable for what it does to put the question of the slave trade into more realistic perspective relative to other issues. He rightly admits that the slave trade was neither a major nor a sectional issue for Americans. But his work on the subject is uneven and he seems to have little interest in the squadron's existence after it was actually created. Fehrenbacher blames Upshur, among others, for the squadron's failure to suppress the slave trade but gives no consideration to the constraints or context in which they operated. Upshur plays a very small role in this version, and appears only as a caricature of a person. Fehrenbacher misleadingly gives no indication that Upshur cared about the Africa squadron and by implying that the secretary lacked interest in the squadron he suggests that Upshur did not try to make a good squadron. This depiction is patently wrong and as my research shows Upshur cared deeply about the squadron, it was originally his idea, and he fought Congress throughout his tenure as secretary for the budget and the power to create and maintain a squadron. Fehrenbacher and McAfee, 165, 173-174.

⁸ Eltis points out that even the much larger British squadron was never effectively large enough. Eltis, 82-83, 102-124.

⁹ My work challenges a number of W.E.B. Du Bois' assertions and interpretations regarding the Africa squadron. For example, Du Bois writes that, "the United States was loath to have her criminal negligence in enforcing her own laws thus exposed by foreigners." W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1896), 141. The question of American culpability in the slave trade is separate. What is important to this study and its goal to explain historical decision-making, is what Americans at the time believed. There is no question that the United States failed to aggressively address the much larger problem of American participation in businesses that supported and facilitated the slave trade, but these issues were outside the scope of the navy's responsibilities, and many of these practices were perfectly legal. The United States may have had policies that benefited slavers and the slave trade but it did not create the squadron to protect slavers. For a representation of the official British view see: Henry Fox to John Forsyth, 30 October 1839, reprinted in: U.S. Congress. House Committee on Commerce, *African Colonization*, 27 Cong., 3 sess., 1843. H.R. 283, 581-599.

¹⁰ Don Fehrenbacher dismisses these doubts as partisan and self-interested, attributing them to such troublemakers as Lewis Cass and Nicholas Trist, but American (and British) doubts were much more widespread and cannot be blamed on a few fanatics or exceptional characters. Fehrenbacher and McAfee, 167-168.

Upshur had convinced Tyler and Webster to support his proposal for an Africa squadron, now the administration needed to convince the American people and Congress to support it. Congress had rejected Upshur's earlier request to fund a squadron, incorporating it into the treaty gave him new leverage, but even though Congress ratified the treaty the squadron's future remained in doubt. Some politicians, notably Missouri senator, Thomas Hart Benton, continued to vigorously oppose the squadron even after the Senate ratified the treaty. The Navy Department's budget was a hotly debated issue in Congress and without adequate funding for a new squadron there would be little that Upshur or Tyler could do to implement this treaty provision.

Paradoxically, the treaty's apparent success placed the squadron's future in jeopardy; ratification of the treaty successfully reduced tensions between the United States and Britain and consequently reduced the apparent need for a squadron to protect Americans from British abuse. The administration had offered Americans three justifications for an Africa squadron: to defend Americans from British abuse, to extend the navy's mission to protect American commerce to West Africa, and to suppress the slave trade. The American people had only been persuaded by the first reason: the need for a squadron to protect them from British abuse. But since concluding the treaty, Britain had promised to stop searching Americans and had temporarily suspended its practice of interfering with American merchantmen. With the threat of British abuse apparently eliminated, Americans no longer saw the need for an expensive squadron.

Coincidentally, just after Congress ratified the treaty, news that savage African pirates had attacked the American schooner *Mary Carver* reached the United States. Chapter seven traces the flow of information about the attack from Africa to the United States, and examines how the administration and other interested groups used that information to advance their own political causes. Upshur in particular, exaggerated the story and used it to offer a new justification for the squadron. Although the British remained the real threat to American interests in West Africa, the administration began emphasizing this supposed new threat from savage Africans in order to increase public support for the squadron.

The American missionaries, colonists, and merchants who told the *Mary Carver*'s story requested and assumed that the U.S. navy would respond to this attack not just because it seemed logical to them, but because it was established U.S. policy. From the beginning of the country, the United States had used its navy to avenge foreign attacks against American citizens and their property, especially attacks made by relatively weak peoples who lived outside the sphere of European colonial interest. Most recently, Presidents Jackson and Van Buren had used the navy to avenge attacks against American merchantmen at Sumatra and the Falkland Islands.¹¹ Jackson had justified the navy's disregard for local sovereignty and its use of severe retribution by labeling the attackers pirates and savages. The law of nations did not apply to pirates, and therefore the navy need not respect their sovereignty. This policy helped him to aggressively expand American economic interests around the globe, wherever the government deemed that Americans had sufficient interests, and Van Buren continued the practice during his administration.¹²

News of the *Mary Carver* attack provided the Tyler administration with the same sort of opportunity. The Americans in West Africa who reported the news suggested that the United States should use the navy to respond, and specifically requested that it establish a permanent naval presence on the coast. These informants told a story of a dramatic attack on American lives and property that had struck a blow to American honor. They also began, for the first time, to describe the Africans living in their vicinity as savages and pirates who posed a continuing threat to American lives and interests in the region. Previously, these Americans had described Africans in much more positive terms, depictions which had benefited their efforts to recruit new colonists, missionaries, and investors for their West African endeavors. But now that Americans had established investments in Africa worth protecting, they used the *Mary Carver* attack to encourage the image of Africans as dangerous savages and argued that they needed ongoing protection from the U.S. navy.

¹¹ John M. Belohlavek, *Let the Eagle Soar! : The Foreign Policy of Andrew Jackson* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 152-162, 180-192; Richard F. Grimmett, *Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798-2004* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2004).

¹² Belohlavek, 8-11, 152-162, 180-192; Grimmett.

It is important to note that these Americans deliberately exaggerated the threat posed by Africans. They believed that the United States needed to address the *Mary Carver* incident in order to encourage Africans to respect Americans, but they also wanted protection from European threats and they slandered Africans in order to get it. Missionaries, colonists, and traders all feared the threat of European competition but the United States had consistently ignored their previous warnings and pleas for help. If the U.S. government ignored the *Mary Carver* incident, Europeans would be emboldened to disrespect American claims along the coast even further.

The arrival of the *Mary Carver* news in the United States, just after Congress approved the treaty, helped the Tyler administration secure public support for the new Africa squadron. Reports of the *Mary Carver* appeared regularly in newspapers across the country for months, and Americans followed the story with interest. Upshur recognized the opportunity and completely changed his rhetoric and justification for the squadron to take advantage of it. He stopped pointing to the threat posed by Britain's practice of abusing American merchantmen, and began to focus on the threat that savage Africans posed to Americans' West African interests. Tyler incorporated this new strategy into his annual message to Congress. The administration used the attack on the *Mary Carver* to convince Americans that dangerous and piratical savages threatened their national interests and honor on the western coast of Africa. They exaggerated the attack, describing it as just one example of many, and warned the nation that this growing pattern of piracy on the coast must be stopped. Upshur's efforts paid off; six months after ratifying the treaty, Congress finally appropriated funds for a new Africa squadron. The administration and other squadron supporters successfully used the *Mary Carver* story to convince Americans that the country needed an Africa squadron to avenge its honor and deter future insults.

Once Congress finally appropriated funds for the Africa squadron, Upshur immediately set about organizing it. Chapter eight describes the squadron that Upshur created and how he used it to expand U.S. foreign policy to West Africa. Upshur ordered the squadron to perform a number of duties, including protecting American commerce and enforcing U.S. laws against the

slave trade. The squadron, like all others, was also responsible for aiding Americans in the region and performing any consular or official duties in places where the United States had no other formal representatives. The squadron immediately set about investigating the *Mary Carver* attack and other reported incidents along the coast, and ultimately resolved the matter by landing a force of over two hundred marines at a place called Little Berriby, killing the leader of that village, and violently destroying a string of connected villages. During its first six months of active service, Squadron Commander Matthew C. Perry established a new naval station in a part of the world where no American network or support system existed. Perry's squadron resolved all outstanding disputes between Americans and Africans on the coast, and provided real protection and service to the American missionaries and colonists in the region. The U.S. Africa squadron was not created to avenge the *Mary Carver*, but the attack did help to justify the squadron's expense. And in turn, the squadron avenged the *Mary Carver* in order to protect and defend American rights.

Chapter nine follows Perry's squadron throughout the second half of its service on the West African station and Americans' reactions to its activities. News that the squadron had avenged the *Mary Carver* received mixed reviews in the United States. Many people supported Perry's attack on the suspected villages, but the degree of violence he used struck some Americans (especially abolitionists) as distasteful or excessive. Meanwhile, still on the station, the squadron spent a large proportion of its time cruising the coast. During this time the squadron accomplished its various goals reasonably well, considering the constraints it operated under. Perry's squadron laid the groundwork for suppressing the slave trade. It established contact with all of the major forts and towns along the coast, including a number of places that had never been visited by American cruisers before. It collected information about the coast, sailing conditions, weather, and both legitimate and illicit trade. It patrolled for slavers and tried to catch them. And it participated in the first officially sanctioned cooperative efforts with the British navy.

Taken on its own terms, the first U.S. Africa squadron, which sailed under Perry's command from 1843 to 1845, was not a failure. It performed its duties to the satisfaction of

most Americans at the time. It accomplished the goals and objectives assigned to it. And it did a lot with limited resources. Perry used the American peoples' money carefully and still managed to preserve the health and safety of his men while carrying out a dangerous assignment. The squadron gathered extensive knowledge about the region of western Africa and it improved U.S. relations with both Britain and Africa. It tried to combat the slave trade with mixed results that are sometimes difficult to measure. Ultimately, Americans' failure to do more to suppress the slave trade requires further study using a new and more broadly designed framework. This is not that study. This is a study of American relations with West Africa during the Tyler administration. What it shows is that those relations were diverse and significant. Under Tyler, the United States formally took a serious interest in West Africa for the first time and this study seeks to describe and explain how and why that change occurred. The slave trade played an important role in that change, but it was only one of many factors.

This dissertation seeks to explain why the U.S. government used a naval squadron to avenge the attack on the American merchant vessel *Mary Carver*. No history of the *Mary Carver* affair has been written before. This affair and the creation of the Africa squadron is largely a story of U.S. foreign policy, but historians of American foreign relations have written the least about it. Instead, historians of the slave trade have taken the subject for their own. This dissertation challenges the prevailing practice of discussing the squadron only in relation to the slave trade, and instead analyzes it as a part of U.S. foreign policy, Atlantic, and naval history.

Historians have not studied the Africa squadron or U.S. relations with western Africa during the early nineteenth century from a foreign policy perspective.¹³ But the *Mary Carver* affair and the creation of the Africa squadron were part of an important episode in American

¹³ There are some general surveys of U.S.-African relations or interactions, but these are organized more as lists of relations between Americans and various parts of Africa rather than as policy studies, they do not address the Africa squadron or the *Mary Carver* affair in significant detail, and they limit their discussion of the squadron to the issue of the slave trade, for example: Clarence C. Clendenen and Peter Duignan, *Americans in Black Africa up to 1865* (Stanford: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, 1964); Lawrence C. Howard, "American Involvement in Africa South of the Sahara, 1800-1860" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard, 1988); Russell Warren Howe, *Along the Afric Shore : An Historic Review of Two Centuries of U.S.-African Relations* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1975).

history that had direct consequences for U.S. relations with both western Africa and Europe. The United States had a policy outlining the navy's role in protecting American interests abroad. The *Mary Carver* affair and the history of the first Africa squadron demonstrate how Tyler's administration applied this policy to West Africa at a time when Europeans were developing their interests in that part of the world. The United States used its Africa squadron to take a stand against European plans to monopolize West Africa and British designs for control of the Atlantic.

Historians of American foreign policy give very little attention to the U.S. navy's peacetime activities in the nineteenth century. For example, in his history of U.S. foreign relations before the Civil War, Bradford Perkins suggests that American commercial expansion during this period was largely the result of private enterprise, not government help. He belittles the government's involvement, writing that with "forty or fifty largely antiquated ships, the U.S. Navy bustled around the globe, protecting and encouraging trade."¹⁴ Perkins briefly references some of these naval actions, but skips over Africa and the Tyler years entirely. My research challenges Perkins' conclusion that commercial concerns rarely became full-fledged matters of policy.¹⁵ The navy's so-called bustling was not a joke; it was real action with real guns and real bloodshed. From the beginning of the union, the United States consistently employed its navy to protect American interests, especially commerce, around the globe, and over time it expanded both the scope and scale of that practice.¹⁶

Jesse S. Reeves' 1907 work, *American Diplomacy Under Tyler and Polk*, remains the only historical study of the Tyler administration's foreign policy.¹⁷ Reeves identifies Texas, Mexico, and the northern boundary dispute as the primary diplomatic issues facing Tyler, and gives only brief attention to Atlantic and Africa-related issues. Subsequent histories of the

¹⁴ Bradford Perkins, *The Creation of a Republican Empire*, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 201-203.

¹⁵ In contrast to the typical practice of separating naval history from foreign policy history, John Belohlavek's study of U.S. foreign policy under Andrew Jackson demonstrates the important role that the navy played in American foreign relations during peacetime. Belohlavek.

¹⁶ Naval historian John Schroeder describes this practice of employing squadrons to protect commerce more or less in policy terms but from a naval history perspective, not a foreign policy one. His work is also of limited value because he separates the Africa squadron from this larger naval history for reasons which are discussed later in this chapter. John H. Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985).

¹⁷ Jesse Siddall Reeves, *American Diplomacy under Tyler and Polk* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1907).

early 1840s focus more on domestic political issues, and have not expanded the study of Tyler's foreign policy beyond the framework that Reeves laid out.¹⁸

Diplomatic histories of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty and the northeastern boundary dispute offer little or no explanation as to why the United States avenged the *Mary Carver*. In general, these histories focus primarily on the boundary dispute and say very little about article eight, the section of the treaty relating to the Africa squadron. These brief treatments do a reasonable job of tracing some of the immediate diplomatic and political issues surrounding the formation of the Africa squadron but they fail to discuss any foreign policy that might have shaped or informed Tyler's decision to propose the squadron in 1842.¹⁹ This omission mistakenly suggests that the American offer to create an Africa squadron was simply a natural and spontaneous occurrence inspired by the occasion of the treaty. These historians generally assume that the United States proposed creating a squadron under pressure from Britain to concede the right of search, and suggest that there was no U.S. policy regarding the Atlantic or any guiding precedents related to West Africa. This dissertation argues that the United States was guided by policy and precedents in these matters, and that the Tyler administration had very definite reasons for proposing the Africa squadron that predated any thoughts of a treaty.

In his study of the Webster-Ashburton treaty, Howard Jones devotes only a couple of pages to article eight. Jones tries unsuccessfully to relate article eight to past American policy, but his summary leaves out important details. According to Jones, isolationist-minded Americans preferred to form their own squadron over entering into so-called entangling alliances like the Quintuple treaty, which granted signatory countries the mutual right of search during peacetime.²⁰ But the principle of isolationism does not sufficiently explain the

¹⁸ Dan Monroe, *The Republican Vision of John Tyler* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2003); Norma Lois Peterson, *The Presidencies of William Henry Harrison & John Tyler* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1989). In addition to these issues, Tyler biographer Edward Crapol focuses on Tyler's foreign policy with regard to the Pacific region but like many historians, his discussion of Atlantic issues is limited by a narrow focus on slavery. Edward P. Crapol, *John Tyler : The Accidental President* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁹ Francis M. Carroll, *A Good and Wise Measure : The Search for the Canadian-American Boundary, 1783-1842* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Jones.

²⁰ Jones, 142-144.

U.S. decision to form and maintain a naval squadron off the coast of Africa, if anything, it contradicts it.

A review of the newspapers, congressional speeches, and diplomatic correspondence from the period raises serious challenges to Jones' isolationist explanation. Americans did not reject the British scheme for mutual search because they preferred to act alone or to isolate themselves from European affairs. Mutual search, as it was practiced at the time, more or less meant signing over rights to Britain, the only nation that actively took advantage of these extraordinary police powers. Refusing to sign over rights cannot be equated to isolationism. And further, the Webster-Ashburton treaty provided for the possibility of joint-cruising, a decidedly non-isolationist practice. Ultimately, Jones' brief discussion of this complex issue offers little insight to help explain why the United States avenged the *Mary Carver* as it did.

Katherine Harris's Ph.D. dissertation on U.S. - Liberian foreign relations is an exception to the general lack of interest in West Africa prevalent among historians of nineteenth-century U.S. foreign policy.²¹ Harris uses the model of informal colonialism to argue that the United States ruled Liberia until it formally recognized the African republic in 1862.²² But while she comes closest to providing a foreign policy-centered analysis of U.S. - West African relations, her argument that colonization goals drove U.S. Liberian policy grossly overstates the control that the United States exerted over Liberia. Harris overstates U.S. interest in the colonization project while underestimating the importance of other American interests in West Africa. She struggles to explain inconsistencies in U.S. policy towards Liberia, especially why economic aid to Liberia dropped off precipitously during Jackson's administration and only edged up slightly during the 1840s. And her generalization that the United States used the navy to enforce and protect its colonial interests in Liberia is particularly problematic. The United States did not avenge the *Mary Carver* simply to protect Liberia. Overall, the U.S. naval presence in West Africa was inconsistent and much more complex than Harris asserts.

²¹ Steven Heath Mitton may also be considered an exception, but he focuses primarily on the British perspective and relies heavily on British sources. Although he contributes to the study of U.S. foreign policy during this period, his work largely deals with Anglo-American relations, the slave trade, and Texas, not U.S. policy regarding West Africa. Steven Heath Mitton, "The Free World Confronted the Problem of Slavery and Progress in American Foreign Relations, 1833-1844" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 2005).

²² Katherine Harris, "The United States, Liberia, and Their Foreign Relations to 1847" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1983), 5.

Histories of U.S. foreign relations under Tyler do not explain why the United States used a naval squadron to avenge the *Mary Carver*. Indeed, they struggle to understand or related the *Mary Carver* affair to their existing narratives. Instead, historians of American foreign relations have been content to let others write this history. As a result, the history of the *Mary Carver* and the Africa squadron has become detached from foreign policy history. This separation has reinforced the misperception that the squadron was formed spontaneously, independent from any policy.

Historians of American foreign relations have largely ignored Atlantic history during the Tyler years, but two other groups have addressed the subject: historians writing specifically about the Africa squadron, and historians writing about Americans in West Africa. These historians all rely on the same underlying framework created by W.E.B. Du Bois in his original study of the U.S. effort to suppress the slave trade. Du Bois was the first scholar to address the Africa squadron and the basic assumptions that he made about it have remained virtually unchallenged ever since.²³

The first such study of American efforts to suppress the slave trade, Du Bois' work remains the basis for virtually all interpretations of the Africa squadron written since.²⁴ Du Bois cast the Africa squadron as unique among naval squadrons. He asserted that it was specifically created to suppress the slave trade. He implied that the British method for suppressing the slave trade was correct and potentially effective. And he established the practice of using statistics and anecdotal evidence about captured slavers as the means to measure a squadron's success at suppressing the slave trade. Du Bois' assumptions about the squadron were quickly reinforced by naval historian John Randolph Spears, who published a history of the effort to suppress the slave trade shortly after Du Bois, and historians have not questioned this interpretation.²⁵ This entrenched framework, which inevitably leads historians to conclude that the U.S. Africa squadron was a failure, has stifled subsequent research into the squadron and related subjects.

²³ Du Bois.

²⁴ For an assessment of Du Bois' influence see: Fehrenbacher and McAfee, 137.

²⁵ Du Bois; John Randolph Spears, *The American Slave-Trade : An Account of Its Origin, Growth and Suppression*(New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1900).

Historians have consistently accepted Du Bois' assumption that the U.S. Africa squadron was specifically created to suppress the slave trade almost without question. They accept his premise that the British model of suppression (which relied heavily on naval enforcement, international cooperation, and mixed courts) was both morally desirable and potentially effective. And despite the lack of evidence, most historians unquestioningly accept Du Bois' assumption that given adequate resources, national will, and international cooperation, this approach could have and should have effectively suppressed the transatlantic slave trade. Consequently, they conclude that the U.S. failure to achieve this goal was a moral failing.

Du Bois' work and studies modeled on it typically generalize about the slave trade and the Africa squadron across time and space, but they do not examine the U.S. squadron closely enough. Most scholars generalize about the squadron as a consistent entity during its twenty year history without sufficient regard for the rapidly changing context in which it existed. Only Donald Canney attempts a full-length study of the Africa squadron, following it chronologically from start to finish. But the slave trade framework that dominates his study, and his narrow focus on naval history, lead him to ignore important aspects of the story relevant to U.S. foreign policy, relations with Britain, and the *Mary Carver* affair. Because he assumes that the United States created the squadron to suppress the slave trade, Canney includes only sporadic discussions of American foreign relations and does not explain the foreign policy behind the formation of the squadron or its mission.²⁶

Following Du Bois and Spears, naval historians continue to accept Du Bois' basic assumptions about the squadron, and analyze the squadron strictly as a part of slave trade history, but not as a part of a larger naval or foreign policy history.²⁷ As a result, naval

²⁶ Alan Booth, "The United States African Squadron 1843-1861," in *Boston University Papers on Africa*, ed. Jeffrey Butler (Boston: Boston University Press, 1964); George M. Brooke, Jr., "The Role of the United States Navy in the Suppression of the African Slave Trade," *American Neptune* 21, no. 1 (1961); Donald L. Canney, *Africa Squadron : The U.S. Navy and the Slave Trade, 1842-1861* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2006); Calvin Lane, "The African Squadron: The U. S. Navy and the Slave Trade, 1820 - 1862," *The Log of Mystic Seaport* (1999); John H. Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry : Antebellum Sailor and Diplomat* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2001); Donald R. Wright, "Matthew Perry and the African Squadron," in *America Spreads Her Sails; U.S. Seapower in the 19th Century*, ed. Clayton R. Barrow (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1973).

²⁷ Examples include: Earl E. McNeilly, "The United States Navy and the Suppression of the West African Slave Trade 1819-1862" (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1973); Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*; John Randolph Spears, *The History of Our Navy from Its Origin to the Present Day, 1775-1897* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1897); Harold Hance Sprout and Margaret Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power, 1776-1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939). Although Spears, Sprout and Spout, and Schroeder have written naval histories covering this

historians have depicted the Africa squadron as unique and have separated it from the history of other squadrons.²⁸ This interpretation has left the Africa squadron out of mainstream naval history, discouraging the identification of patterns, connections, or conclusions about larger naval or foreign policies governing the Atlantic during this period.²⁹ Historians have mistakenly separated the Africa squadron from the larger body of naval history and exaggerated the unique aspects of the Africa squadron. The Africa squadron, like all naval squadrons, had its share of particular duties and unique circumstances, but all squadrons were expected to fulfill the same general mission to protect and defend Americans and their interests abroad. This dissertation examines the squadron in a larger context, in which the slave trade appears as just one of the many issues that the squadron faced. A study of the slave trade is necessary to understand the squadron's history, but it is not sufficient to explain it.

A number of historical accounts of the squadron focus on the right of search and argue that that the United States should have either given up the right of search, or maintained a more effective squadron.³⁰ This dissertation challenges that interpretation on the grounds that the U.S. position on the right of search was legitimate and worth defending. And not only would it have been practically and politically impossible for the United States to have maintained a squadron of the kind these historians suggest, but there is no evidence that such an approach would have been any more effective than the methods that the United States did employ.

Historians who criticize the United States for refusing to grant Britain the right of search suggest that the right was of little value compared to the potential value of ending the

period, they give little or no attention to the Africa squadron. Spears was a naval historian first, but as he explained, he did not have room to deal with the Africa squadron in his naval history, and instead decided to deal with it in his history of the slave trade instead. McNeilly has tried to apply the Sprout and Sprout interpretation to the Africa squadron but still works only within the limited framework of slave trade suppression.

²⁸ Canney actually calls the squadron an anomaly, because, as he claims, its existence was determined outside the navy. But this interpretation ignores the fact that the Secretary of the Navy wanted to create such a squadron and was ultimately responsible for its form and function as much as any other squadron and he did not treat it as an anomaly. This interpretation also ignores the fact that to some degree all squadrons were determined outside the department. Congress had control of appropriations and budgets and generally approved the creation of new squadrons, including most recently the Home Squadron and the Exploring Expedition. Canney, 39.

²⁹ Interestingly, Nathaniel Philbrick's study of the U.S. Exploring Expedition, tells a story that is quite similar to that of the Africa squadron. Both squadrons faced the same political obstacles and were part of the same U.S. – European rivalries. And like the Africa squadron, historians have separated the exploring expedition from mainstream naval squadrons. Nathaniel Philbrick, *Sea of Glory : America's Voyage of Discovery : The U.S. Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842* (New York: Viking, 2003).

³⁰ This is Soulsby's argument, among others. Hugh Graham Soulsby, "The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations, 1814-1862" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1933).

slave trade.³¹ But as David Eltis argues, in order to have used its navy to successfully suppress the slave trade, Britain would have had to dramatically expand its power at the expense of other nations and existing principles of international law. Eltis concludes that this course of action would have produced an even worse outcome for humanity than the perpetuation of the slave trade.³² This dissertation argues that Americans understood the situation in these terms; they acted to defend their rights and their idea of international law, believing these to be of paramount importance and value.

The current historical interpretation of the squadron as a tool for suppressing the slave trade offers no insight into why the United States avenged the *Mary Carver*. Historical studies of the Africa squadron, the slave trade, and West Africa often include brief references to the *Mary Carver* story, but in relating the basic facts, historians have not asked why the United States government sent a squadron of naval cruisers to avenge the death of one merchant sea captain. Sending a naval squadron and a detachment of some two hundred marines to destroy a string of coastal villages was a significant act, but it has been a difficult problem for historians to reckon with. It does not fit within the existing historical framework, which depicts the squadron as a unique force dedicated to suppress the slave trade. In that framework, the effort to avenge the *Mary Carver* appears to distract the squadron from its mission.

Historians have struggled to explain the squadron's actions, suggesting that it was either hijacked by partisans or misused for petty political purposes.³³ They cite the *Mary Carver* affair as further evidence of the government's insincere efforts to suppress the slave trade, or as an excuse that the navy used to shirk its true duty, and then quickly brush the affair aside as insignificant. But this explanation rings hollow and is neither convincing nor supported by the evidence. It is contradictory to claim that the United States created a squadron to suppress the slave trade, and then claim that its failure to use the squadron for

³¹ Ibid.

³² Eltis, 102-124.

³³ For example, Canney describes the events very matter-of-factly and with very little detail as though it were a perfectly normal course of events. But then later when searching for explanations as to why the squadron failed the *Mary Carver* business becomes part of a larger pattern of distractions that include Liberia, British relations and American commerce. Canney, 60-62.

that purpose demonstrates the government's insincerity. The United States' use of this squadron for multiple purposes suggests that the government created it to do more than just suppress the slave trade.

Instead of struggling to reconcile the *Mary Carver* affair with the existing slave trade framework, this dissertation looks at the Africa squadron within the larger context of U.S. foreign policy and asks new questions. The effort to avenge the *Mary Carver* was a much more serious affair than historians have suggested. The Africa squadron invested a lot of time and manpower and faced significant risks to avenge the *Mary Carver*, and Americans followed these dramatic events closely. Commodore Perry worried that his every move was being watched on an international stage and he tried to conduct himself accordingly. If the current historical interpretation of the affair as a distraction was correct, one would expect to find evidence that Americans criticized the squadron for shirking its "true" duties. But my research has found quite the opposite; Americans overwhelmingly supported the squadron's actions. The *Mary Carver* affair did not distract the squadron from its mission; rather it was an important part of that mission. This finding challenges the current historical interpretation and calls for reconsidering our overall interpretation of the squadron and its purpose.

Not only does the Du Bois slave trade framework ignore the wider context of U.S. foreign policy, but these histories also do a poor job of studying Americans' understanding of the slave trade. During the 1830s and 40s most Americans simply did not believe that very many of their fellow citizens were directly involved in the slave trade or guilty of violating U.S. law. These beliefs were not unfounded; the British government generally shared the same view, and they have since been substantiated by Warren Howard and David Eltis' detailed research of the slave trade, among others. If Americans did not believe that very many citizens were directly participating in the slave trade, then it would not have made sense for the United States to form an expensive squadron to enforce its laws against that trade. But yet historians continue to assert that the United States created the squadron to suppress that trade.

Following Du Bois' framework and its focus on suppressing the slave trade as a law enforcement problem, historians can only conclude that the Africa squadron was a failure because it did not capture a significant number of slavers. Naval historians in particular rely heavily on statistical comparisons with the British Africa squadron to analyze the U.S. squadron's effectiveness.³⁴ These statistics show that the numbers of suspected slave ships pursued, detained, captured, and prosecuted by the United States were very small during the squadron's two decades in operation, especially when compared with Britain's West Africa squadron. The structure of this argument assumes, without any evidence or explanation, that the U.S. Africa squadron could have successfully suppressed the slave trade if the United States had invested adequate and appropriate resources. And because it did not, these historians have concluded that the American squadron was a failure.³⁵ The structure of this argument, with its underlying assumptions and foregone conclusion simply leaves historians with the task of assigning blame for the failure.

Some of these historians criticize Perry for making bad decisions, blaming him for the squadron's failure.³⁶ Donald Wright argues that because Perry's orders gave him leeway to use his own judgment, necessary in a time of slow communications, that he was free to make his own decisions.³⁷ But Wright fails to consider the constraints that Perry was under. Perry commanded the squadron conservatively and preferred to write to the department for specific direction whenever possible. He was particularly cautious regarding actions that involved policing the slave trade. As Perry knew, the question of policing the slave trade was extremely political and the fact that five different men headed the Navy Department during his two-year

³⁴ Brooke's generalizations of the trade and American participation are a good example of this. Du Bois ignored the question of identity by generalizing or assuming the worst, drawing heavily from British and abolitionist evidence. Du Bois conflates issues and evidence in order to generalize about the slave trade as a whole. Don Fehrenbacher criticizes him for relying heavily on "episodic evidence and unsubstantiated assertions" including some that are now considered "spurious." Fehrenbacher and McAfee, 385, n.67. Booth, for example, provides appendices with tables comparing the forces of the British and American squadrons.

³⁵ Harmon relates this history in terms of a police force responding to "the problem of extinguishing the slave trade." This is an example of the problematic way in which this issue has been framed, as this is his conception of the problem but does not in any way adequately address how the historical actors identified and defined the problem or problems. Judd Scott Harmon, "Marriage of Convenience: The United States Navy in Africa, 1820-1843," *American Neptune* 32, no. 4 (1972): 264-276.

³⁶ Spears writes a scathing critique of Perry, writing that his command of the Africa squadron brought shame on the service. Spears, *The American Slave-Trade: An Account of Its Origin, Growth and Suppression*, 155. Fehrenbacher blames Perry for making the wrong decisions. Fehrenbacher and McAfee, 174.

³⁷ Wright, 98-99.

command of the squadron helps to explain his reticence to act on his own authority. Perry also acknowledged the role that international pressure played in moderating his actions. It is clear from his letters that Perry did not feel nearly as free to make decisions as Wright suggests he was.³⁸ Most recently, Donald Canney blames “various distractions” including Liberia and British relations for the squadron’s failure to capture slavers.³⁹ This conclusion is perverse considering that the squadron was created as a result of a treaty that was explicitly made to improve relations with Britain. But while historians have been busy debating who or what was to blame for the squadron’s failure to suppress the slave trade, no one has questioned the assumption that the squadron was created to suppress the slave trade.

Only Warren Howard has come close to challenging the assumption that the squadron was created to suppress the slave trade. Howard has written a lengthy study of the American effort to suppress the slave trade from a legal perspective.⁴⁰ He has researched individual cases in depth and produced the most detailed study of American involvement in the slave trade so far. Howard still assumes that the United States created the squadron to suppress the slave trade, but he concludes that the French and American Africa squadrons were intended as much to protect their own merchants from British abuses as they were to capture slavers.⁴¹

Like naval historians, Howard also uses statistics to compare the American and British suppression efforts, but he has done more research and demonstrates the value of studying these subjects in detail. He concludes that the British were not the morally superior beings that Du Bois and others have depicted, and suggests that even Britain’s Africa squadron was nowhere near large enough to have effectively suppressed the slave trade.⁴² Howard’s research raises several questions about historians’ assumption that additional naval resources could have

³⁸ Perry’s conservative attitude and legalistic approach to his command reflect the American policy of putting legal rights above all else. Perry was charged with resolving disputes between Americans and Africans and he handled each case, except for the Mary Carver, as if it were a judicial proceeding. Although his conduct in the Mary Carver affair stands out as distinctly prejudicial when compared with the others, Perry’s reports show that he was still concerned that the proceedings appear to meet the appropriate standard of evidence for a worldwide audience.

³⁹ Canney, xi-xii.

⁴⁰ Warren S. Howard, *American Slavers and the Federal Law, 1837-1862* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5. Following Howard, Judd Scott Harmon argues that protecting commerce was an “area of concern” leading up to the treaty and that the squadron was deployed as much to protect legitimate commerce as it was to inhibit the slave trade. Judd Scott Harmon, “Suppress and Protect the United States Navy, the African Slave Trade, and Maritime Commerce, 1794-1862” (Ph.D. diss., The College of William and Mary, 1977), 174.

⁴² Howard also describes how the British squadron put commercial interests above suppression. For example, in their efforts to prevent Portuguese claims of sovereignty on the coast, and in their lenient policies towards British merchantmen. Eltis, 82-83, 102-124; Howard, *American Slavers and the Federal Law, 1837-1862*, 5-7, 100; Mitton.

suppressed the trade. In theory, naval efforts could possibly have been effective, if there had been an international consensus, but several nations stood in the way. And supposed examples of the effectiveness of naval suppression were often misleading. Suppression in one particular place did not necessarily reduce the overall trade, as slavers simply moved their traffic to another marketplace. The only way to overcome these obstacles would have been for participating nations to invest enormous resources and use them to trample the rights of those who refused to cooperate. This approach was practically impossible; no country had either the necessary political will or the financial and naval resources in sufficient quantity.

Following Du Bois' example, historians have assumed that the United States created its Africa squadron to suppress the slave trade largely because of the language used in the Webster-Ashburton treaty.⁴³ But historians rely too much on the explicit treaty language to explain the Africa squadron's purpose without considering the larger political and diplomatic context surrounding the treaty. The United States and Britain created the treaty in response to a number of issues. Looking at the purpose stated in the treaty article is logical, but diplomatic language must be read closely and considered in context. The first half of article eight of the Webster-Ashburton treaty reads:

The Parties mutually stipulate that each shall prepare, equip, and maintain in service, on the coast of Africa, a sufficient and adequate squadron, or naval force of vessels, of suitable numbers and descriptions, to carry in all not less than eighty guns, to enforce, separately and respectively, the laws rights and obligations of each of the two countries, for the suppression of the Slave Trade.⁴⁴

This article clearly states that the purpose of each squadron was to enforce its own country's laws against the slave trade. U.S. laws were relatively harsh, declaring the slave trade to be piracy and punishable by death, but as American laws they only applied to Americans. Therefore, according to the treaty, the U.S. Africa squadron's purpose was to enforce American laws against Americans participating in the slave trade. While this point may seem obvious or belabored, historians have not made this distinction. Glossing over it produces

⁴³ In addition to works already mentioned, recent examples include: Fehrenbacher and McAfee. Canney repeatedly refers to the squadron as the anti-slave trade squadron instead of the Africa squadron. Canney, xii, 42.

⁴⁴ David Hunter Miller, ed. *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, 8 vols., vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1931-48), 363-370.

misleading generalizations, especially when we consider that most Americans at the time, including the Tyler administration, doubted that very many Americans were actually engaged directly in the trade or guilty of violating U.S. law.⁴⁵ Therefore, the United States logically invested little in the squadron's ability to capture slavers.

The fact that Americans consistently expected that the U.S. Africa squadron would catch few slavers also suggests that it had a different purpose. It would have been illogical for the people to have created, funded, and supported a squadron that was largely expected to fail. Party politics is not a sufficient explanation to overcome this problem. The American people supported the squadron but did not expect it to capture many slavers. They must have had a reason for doing so.

Relations with Britain are an important key to explaining Americans' intended purpose for the squadron. Warren Howard and Judd Scott Harmon have already suggested that the United States had other reasons, in addition to suppressing the slave trade, for creating the squadron but they do not take this argument far enough.⁴⁶ Relations with Britain were not just a reason for creating the squadron, they were the primary reason.

This dissertation is a case study of the *Mary Carver* affair and the first Africa squadron commanded by Matthew Perry from 1843 to 1845. It relies on a wide variety of sources to explain why the U.S. government avenged the *Mary Carver*. As Howard's example illustrates, a greater attention to detailed research can offer new insight into this subject. I have looked at a broad range of sources from several historical sub-fields, and because the *Mary Carver* story has never been fully told, and the history of the Africa squadron has been limited to aspects relevant to the slave trade, this work relies mainly on primary sources.

Beyond the Webster-Ashburton treaty, a variety of primary sources offer insight into the first U.S. Africa squadron, its purpose, and U.S. foreign policy in the Atlantic at the time. I have looked at a wide variety of possibly relevant factors and factions, including domestic politics, foreign relations, colonization, commercial interests, missionaries, and anti-slavery

⁴⁵ American citizens (and British subjects) participated indirectly in the slave trade, but this was a separate question that the treaty did not address.

⁴⁶ Harmon, "Suppress and Protect the United States Navy, the African Slave Trade, and Maritime Commerce, 1794-1862"; Howard, *American Slavers and the Federal Law, 1837-1862*.

groups. I have read published and unpublished correspondence between American and British naval officers, diplomats, politicians, missionaries, merchant sailors, and colonizationists. Many of these sources have been used before, but when read together, the letters that were passed back and forth between three continents reveal a much larger story than has been told. Most significantly, this story calls into question the prevailing interpretation of the *Mary Carver* affair as a distraction to the squadron, and of the Africa squadron as a failure. The *Mary Carver* affair was a justification for the squadron, not a distraction.

American and British diplomatic correspondence during the late 1830s and early 40s detailed multiple incidents between British naval cruisers and suspicious merchant vessels. The British complained of suspected American involvement in the slave trade and the growing abuse of the American flag to protect it. The Americans complained of British naval officers abusing the rights of American citizens and unlawful searches of American merchantmen. As investigations into these cross-complaints dragged on, and the number of incidents increased, the volume of correspondence grew.

Naval officers wrote a great deal about their experience on the African station. In addition to formal reports and records, officers also wrote public and private letters. Previous histories have relied almost exclusively on the official correspondence collected by the Navy Department and the book published by Purser Horatio Bridge, but I have found several additional accounts in newspapers and archives that add new information and perspective, significantly enriching this story. I have also read the letters and reports written by American politicians, Liberian colonial leaders, missionaries in West Africa, merchant sailors, and colonization society men. Some of these letters were printed in newspapers or journals of the day, and many others were collected in extensive government reports on colonization, the slave trade, and the Africa squadron.

To explain why the United States used a naval squadron to avenge the *Mary Carver*, I began by trying to learn as much as I could about the *Mary Carver* and her captain Eben Farwell. How was the *Mary Carver*'s story told? What did people believe, and how did their understanding of events shape the government's decision to seek vengeance? Because the navy

was the tool of response, I examined the state of the navy at the time. What role did the navy play in American foreign policy, and what political issues surrounded it? Finally, the *Mary Carver* affair coincidentally began just as the United States ratified the treaty. What were the details of the treaty and the diplomatic events leading up to it? And how were the two events related?

Eben Farwell's personal connections, although influential, did not factor in the government's decision to avenge the *Mary Carver*. The Farwells had ties to politicians directly involved with the treaty and the creation of the squadron, as well as influential friends in party politics and the press. These friends had come to Eben Farwell's defense in high profile incidents before, but there is no evidence that anyone acknowledged a personal connection to him during the *Mary Carver* affair. The evidence shows that Farwell's interests had nothing to do with the decision to avenge the *Mary Carver*. In fact, it was quite the opposite. Everyone involved in the affair preferred to keep the character of this victim as vague and general as possible. His friends, neighbors, and connections said nothing about him even though many of them had direct involvement in, or close connections to, the affair. His friends did not try to use their considerable influence, and no one questioned whether or not Farwell deserved to be avenged. In fact, despite many chances, people who knew him almost went out of their way to avoid making this a personal story. The particular details about the *Mary Carver* and her captain were almost intentionally confused or ignored throughout the affair. My research shows that at the very least, Farwell was a man of questionable character. Personal details about him and his frequent troubles with the law would most likely have diminished public support for the decision to avenge his murder and for the squadron in general.

Interested parties turned Farwell into a symbolic American and his friends and neighbors sat back and watched as this happened. Publicly, the U.S. government assumed that all Americans involved in the transatlantic trade were honest merchants who unquestionably deserved the protection of their government, unless proved otherwise. The government would not be the first one to question a person's character or their guilt, even when there might be reason to do so. This attitude, and the general U.S. practice of putting legal rights before

moral outcomes, frustrated the British who held the opposite view. And in a sense, this difference was at the root of the conflict between the two nations.⁴⁷

It seems strange that the Farwells counted senators, newspaper editors, and officers of the Africa squadron among their friends and acquaintances in their home state of Maine, and yet none of these men acknowledged any connection between Farwell and the state. Reports of the affair written by men who knew the Farwells, correctly identified his hometown in Maine, but Mainers never tried to use their political power to influence the affair, and Mainers never tried to claim that the *Mary Carver* attack was an issue of any particular local or state interest. Strangely, despite the fact that a good share of the trade with West Africa was carried on by Mainers, they did not see this as a local issue. One might reasonably ask why not?

Although Maine had a reasonable share of political power in Washington, state politicians focused on national party politics and patronage, not local issues. When Maine politicians advanced within the ranks of the political parties and the federal government, they did not raise issues of concern to Mainers. Instead, according to Elizabeth Ring, they focused on using their power to secure additional jobs for their fellow Mainers.⁴⁸ There was some opportunity for change at this time; the political system was not completely entrenched in Maine. Richard Wescott describes how intraparty conflicts in Maine broke down party structures and created openings for new men and new issues during the 1840s.⁴⁹ But again, these new issues (anti-slavery and temperance) were national, not specifically local, matters. And so even though the *Mary Carver* affair was entwined with public debate surrounding the slave trade and colonization, anti-slavery and colonization activists in Maine largely ignored the local connection.

The only federal issue that Maine politicians addressed from a specifically local angle during this period was the northeastern boundary dispute. With the exception of this one

⁴⁷ The British opinion of Americans' innocence was confusing. On the one hand, the British admitted the majority of slavers flying the U.S. flag did so fraudulently, but at the same time the British maintained an attitude of contempt and general suspicion for all Americans sailing the Atlantic. And although the British policy for presuming that its own subjects were innocent until proven guilty was similar to the U.S. policy governing American citizens, Britain still complained that the U.S. did not adequately scrutinize Americans. Americans recognized and resented this double-standard, often calling the British hypocrites.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Ring, *Maine in the Making of the Nation 1783-1870* (Camden, Me.: Picton Press, 1996).

⁴⁹ Richard R. Wescott, *New Men, New Issues: The Formation of the Republican Party in Maine* (Portland: Maine Historical Society, 1986), 25.

extraordinary issue, Maine politics were focused more on national issues than local ones. The history of Maine politics during this period show how national issues influenced state politics, rather than the other way round. Even in the case of the boundary issue, where Maine had its greatest power and influence over government policy and decision-making, the issue was ultimately settled according to the national government's wishes, not Maine's.⁵⁰ In keeping with this pattern, Mainers never identified the *Mary Carver* affair as a local issue, but followed national party leaders and treated the affair as a national issue just like everyone else. Maine continued to be a valuable source of votes for political parties up through the Civil War (Maine Republican Hannibal Hamlin served as Abraham Lincoln's vice-president from 1861 to 1865) but Maine politicians did not influence the federal government's response to the *Mary Carver* affair.

Information about the *Mary Carver* and her captain did not originate with Farwell's friends and neighbors in Maine; it came from Americans in West Africa. This dissertation reconstructs the flow of information from self-interested Americans in Africa to the United States. Colonists, missionaries, and merchant sea captains shaped the story of the attack on the *Mary Carver* based on their own interests, and they all stood to benefit from a naval response.

The historical literature on colonization, missions, and trade in West Africa is largely segmented. This study, which looks at all three historical sub-fields in conjunction, does not necessarily support or contradict existing historical interpretations, but rather it makes a new contribution by asking different kinds of questions, filling in holes in the historical narrative, and making new connections between the these sub-fields. The existing literature provides a limited perspective as each work gives only one point of view, that of the merchants, colonists, or missionaries being studied. There is no good, comprehensive history of the Liberian region that compares and evaluates all three viewpoints in a balanced manner.

⁵⁰ Instead of being influenced by Maine, Daniel Webster engaged Maine newspaper editor F.O.J. Smith to wage a propaganda campaign to help convince Mainers to support the federal government's position. Frederick Merk and Robert J. Walker, *Fruits of Propaganda in the Tyler Administration*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

Histories of trade along the West African coast provide uneven coverage. Those that go beyond the slave trade tend to focus on a specific commodity like palm oil or a narrow geographic location.⁵¹ George E. Brooks' study of American trade along the coast of western Africa in the nineteenth century is by far the most comprehensive of these studies, but unfortunately he skips the Liberian region altogether, because, as Brooks explains, American trade with the colonies had "a number of unique aspects."⁵² Despite his focus on American trade, Brooks is reluctant to address the U.S. Africa squadron and its mission to protect American commerce. To the extent that he includes the squadron, he relies on histories written by naval historians that are limited by the narrow slave trade framework.⁵³ He accepts their conclusion that the squadron's purpose was to suppress the slave trade and refers to the squadron's mission to protect commerce as a secondary purpose that over time was transformed into the squadron's main purpose.

Because Brooks' study is about American commerce in West Africa, one would expect that he would challenge the limitations of the slave trade framework currently used to study and analyze the squadron. But he is reluctant to deal with the navy's role on the coast at all. And his decision to rely on existing historical studies of the squadron and the navy severely limits his ability to do so. He gives a brief summary of the navy's activity but his treatment of this subject, following his sources, is limited to the question of the slave trade. Brooks mentions that successive secretaries of the navy used the Africa squadron to protect commerce, but despite making a study of trade he does not engage with this issue and is even strangely critical of the practice. Brooks' only comment on the Africa squadron and its efforts to protect American commerce in West Africa is a vague reference to the squadron's action to avenge the *Mary Carver*. He writes:

⁵¹ Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa : The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century*(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Bruce Lee Mouser, "Trade and Politics in the Nunez and Pongo Rivers, 1790-1865" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1971); Dwight Nash Syfert, "A History of the Liberian Coasting Trade, 1821-1900" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1977).

⁵² George E. Brooks, Jr., *Yankee Traders, Old Coasters & African Middlemen*(Brookline, Mass.: Boston University Press, 1970), 6.

⁵³ In particular Brooks cites Alan Booth's article as his main source. He also references: Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*(London: Oxford University Press, 1962); Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade; the Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*(London; New York: Longmans, Green, 1949); Wright.

In 1843, Commodore Perry burned several villages on the Liberian coast implicated in the pillaging of American vessels. This initiative was alleged to have a salutary influence in other areas as well.⁵⁴

Brooks shows no interest in this incident or any effect that the U.S. navy may have had on commerce in the region. He only begrudgingly admits that American traders “generally applauded the squadron’s efforts on their behalf.” This is a gross understatement. Situating the squadron within the context of the historical relationship between the navy and American merchants, and giving closer consideration to the details of the *Mary Carver* affair, shows that American traders played a much more active role in this affair than Brooks suggests.

Mission histories provide a different perspective. Unfortunately they tend to be fragmented by denomination and there is no general or comprehensive history of missions in the region. Historians have written most about the missions of the American Protestant Episcopal Church and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in West Africa.⁵⁵ These Protestant missions were influential in the Liberian region during the 1830s and 40s, especially in the Maryland colony. Historical studies of these missions incorporate some Liberian colonial history and offer some perspective on the relationship between those colonies and the United States.⁵⁶ For example, as Dean Holt explains in his study of the impact that the Episcopal mission had on the region, the relationship between the United States and the Liberian colonies was a complicating factor in missionary life.⁵⁷ Holt’s interpretation adds useful perspective and reinforces the point that missionaries were important participants in the affair, but his conclusions are decidedly biased and one-sided.

⁵⁴ His source for this alleged influence is: Horatio Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, ed. Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845); Brooks, 120.

⁵⁵ Historical studies of other denominations’ missions include: Martin J. Bane, *The Catholic Story of Liberia* (New York: D.X. McMullen Co., 1950); Martin J. Bane, *Catholic Pioneers in West Africa* (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds, 1956); Martin J. Bane, *The Popes and Western Africa; an Outline of Mission History, 1460’s-1960’s* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1968); J. M. Reid, *Missions and Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church Vol. I* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1879).

⁵⁶ Secondary sources on the Protestant Episcopal church in the region and the ABCFM mission include: D. Elwood Dunn, *A History of the Episcopal Church in Liberia, 1821-1980* (Metuchen, N.J.: American Theological Library Association and The Scarecrow Press, 1992); Dean Arthur Holt, “Change Strategies Initiated by the Protestant Episcopal Church in Liberia from 1836 to 1950 and Their Differential Effects” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1970); Clifton Jackson Phillips, “Protestant America and the Pagan World: The First Half Century of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-1860” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard, 1969). Phillips writes that colonial and international problems plagued the ABCFM mission and mentions that the U.S. navy was somehow involved but does not explain or discuss the squadron or relationship between the U.S. government and the mission in any way (pp.221-224).

⁵⁷ Holt, 73-74.

D. Elwood Dunn's interpretation of these events goes further. He describes how the *Mary Carver* affair and the missionaries' apparently close relationship to the navy during this period emphasized the white missionaries' "foreignness" and exemplified their negative attitudes towards Africans and colonists.⁵⁸ While Dunn may be right that the missionaries' role in the *Mary Carver* incident says something about their racial attitudes, this interpretation does not sufficiently explain their motives or position. The missionaries did not suddenly request an ongoing naval presence simply because they held negative views of Africans. My research shows how these missionaries advocated a naval presence because it actively served the interests of their mission. It also shows how missionaries' conception of the proper response to the *Mary Carver* attack was not based on specific racial views of Africans, but rather that their ideas and expectations exemplified a more general American attitude towards weaker peoples around the world. The missionaries specifically compared the *Mary Carver* attack to attacks on Americans in Sumatra and depicted the accused Africans in ways that were similar to previous depictions of peoples in Asia and South America. Like other Americans, the missionaries expected the navy to treat Africans just like it did poorer and weaker peoples around the globe.

Lastly, colonization histories offer yet another side of the story. Liberian colonial histories are typically separate from histories of the African colonization movement in the United States so that one must read different sources to understand related events that took place in Liberia and in the United States. Colonization histories are typically organizational histories of the American Colonization Society (ACS).⁵⁹ Liberian histories tend to have an inward focus on colonial life and culture rather than the relationships between the colonization societies, colonial governments, and U.S. government.⁶⁰ Liberian histories also tend to focus

⁵⁸ Dunn, 59-61.

⁵⁹ Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution : A History of the American Colonization Society*(Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*(New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

⁶⁰ Tom W. Shick, *Behold the Promised Land : A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia*(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Wilson.

on Monrovia and its immediate environs, while some scholars have written specialized studies of the Maryland Colonization Society (MSCS) and its colony Maryland in Liberia.⁶¹

Historians of Liberia treat the colonization societies' and their colonies' relationships with the U.S. government unevenly. P.J. Staudenraus's history of the ACS practically ignores the Africa squadron, Tyler administration, and the early 1840s altogether. It is strange that Staudenraus does not discuss the relationship between the ACS and the government during this period, considering that the list of ACS presidents and vice presidents was full of powerful government leaders including President Tyler, Abel Upshur, Daniel Webster, and Henry Clay.⁶² The Tyler administration was not indifferent to colonization or Liberia, as Staudenraus implies by ignoring the subject. This dissertation connects colonization and colonial interests to other concerns like the slave trade and U.S. relations with West Africa in general, shows how colonizationists worked hard to lobby the government on behalf of their cause, and how they succeeded in some cases.

More recently, Eric Burin's history of the ACS attempts to answer the question of whether or not colonization was a pro- or anti-slavery movement.⁶³ Burin evaluates the ACS and its motives but has little to say about Liberia or the ACS's relationship with the U.S. government. While the colonization movement's motives are historically important, they are only marginally relevant to the question of why the United States employed the navy to avenge the *Mary Carver*. Whether or not the ACS was a pro- or anti-slavery movement, or had a membership with diverse motives, does not help to explain the motives behind U.S. foreign policy, especially if Liberia itself was not the primary concern behind American policy-makers' decision to create the squadron or to avenge the *Mary Carver*.

Like the scholarship on the ACS, histories of the Liberian colonies pay little attention to the relationship between the U.S. government and these colonies, especially after 1824.

⁶¹ Penelope Campbell, *Maryland in Africa; the Maryland State Colonization Society, 1831-1857* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971); Richard L. Hall, *On Africa's Shore : A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834-1857* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2003); Jane J. Martin, "The Dual Legacy: Government Authority and Mission Influence among the Glebo of Eastern Liberia, 1834-1910" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1968).

⁶² Instead, Staudenraus seems content to blame abolitionists and the growing battle between anti-slavery and colonization supporters for the ACS's declining fortunes. But as my research shows, during the Tyler administration colonizationists were actively fighting this battle and winning, especially in places like Maine where anti-slavery speakers were routinely threatened and attacked with violence.

⁶³ Burin.

Charles Wilson claims that the United States persistently ignored Liberia. But conversely, he also blames the United States for meddling in colonial affairs and damaging the colonial government's limited credibility.⁶⁴ As evidence of this damaging interference, Wilson cites the USS *Vandalia*'s actions during its visit to the colony in 1841. While *Vandalia* did perform poorly, it is unrepresentative of the navy's overall interaction with the colony and cannot fairly be used to exemplify U.S.-Liberian relations. The United States did much more for Liberia than Wilson implies; Liberians overwhelmingly applauded the Africa squadron's actions and interpreted them as directly beneficial to the colonies in several ways.⁶⁵

Historians of the MSCS and its colony Maryland in Liberia have shown more interest in the relationship between the United States, its navy, and these colonies than historians focused on the ACS and Monrovia. Penelope Campbell suggests that the colonization societies successfully influenced the U.S. government to support the Liberian colonies, for example, she claims that the MSCS convinced Van Buren to send cruisers to the coast.⁶⁶ But this interpretation exaggerates the societies' influence. Colonization societies worked hard to encourage government support for the Liberian colonies, but their political influence remained limited. The societies and colonists were at best only auxiliaries to the decision-making process. They served as useful sources of information, but their concerns were of minor importance to the U.S. government. They certainly did not exert the degree of influence over American policy that Campbell claims.

In her analysis of the Africa squadron, Campbell attributes full responsibility for its actions and policies to Perry, and mistakenly claims that it was his decision to focus the squadron's activities on protecting American commerce. From the narrow vantage point afforded by her research model, which relies almost exclusively on the papers of the MSCS, it may seem like Perry directed squadron policy, but as my research shows, protecting commerce

⁶⁴ Wilson, 53-54.

⁶⁵ Wilson's interpretation also assumes that the United States should have done more, ignoring Liberians own debate over this question. Some Liberians actually preferred to be ignored by the U.S. government because they wanted an independent nation and feared that dependency on the US would weaken their chances of long-term success.

⁶⁶ Campbell, 159-162.

was a directive that Perry received from the Navy Department, and more importantly, it was long-established naval policy.

Most recently, Richard Hall has published a detailed history of Maryland in Liberia. Although Hall gives one of the most lengthy and detailed historical accounts of the *Mary Carver* affair, he depicts it more as an anecdote, failing to connect it to any larger story. In his telling, the story appears as an isolated incident devoid of any meaning except as an example of U.S. “powder and ball diplomacy.” He suggests that the squadron’s presence gave some advantage to the colonists, chiefly by boosting colonial confidence and helping to convince the neighboring Grebo people that the colonists were there to stay.⁶⁷ But Hall fails to provide any background about the Africa squadron and only briefly mentions the treaty. In his interpretation, the colonization societies play no role in securing the U.S. naval presence but were merely the passive recipients of the squadron’s attention.⁶⁸

Hall and Campbell use Charles Paullin’s model of shirt sleeve diplomacy to interpret Perry’s Africa squadron, but this model attributes too much power, responsibility, and credit to Perry. Paullin’s own account of the Africa squadron is curious. He limits his discussion to Perry’s investigation of three disputes between American merchantmen and African villages, and his treatment of the squadron ends abruptly with a description of the treaty that Perry exacted from several African headmen to settle the *Mary Carver* business. Paullin pronounces that with this treaty, “Perry’s diplomatic duties on the African coast came to an end.”⁶⁹ Perry served on the African station for another year, but Paullin completely ignores the various diplomatic duties that he performed, as well as the related diplomatic events connected to the Webster-Ashburton treaty. By ignoring the Webster-Ashburton treaty and much more, Paullin gives the misleading impression that the squadron’s role in the *Mary Carver* affair was an example of shirt sleeve diplomacy, unconnected to any established U.S. policy or national foreign relations agenda.

⁶⁷ Hall, 247. “Powder and Ball Diplomacy” is the title of chapter twelve.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 227-228.

⁶⁹ Charles Oscar Paullin, *Diplomatic Negotiations of American Naval Officers 1778-1883* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1912), 358-361.

Shirt-sleeve diplomacy, colonization schemes, the right of search, and the effort to suppress the slave trade all played a part in the formation and mission of the first Africa squadron. But none of these models provide a sufficient explanation of how and why the United States government created the squadron and used it to avenge the *Mary Carver*. This literature either ignores U.S.-Liberian relations, or draws faulty conclusions based on limited or biased interpretations. The *Mary Carver* affair affords an opportunity to show how traders, missionaries, and colonizationists used their control of information to actively participate in and influence the public discussion about the use of the navy to protect American interests in West Africa.⁷⁰ Although these groups were often in competition with one another, they all faced the same fundamental dangers in West Africa, and they all advocated the same solution: naval and political support from the U.S. government.

This dissertation uses a new approach to explain the relationship between the United States and West Africa during Tyler's presidency. I argue that the Tyler administration's decision to send a naval squadron to West Africa was driven by two factors. First, it was a response to an ongoing diplomatic dispute with Britain. And second, it was part of a general policy governing the use of the navy to protect American commerce around the globe. When the decision to create the Africa squadron is analyzed, the slave trade and U.S. relations with Liberia rank far below these other concerns.

The U.S. Africa squadron had multiple purposes. Immediately, as a product of the treaty, its first priority was to protect American rights, and then also to enforce American laws against American participation in the slave trade. Further, like all squadrons it was responsible for protecting American commerce, citizens, and their property abroad, acting as diplomatic representative, and gathering useful information. Considered on these terms, Perry's squadron was a reasonable success. Some historians have criticized the squadron for performing these latter duties, suggesting that they distracted from the squadron's work of suppressing the slave trade, but this is a mistake. Separating the Africa squadron in this way creates a distorted analytical frame. Every squadron had its own particular concerns, but the public expected

⁷⁰ I am using the term colonizationist here to refer to both colonization society men and colonists.

them all to perform the same basic duties. The Africa squadron had to serve multiple purposes and fulfill traditional duties. Historians seem to want the Africa squadron to have been a force for right against the evil of the slave trade, but the U.S. Africa squadron was never intended to be anything so noble. Rather, it was precisely the ordinary nature of the squadron that made its existence politically possible.

Furthermore, the squadron's secondary priorities, policing the slave trade and fulfilling ordinary duties, were not necessarily as separate and distinct as historians have suggested. Historians have separated these activities into mutually exclusive categories in a way that the participants did not.⁷¹ Perry and many others believed that protecting legitimate American commerce was essential to effectively suppressing the slave trade. Historians have reduced the discussion of suppressing the slave trade, especially as it concerns the Africa squadron, to simply catching slavers, but efforts to suppress the slave trade were much broader than simple naval police action. There were multiple ways of suppressing the slave trade.⁷² Many Americans believed that promoting legitimate trade, colonies, and missions helped suppress the trade by fostering a more civilized society and an alternative economy.

Many people believed that Liberia was a bulwark against the slave trade, and considered any support the squadron offered it a useful contribution to suppression efforts. As the tiny settlements grew and expanded they were expected to supplant the slave trade with legitimate commerce. In addition to providing a market for legitimate trade and an example of civilized life, Liberia was also a necessary part of U.S. policy for policing the slave trade. Earlier efforts to capture slavers had been hampered by the politically difficult question of how to dispose of the liberated Africans. In order to make any effort at policing the slave trade, the United States needed a place to resettle recaptured Africans. Liberia, directly through

⁷¹ Harmon argues that protecting commerce was compatible with, not contradictory to, combating the trade, but my argument is broader. Harmon focuses on naval history and the slave trade over an extended period of time, while this study incorporates a broader range of factors including foreign policy, colonization, missions, and domestic politics, among others. Harmon, "Suppress and Protect the United States Navy, the African Slave Trade, and Maritime Commerce, 1794-1862".

⁷² By 1845, the squadron's presence had caused some American merchants to instruct their captains and supercargoes to stop accepting bills of exchange on Havana because the risk was too great. Although this example is not overwhelming proof of the squadron's success, it does suggest that Perry's squadron had some impact on the slave trade by making it a little more difficult for slave traders to obtain credit. Norman Robert Bennett and George E. Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa; a History through Documents, 1802 to 1865* (Brookline, Mass.: Boston University Press, 1965), 280 n. 6.

services that it provided, and indirectly by virtue of its existence, provided invaluable services to the squadron, its mission, and the U.S. effort to police the slave trade. Whatever assistance the squadron offered to Liberia should be considered a mutual benefit to both the colony and the squadron.

Histories of the Africa squadron tend to oversimplify and dismiss the squadron under Perry's command in particular, as a failure, but it is unfair to judge Perry's squadron a failure because it did not make obvious or immediately significant strides against the slave trade when it was not meant to do so.⁷³ This dissertation uses a wider, more comprehensive framework to study the United States and West Africa during the 1840s. The slave trade was far from the dominant issue during Tyler's presidency and using it as the dominant lens through which to study the creation of the squadron, politics, and foreign policy of the period distorts our view of this history. This dissertation re-evaluates the squadron's success in terms of its actual purpose and mission, and expands the definition of suppression to include long-term projects, including those designed to change the culture of West Africa. The United States created the Africa squadron to protect its interests from the British, defend American honor, expand American commerce, and enforce its laws against the slave trade, and it should be evaluated based on how well it fulfilled all of these duties. The squadron's primary purpose was to protect American rights and honor from British abuse, and it largely succeeded. Americans, including those in the Tyler administration, were concerned about the slave trade, but it was not their primary reason for creating the squadron.

Could Americans have done more to suppress the slave trade? Of course. But they did not because they did not believe that many Americans were involved. They believed that defending legal rights was more important and they consequently demanded a high standard of evidence to convict people of slaving, which was a capital crime under U.S. law. Many people doubted the effectiveness of naval policing and supported other strategies for ending the

⁷³ Another problem which is discussed in the following chapter is the reliance on statistics indicating the number of slavers captured to evaluate success. It is unproductive to draw conclusions by comparing U.S. and British captures without analyzing the effects that such captures had on the overall trade. Harmon asks if anything short of total suppression could be considered successful. Harmon, "Suppress and Protect the United States Navy, the African Slave Trade, and Maritime Commerce, 1794-1862", 3-4.

trade. Some advocated changes to the law that would give people greater powers to act against the trade. Perry believed that Congress needed to pass new laws before he could actively pursue slavers. Above all, Americans valued free enterprise and cheap government. As designed and implemented, the U.S. policy successfully addressed the immediate problems of British relations, protecting commerce, defending national honor, abuse of the flag, and obtaining justice for the *Mary Carver*. As long as slavers did not hide behind the stars and stripes, Americans did not feel responsible for the problem. It was not an ideal solution, but as John Quincy Adams and David Eltis argue, it could have been worse.

This is not a study of the American effort to suppress the slave trade. Because that issue is inseparable from the squadron's history and was a partial cause of the tensions between the United States and Britain that the Webster-Ashburton treaty addressed, it necessarily figures in this story, but the history of the *Mary Carver* affair and the Africa squadron should not be subsumed to the history of the effort to suppress the slave trade. This dissertation re-situates the *Mary Carver* affair within the larger context of 1840s politics and culture. Only by using a larger foreign policy framework can we understand why the United States avenged the *Mary Carver*, how the Africa squadron came to be formed, and the reasons behind its mission. And only by answering these questions can we fairly evaluate the squadron's successes and failures.

CHAPTER 2

PROLOGUE

In 1807, Congress outlawed the importation of slaves into the United States; and it authorized the president to employ armed vessels to patrol the high seas and to seize any American vessels violating this law. But President Thomas Jefferson's disdain for the navy, the embargo, and the War of 1812 prevented effective enforcement of this law. After the war, Americans revisited the problem of the slave trade, realizing that effective enforcement of the ban would require new laws. But first, two important questions needed to be answered: what to do with Africans captured from slavers, and how to classify the crime of participating in the slave trade. Congress approached the problem enthusiastically.

Before the United States could implement any program to suppress the slave trade, Americans needed to decide what to do with Africans captured on board slavers. Political and financial support for suppression depended on an acceptable plan. The two most likely possibilities were that these so-called "recaptured Africans" would either end up enslaved, despite being rescued from slavers, or that they would be returned to Africa, possibly to a colony. In 1816, a group of distinguished Americans met in Washington D.C. to form the American Society for Colonizing Free People of Color of the United States, and promoted a scheme for colonizing free blacks and repatriating recaptured Africans.¹ The American Colonization Society (ACS), as the society came to be known, situated itself in the capital, hoping to win support from the U.S. government, but government support for colonization was tempered by financial and legal concerns, and by a general disdain for the burden of colonies. When Congress began to consider the problem of suppressing the slave trade, the ACS seized the opportunity to argue for a private-public partnership to settle recaptured Africans in a new

¹ American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, "Memorial of the American Colonization Society, 1817," in *African Colonization*, 27 Cong., 3 Sess., H.R. 283, ed. U.S. Congress House Committee on Commerce(1843), 172. For a history of the ACS see: Staudenraus.

ACS colony. Congress initially rejected the scheme, suggesting that it would be cheaper and easier for the United States to send recaptured Africans to the existing British colony of Sierra Leone instead.² Hoping to persuade Congress to reconsider, the ACS sent a fact-finding expedition to West Africa to investigate possible sites for a new colony.

When the expedition returned from West Africa, the ACS reported to Congress that it had found numerous violations of the anti-slave trade laws and suggested that establishing a new colony would deter such crimes. The appeal succeeded and Congress passed a new law expanding the president's powers to enforce the ban against the slave trade. It authorized the president to employ armed vessels on the coasts of the United States and Africa, or wherever Americans might attempt to carry on the international slave trade. It authorized the navy to seize suspected slaving vessels and bring them to the United States for trial. It established a system of prize money for those officers and their crews. It shifted responsibility for recaptured Africans from the states to the federal government, authorizing the president to support and remove recaptured Africans from the United States. And it appropriated \$100,000 to fund these efforts.³ The new law did not mention colonization specifically, but its sponsors knew that the ACS planned to establish a colony, and so the law provided for an agent of the United States to be stationed on the African coast, presumably in the ACS colony, to receive the recaptured Africans.⁴

Sympathetic to the idea of colonization, President James Monroe used these new powers to foster the ACS colony. Monroe appointed Samuel Bacon the first U.S. agent for recaptured Africans and authorized him to make preparations to settle recaptured Africans in West Africa. In the fall of 1819, Bacon chartered the merchant brig *Elizabeth* and stocked it with tools and supplies. It was a joint effort between the United States and the ACS to suppress the slave trade and establish the private colony. The free black laborers that Bacon hired to build the U.S. agency in West Africa brought their families and intended to settle

² Lingering hostility between Britain and the United States following the War of 1812 and the troubled state of the Sierra Leone colony made cooperation unlikely.

³ "An act in addition to the act prohibiting the slave trade," 15 Cong., 2 sess., 3 March 1819, *Statutes at Large: List of the Public Acts of Congress*, (Vol. 3) 532-534.

⁴ Staudenraus, 50-51.

permanently in the new colony.⁵ The ACS agent Samuel Crozer also planned to sail on the *Elizabeth*. Once in Africa, Crozer would be responsible for purchasing land and establishing a colonial government. *Elizabeth* sailed for Africa on January 31, 1820, escorted by USS *Cyane*.

Service in the uncomfortable and deadly African climate was not the most desirable assignment in the navy, but active duty assignments were scarce in the years following the war. *Cyane* offered a welcome opportunity and Lieut. Matthew Calbraith Perry gladly volunteered for the mission. The little convoy headed for Sherbro, a small island off the coast just south of Sierra Leone. The ACS exploratory party had recommended Sherbro enthusiastically, but the swampy island was a terrible location and disaster quickly befell the *Elizabeth* settlement. Most of the settlers were taken ill with malaria or other fevers and many in the party died, including both the U.S. and the ACS agent. Meanwhile, the prostrate settlers were unable to defend themselves from neighboring Africans who robbed them of most of their provisions and supplies. Desperate and vulnerable, the surviving colonists retreated to Freetown.

After the *Elizabeth* disaster, the United States organized a mission to aid the survivors. Perry, who had by now developed a personal interest in the colony's success, volunteered again. In July of 1821, now Lieutenant Commandant Perry, received his first independent command, the U.S. schooner *Shark*, assigned to transport the new ACS agent, Dr. Eli Ayers, to West Africa.⁶ When *Shark* arrived at Freetown, Ayers learned that the replacement U.S. agents had already died and so he was forced to take over their responsibilities as well. The settlers were in a poor and rebellious condition and Ayers needed to find a new location for the settlement as soon as possible. The British at Sierra Leone and Lieutenant Perry all recommended Cape Mesurado, the headlands at the mouth of the St. Paul River. Perry wrote that:

This is the most eligible spot that I have yet seen, for the location of the colony. The natives are less barbarous than those of the neighboring nations, and are more pacific in their dispositions; and the presumption is, that if the trees were cut down, and the land cultivated, it would prove comparatively a

⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁶ Samuel Eliot Morison, *"Old Bruin": Commodore Matthew C. Perry, 1794-1858* (Boston: Little Brown, 1967), 62-63.

healthy situation, as its projection into the sea affords it the advantage of the sea breeze, the strongest preventative of disease.⁷

Perry was particularly interested in the salutary dangers of the African climate and this would remain his first priority during his subsequent service in West Africa. Meanwhile, Lieut. Robert Stockton arrived in command of U.S. schooner *Alligator* with orders to help Ayers purchase land. Ayers and Stockton immediately sailed for Cape Mesurado, where they used a combination of threats and gifts to force the local people to sell the ACS a tract of land.

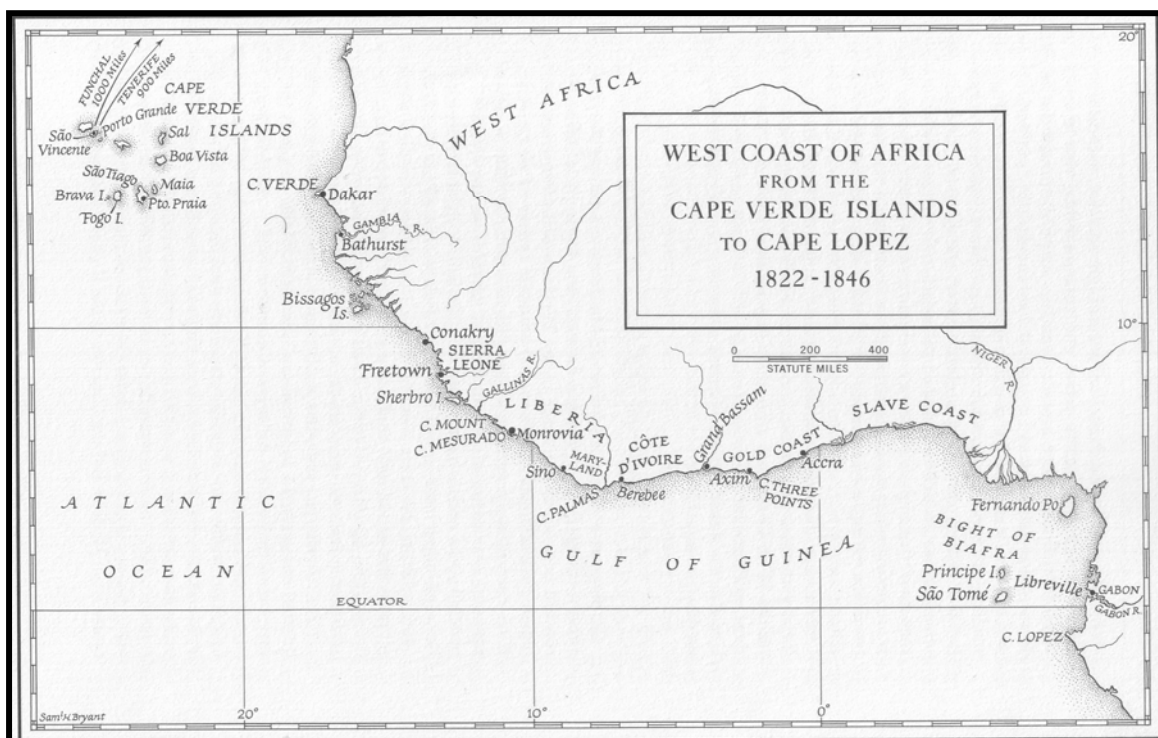


Figure 1. Map of West Coast of Africa : From the Cape Verde Islands to Cape Lopez, 1822 - 1846.

The new colony at Cape Mesurado struggled to survive as internal conflicts and hostile neighbors threatened to destroy it. The settlers relied on a limited arsenal and periodic visits from naval vessels to defend their territory. In June of 1822, the secretary of the navy ordered Captain Spence, in command of *Cyane*, to defend the colony from its neighbors for as long as the danger lasted.⁸ But the danger persisted, and the following April the secretary ordered

⁷ Matthew C. Perry to Secretary of the Navy, 18 November 1821, H.R. 283, 821.

⁸ Secretary of the Navy to Captain Spence, 11 June 1822, H.R. 283, 808.

Spence to station marines in the colony.⁹ The marines kept themselves busy on shore, helping the colonists construct defenses, until fever struck dozens of them down. This devastating experience left a lasting impression on the navy, and in the future, officers would be extremely reluctant expose their men to this danger on shore.

Americans supported using the navy to protect the infant colony because they believed that colonization and suppressing the slave trade were mutually beneficial and overlapping projects. Logic and necessity dictated that the two infant projects work in tandem. Otherwise, the United States would be forced to establish its own formal colony at much greater expense, absorb recaptured Africans into American society as indentured servants, or watch as they were re-enslaved. Considering the other options, helping the Liberians seemed like a reasonable choice.

In 1820, Congress acted again to address the slave trade, strengthening U.S. law by declaring participation in the trade an act of piracy – a capital crime.¹⁰ In recommending this change, the House Committee on the Slave Trade wrote that:

The maritime Powers of the Christian world have at length concurred in pronouncing sentence of condemnation against the traffic. The United States, having led the way in forming this decree, owe it to themselves not to *follow* the rest of mankind in promoting its vigorous execution.¹¹

In addition to being the first nation to outlaw the slave trade, the United States could now claim to be the first and only nation to have declared that trade piracy.

During the time that Americans were establishing this colony, five different U.S. vessels took turns cruising the coast of West Africa, assisting the settlers, and enforcing U.S. laws against the slave trade. But circumstances limited the navy's effectiveness. The vessels assigned to patrol for slavers off West Africa were also assigned to patrol the Caribbean for pirates, a more immediate concern for most Americans. Consequently, these vessels only made brief visits to West Africa. And because the United States was only responsible for enforcing its own laws against the slave trade, U.S. cruisers could only legally stop and search

⁹ Secretary of the Navy to Captain Spence, 8 April 1823, H.R. 283, 808.

¹⁰ "An act to continue in force 'An act to protect the commerce of the United States, and punish the crime of piracy,' and also to make further provisions for punishing the crime of piracy," 16 Cong., 1 sess., 15 May 1820, *Statutes at Large: List of the Public Acts of Congress*, (Vol. 3) 600-601.

¹¹ Report of the House Committee on the Slave Trade, 8 May 1820, H.R. 283, 259-262.

American vessels. When the French government complained that four schooners captured by USS *Alligator* had been flying French colors, the United States was forced to release them. By 1822, American officers reported that no slavers were flying American colors on the windward coast of West Africa. Slavers operating near the Cape Mesurado colony, now called Liberia, had begun flying French and Spanish flags, leaving little for the American navy to do.¹²

International law prohibited naval cruisers from interfering with foreign merchant vessels during peacetime, except in cases of suspected piracy, and the law of nations did not yet recognize slave trading as piracy. To get around this restriction, Britain made treaties with other nations, agreeing to ban the slave trade north of the equator, establish mixed courts, and allow for a mutual right of search of suspected slavers. In practice, these treaties gave the British navy the authority to stop, search, and seize vessels from signatory nations and deliver them for trial at special courts. Although potentially effective, these treaties required the cooperation of all the major maritime powers to successfully suppress the slave trade.

The United States refused to make any such agreement or to relinquish any rights to foreign nations. The House Committee on the Slave Trade earnestly recommended that the president reach some agreement with Britain for a mutual right of search. It argued that there was little chance that such a limited grant of rights would harm Americans, and concluded that the potential benefits of suppressing the slave trade made cooperation expedient.¹³ But the Monroe administration disagreed. Secretary of State John Quincy Adams argued that the people would never support such a concession and that the Senate would not ratify such a treaty. Monroe believed that participation in mixed courts would be unconstitutional.

The administration insisted that no foreign officer had the right to board, visit, or search any vessel flying the U.S. flag. Instead, Adams suggested that Britain follow the U.S. example and declare participation in the slave trade an act of piracy, rendering the mutual right of search and mixed courts unnecessary. Once Britain declared the slave trade piracy, he reasoned, the policy could be “urged upon” France and other maritime powers until it became

¹² Canney, 15-17.

¹³ Report of the House Committee on the Slave Trade, 9 February 1821, H.R. 283, 288-295. The House passed this resolution on 28 February 1823, see H.R. 283, 363.

accepted international law.¹⁴ The United States had, Adams wrote, “evinced their willingness, and expressed their desire, that the change should become general, by the consent of every other Power, whereby it would be made the law of nations.”¹⁵ Adams instructed U.S. foreign ministers to relay this message to several foreign governments, and even sent draft agreements to ministers in Britain and Russia. Britain promptly complied with the suggestion, but changing international law would take considerably more time, especially while slavery remained legal in most countries.

By 1824, American interest in the slave trade was beginning to decline. Diplomats had reached an impasse over the right of search. Congress had passed major laws and then moved on to new issues. Monroe had established the agency for recaptured Africans and helped to establish the Liberian colony, and was now preparing to leave office. And the navy began halting its patrols when officers reported that the U.S. flag had disappeared from the slave trade. Meanwhile, the little Liberian colony struggled along. Ayers retreated in broken health and Jehudi Ashmun appointed himself the new colonial agent. During these early years when so many died, there was rarely a U.S. agent at the colony and the place was often filled by the colonial agent out of necessity. Ashmun used U.S. government funds and resources to build public buildings and fortifications, ostensibly for the benefit of the U.S. agency, to house and protect U.S. property and stores for resettling recaptured Africans.¹⁶

Throughout the 1820s, Ashmun struggled to build the colony in Liberia while the Reverend Ralph Gurley worked to build the ACS in America. Gurley’s tireless devotion to colonization, Ashmun’s apparent success, and the failure of a brief experiment with black emigration to Haiti made these early years fairly successful for the ACS. Both Liberians and the ACS made ambitious plans for the future. In Liberia, Ashmun envisioned a territorial empire stretching along the coast for a hundred miles or more, modeled on Sierra Leone. In the United States, Gurley cultivated a national network of local and auxiliary colonization societies designed to collect essential funds and disseminate information to build political support for

¹⁴ John Quincy Adams to Stratford Canning, 31 March 1823, H.R. 283, 367-368.

¹⁵ John Quincy Adams to Stratford Canning, 24 June 1823, H.R. 283, 372-376.

¹⁶ Staudenraus, 151.

the cause. It all seemed very promising. But by the end of the decade Ashmun was dead and both the colony and the ACS were experiencing difficulties. Some local auxiliaries and state colonization societies began to resist the national leadership; the thriving Maryland Colonization Society began openly challenging the parent society.¹⁷ In particular, it questioned the imbalance between the amount of local funds raised and the number of local emigrants transported to Africa. In 1827, the Maryland legislature appropriated \$1,000 annually to the ACS for the emigration of Maryland residents, but when the ACS failed to transport enough emigrants from Maryland to collect the State funds Maryland's interest in colonization seemed to die out.¹⁸ By the end of the decade, with the cessation of naval patrols and the colonization movements' declining fortunes, Americans lost interest in West Africa. But for a few enterprising young men, the difficulties and challenges of West Africa presented a tempting opportunity. And in the years to come, these men would plant seeds on that coast, cultivating and renewing Americans' interest in West Africa.

¹⁷ Eric Burin describes how colonization societies in Pennsylvania and New York acted with increasing independence from the ACS. Burin.

¹⁸ John H. B. Latrobe, *Maryland in Liberia : A History of the Colony Planted by the Maryland State Colonization Society under the Auspices of the State of Maryland, U.S., at Cape Palmas on the South-West Coast of Africa, 1833-1853 : A Paper Read before the Maryland Historical Society, March 9th, 1885*(Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1885), 12.

CHAPTER 3

BEGINNINGS: PLANTING THE SEEDS OF AMERICAN INTERESTS IN WEST AFRICA, 1830 - 1836

The story of the *Mary Carver* affair begins in the 1830s, when remote and dangerous places attracted ambitious young men seeking new opportunities for personal success. At the time, West Africa was one of the most dangerous and open fields in the world, where ambitious young men, who were willing to take risks and lucky enough to survive the climate, could advance quickly to a position of power. Political issues connected to West Africa, particularly questions related to slavery and colonization, also created opportunities for young men who preferred to remain in the United States.

This chapter introduces several of the ambitious young men who took an interest in West Africa in the early 1830s and argues that the seeds they planted grew into relatively significant American interests. A young Baltimore lawyer helped to renew the colonization movement in Maryland and launch a new colony in West Africa. Two Bowdoin College alums, a doctor and a newspaper editor, set out for the Liberian colonies as businessmen and found themselves transformed into political leaders. Two young ministers went to West Africa as the first white American missionaries to the continent. And a young sea captain and his partners invested in new trading ventures to that coast. These men all hoped that their risky ventures would pay off and fulfill their personal ambitions for wealth, power, influence, and respect.

This chapter describes the seeds of American interest that that these young men planted in West Africa during the early 1830s, seeds that would grow into the established colonies, missions, and trading businesses that played important roles in the *Mary Carver* affair just a decade later. It is divided into four sections. The first section introduces some key American figures in the region of Liberia when they were just starting out: describing their characters, background, and their various African ventures. The second section discusses President Jackson's foreign and naval policies. As historian John Belohlavek describes, Jackson

had an aggressive plan for the navy and he used it to expand American commercial interests around the globe.¹ This section argues that Jackson established important precedents which later influenced U.S. policy and American attitudes during the *Mary Carver* affair. The third section describes the relationship between the United States and the Liberian region during Jackson's presidency, including the navy's impact on American commercial interests. The final section of this chapter introduces Ebenezer Farwell, the future captain of the *Mary Carver*, and describes his early experience in the African trade.

These various pieces of the *Mary Carver* story: Liberian colonization, West African missions, American foreign policy and naval affairs, and American trade in West Africa remain largely separate and distinct during the early 1830s. But they would grow completely intertwined in less than ten years, with each forming an important part of the *Mary Carver* affair. The people, policies, and precedents that this chapter outlines form the background of this study and are essential to understanding the choices that Americans faced ten years later during the *Mary Carver* affair.

Liberia

The colonization movement was struggling in 1829 when Andrew Jackson assumed the presidency of the United States. Liberia suffered from poor leadership after the death of Jehudi Ashmun, and Ralph Gurley found it difficult to satisfy increasingly disparate interests within the ACS. Maryland, where white residents were frightened by the threat of slave revolts, had been a strong supporter of colonization as a means of removing potentially dangerous free blacks from the state. When the ACS failed to use Maryland's contributions to remove Maryland's free blacks, the state's support for colonization began to die out. But in the early 1830s a small group of dedicated men helped to revive Maryland's interest in colonization.²

The young Baltimore lawyer John H. B. Latrobe led a new, more localized, colonization movement in Maryland. With Latrobe's help, the Maryland ACS auxiliary reorganized itself into

¹ Belohlavek, 8-11.

² For the history of the MSCS see: Campbell; Hall; Latrobe.

a new, more independent, society. By doing so, the state society freed itself from some of the burdens that encumbered the ACS. But at the same time, it lost the benefits of full membership in the national organization, which ultimately forced the Maryland society to establish its own colony in Africa.

Latrobe and the new Maryland colonization society relied heavily on the work of three other men. James Hall, a young doctor, founded Maryland's new colony on the distant shores of West Africa. A young Liberian colonist and newspaper editor, John Brown Russwurm, took over control as the first non-white leader of a Liberian colony. And a young Presbyterian minister, John Leighton Wilson, opened one of the first American missions to West Africa in the colony. By 1837, these four men forged a new colonization society, and established a new colony and mission on the coast of Africa. Although their colony was small, their achievement was not. From this small beginning, the colony and the mission grew into a Liberian region of significant American interests in just a few short years.

On February 21, 1831, Robert S. Finley headlined a meeting at the Baltimore Athenaeum where he gave a rousing speech. By the end of the meeting, the Maryland State Colonization Society (MSCS) had been formed. The new organization proclaimed that: "It is deemed expedient to endeavor to apply the means that may be raised in Maryland to the removal of the free people of color of Maryland."³ The members appointed Latrobe manager, Executive Committee member, and corresponding secretary of the new society. Although still technically an ACS auxiliary, the MSCS was breaking away.

At first, the ACS and the new MSCS attempted to work together, but it quickly became clear that partial cooperation was impractical and the MSCS began operating independently of the ACS in America. The ACS expected the MSCS to continue handing over all monies, but Maryland colonizationists wanted to control the expenditure of the funds that they raised. In 1830, 52,938 free blacks lived in Maryland, with thirty percent of that population concentrated in Baltimore.⁴ The presence of such a large free black population in the state made white residents nervous, and they were anxious to remove as many free black people as possible.

³ Preamble and resolutions adopted at Baltimore on 22 February, 1832. Latrobe, 12.

⁴ Campbell, 16-17.

Colonization offered at least a partial remedy to this perceived threat. The supposed threat seemed all the more real when rebel slaves, led by Nat Turner, murdered fifty-five white Virginians later that summer. The MSCS wanted funds raised in Maryland used to remove dangerous blacks from Maryland.

The ACS struggled to be all things to all people. Officially the society's objective was to colonize free people of color, but how those people should become free was open to interpretation. The ACS remained intentionally vague on this question so as not to offend potential supporters, but both proslavery and anti-slavery proponents remained suspicious of the society's agenda. In contrast, it was easier for a state organization, with its more homogenous membership, to take a clear stand. In 1833, the new MSCS announced that its goal was to completely eliminate slavery and remove all black people from Maryland. While the ACS struggled to court supporters on both sides of the slavery issue, Latrobe strategically positioned the MSCS to win financial support from sympathetic anti-slavery northerners.⁵

Even though the MSCS wanted organizational independence at home, it still hoped to send its emigrants to the ACS colony in Africa. But when an attempt at cooperation failed, the MSCS reluctantly decided to establish its own colony in West Africa. The MSCS chose Dr. James Hall to lead its expedition to Africa and found the new colony. A graduate from the Medical School of Maine on the campus of Bowdoin College (1822), Dr. Hall had first traveled to Liberia in 1831, where he served as colonial physician until 1833. A strong proponent of colonization, Hall gladly accepted the MSCS offer. Plans moved ahead quickly, and the expedition to establish the new Maryland colony set sail from Baltimore on board the brig *Ann* November 28, 1833. In addition to nineteen settlers, Dr. Hall, and his assistant the Reverend John Hersey, *Ann* carried two missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM): the Reverend John Leighton Wilson and Steven Wyncoop.

John Leighton Wilson was just twenty-four years old when he sailed on board *Ann*, bound for Africa for the first time. Life on board ship was spartan but full of excited anticipation. Wilson had been born into a moderately prominent slave holding family in South

⁵ Ibid., 60-61.

Carolina and was looking to make his way in the world. After graduating from Union College in Schenectady, New York in 1831, he had decided to become a missionary and had joined the inaugural class of South Carolina's Columbia Theological Seminary. By the end of 1832, he had applied to the ABCFM for an assignment, and the board had convinced him to go to Africa. The lack of suitable and willing candidates for a mission to Africa made it a good opportunity for an ambitious young man like Wilson to attain a position of power and independence relatively quickly.⁶

Wilson spent most of 1833 preparing for his new life in West Africa. He traveled throughout the Northeast, preaching and promoting his mission. He studied Arabic and educated himself about Africa and medicine. Friends tried unsuccessfully to dissuade him, telling him that he was "going to martyrdom," and "pursuing shadows," but Wilson was committed to his plan. He wrote to his fiancée Jane Bayard, who had agreed to accompany him to Africa, explaining that the importance of the work was worth the risk to their health:

Our lives may, and probably will, be shortened, but such is the transcendent importance of that mission that it seems to me our duty to commence it, even should there be no possibility of our living more than *ten years*. Besides, my dear, my heart is strongly drawn out towards the *poor Africans*. If we do not care for them, who will? And if we cannot go as missionaries to Africa, who can?⁷

The probability of death was very real, and few men were willing to make such a sacrifice.⁸

In July of 1833, after learning of Wilson's plans, the ACS offered him the position of acting governor of Liberia. The post had remained vacant since the ACS had recalled its previous governor, Dr. Joseph Mechlin, in 1832. Wilson declined the offer, explaining that he "love[d] the privilege of preaching the gospel too much to give it a serious consideration."⁹ When Wilson rejected the job, the ACS offered it to another missionary, the Reverend John B. Pinney.¹⁰ The Presbyterian missionary organization, the Western Foreign Missionary Society

⁶ Hampden C. Du Bose, *Memoirs of Rev. John Leighton Wilson* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1895); E. F. Hening, *History of the African Mission of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971); Phillips.

⁷ Du Bose, 52-53.

⁸ At the last moment his associate, Brother Adams, withdrew from the plan making the excuse that his mother would not survive his going.

⁹ Du Bose, 54.

¹⁰ Arthur Judson Brown, *One Hundred Years; a History of the Foreign Missionary Work of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1936), 196-199.

(WFMS), had been formed in Pittsburgh in 1831 to facilitate African colonization by using the Presbytery network to raise money for the ACS. Soon after, the WFMS had decided to open a mission in Africa and it appointed Pinney, a Princeton seminary student, its missionary to Africa.¹¹ Pinney sailed for Liberia in January of 1833, and after exploring the country for four months he returned to the United States to report his findings. Encouraged by his report, the missionary society sent Pinney back to Liberia in November with three white associates: John Cloud and Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Laird, and a young black assistant missionary, James Temple. They arrived in Monrovia on the last day of 1833 to begin building the first formal American mission in West Africa. As head missionary, acting U.S. agent, and governor of Liberia, the young Pinney quickly assumed a great deal of responsibility.¹²

While Pinney was busy in Monrovia, Wilson made his way to nearby Cape Palmas. *Ann* reached the cape on February 11th, 1834 and the Americans immediately met with the local Grebo people. Dr. Hall purchased land from the Grebo leaders King Freeman, King Will, and King Joe Holland, and then set to work mapping out a town, building a fort, and dividing lots among the settlers. Meanwhile, the two missionaries, Wilson and Wyncoop, surveyed the possibilities for a mission. Pleased with what they found, they reported to the ABCFM that Cape Palmas “was by far the most suitable place for the location of a mission” that they had seen.¹³ The cape, located at the point where the windward coast meets the leeward coast, seemed to be a relatively healthy and strategic location; considerably more promising than the swampy Cape Mesurado where Monrovia was located. Wilson and Hall agreed that the mission would occupy a six-acre site fronting the sea. Wilson thought that “the elevation of the ground, its apparent healthfulness, and its distance from both the colony and the native

¹¹ A second missionary named Joseph Barr was supposed to accompany Pinney but he died abruptly, leaving Pinney to sail for Africa alone.

¹² Brown, 200-201. Colonists had established Methodist and Baptist churches in Liberia, but Pinney was the first white American missionary in Africa. The Methodist Episcopal Church Missionary Society’s first white missionary from America, Melville B. Cox, arrived in Liberia in March of 1833, just two months after Pinney, but he died after four months. Colonists Lott Carey and Colin Teague preached in the Baptist church, but the American Baptist Missionary Union did not send white missionaries to Liberia until 1835. Although all missionary societies relied heavily on black men and women to keep their missions in West Africa going, the legitimacy of the missions depended on the presence of a white missionary.

¹³ Du Bose, 67.

settlements, render it as suitable a place as could be desired.”¹⁴ He had brought the components of a wood-frame house with him and made arrangements to have it erected while he and Wyncoop returned to the United States.

Back in Baltimore, Wilson consulted with the MSCS and reported on the colony's progress. He married Jane Bayard on May 21st in Savannah, Georgia, and the newlyweds traveled to South Carolina where Wilson delighted his friends and family with stories of his African adventure. Wilson took every opportunity to ask local doctors for suggestions about treating fevers and for any other advice that might be useful to him in Africa.¹⁵ Climate and disease, which threatened to break a missionary's physical and mental health, were the greatest obstacles to a mission's success.

The ABCFM worried that severe challenges might make Wilson despondent, and the commissioners used a combination of encouragement, support, and guilt to bolster his faith and dedication to the mission. They argued that Africa was not the harshest climate a missionary might labor in, comparing Wilson's situation with “the Moravian missionary in the frozen regions of Greenland,” who, they explained, “is situated on one extreme of nature; where man, surrounded by icebergs and barren mountains, and dwellings on the verge of animated being, labors hard to collect the far-scattered elements of life.” Wilson's situation compared favorably with that frigid and desolate scene:

You will be on the other extreme; beneath the burning zone, with the soil teeming around you with vegetable life, and with the tribes and nations of men so many and populous, that the light, once enkindled, may radiate from people to people with reflected and multiplied brightness. Though many a white man hath there found an untimely grave, better is it, if God so order, to preach the gospel under the burning line, than beneath the frozen pole. The stream of your life may be shorter, but it will flow with a broader, deeper current.¹⁶

Although the commissioners expressed their sincere desire that Wilson live a long life, they recognized the probability that he would not, and they reminded him that the value of life should not be measured merely on a “scale of days and years.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 68-69.

¹⁶ “Western Africa - Nature and Objects of the Mission,” *The Missionary Herald*, November 1833, 399-403.

To the commissioners, Wilson, a southerner, seemed well suited to a life in the burning zone because he was presumably accustomed to a hot and humid climate. Perhaps a New England missionary might find the frozen tundra of Greenland more appealing, but a man from South Carolina should be more comfortable among the tropical beaches and dense, teeming soil of West Africa. Still, caution was prudent. As the ABCFM put it, “though you have been inured to a southern climate from your infancy, and are supposed to possess a constitution in a good measure adapted to the climate of Africa, your mission is planned with a view to save you from all unnecessary exposure of health and life.”¹⁷ A southern constitution was an asset, but not a guarantee.

The commissioners also compared Wilson’s situation with that of other adventurers. Many men routinely risked exposure to the African climate in search of fame or glory, for science or fortune. They asked, “From what part of the world, and by what amount of privation and peril, is commerce deterred from sending her missionaries for exploration and for traffic?” In the commissioners’ eyes, the men who risked their lives to find the Northwest Passage or the source of the Nile certainly risked more for less. They lamented that “the church should make so much of personal sacrifices, endured for the glory of Christ and the salvation of men, when the world accounts them so little, endured for the sake of wealth or fame.”¹⁸ This comparison did not lessen the dangers a missionary faced, but it did demean any complaints he might be tempted to make.

The Wilsons sailed from New York on November 7th on board the schooner *Edgar*. Jane suffered from severe sea sickness, but otherwise the journey was expeditious and comfortable. After a passage of thirty days they stopped at the island of Gorée, a popular French trading port off Senegal, where Wilson bought a small horse for his wife. He found the sight of land, especially Africa, refreshing. *Edgar* continued down the coast to Cape Palmas, where they arrived to a warm welcome on Christmas Day, 1834. Wilson described it in glowing terms, reassuring both himself and his associates back in the United States that his new Grebo neighbors were friendly and happy objects for his work:

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Our reception by the natives was, in their way, quite triumphant. We were carried ashore in the largest canoe about the cape, rowed by twelve or fifteen native men, who sang and rowed with great spirit from the time we left the vessel till we reached the shore. The king was the first to pay his respects, and has been particularly kind and friendly ever since. I made him a small present, in compliance with the universal custom of the country, and he, in return, presented me with a bullock. The natives generally pretend to feel interested in our object and claim me as *their man*, in distinction from the colony. They received us with loud acclamations of joy. More than five hundred of them are now around our door.¹⁹

This emphatically positive description is characteristic of the optimistic reports that these early missionaries and colonial leaders sent back to the United States. Positive reports reassured lonely and nervous authors who had placed themselves in precarious situations far from home, and they cultivated much needed support and followers back in the United States.

Wilson's description of their reception was not wholly exaggerated. The Cape Palmas Grebo were happy to welcome missionaries to their neighborhood because they perceived that a close association with Americans and access to western education would give them an advantage in local politics and trade. This belief had been the major reason why they had agreed to share the cape with the Maryland colonists in the first place. As part of his original agreement to buy land at the cape, Hall had promised to provide a school and a teacher for the local Grebo. The ABCFM had agreed to take over this responsibility in exchange for six acres of colonial land. So when Wilson arrived, the Grebo correctly perceived him as "their man;" they had effectively sold a portion of their land to buy his services. Wilson may have been right to say that the Grebo had little interest in Christianity, but they were sincere in their desire for western education.

Wilson was also extremely positive about the general landscape surrounding his new home. Excited and full of optimism, he described how:

The situation of our house is remarkably pleasant. I do not know that I have ever seen any place where the beauty and grandeur of nature are more harmoniously united. On the south we have a boundless view of the ocean, and the sea rolls on the beach with such tremendous and majestic power that our house is constantly jarred by the breaking of its mighty billows. On the east there is a salt lake eight or ten miles long, and we see at one view three native towns and colonial settlements. The north presents an extended plain of the

¹⁹ Du Bose, 71.

richest verdure, through which winds a beautiful fresh-water stream, which, from our piazza, may be traced to a great distance.²⁰

It was hardly a picture of the reputed white man's grave. Again, Wilson's descriptions of the area exemplify the extremely positive nature of these early reports. Wilson was sitting on top of his own little heathen-inhabited paradise, the ideal situation for a young ambitious missionary.

Wilson's first priorities, as instructed by the ABCFM, were to establish a boarding school to train laborers for the mission field and to gather information about the local inhabitants. The ABCFM planned to use this beachhead as a base for a network of mission stations along the coast and into the interior. Progress on this project was a matter of some urgency. The ABCFM estimated that between the coast of Guinea and the Sahara desert there were as many as twenty-five million souls in need of saving, and it worried that Arabs were "daily advancing" into this region with "the religion of the false prophet."²¹ The ABCFM was anxious to build a chain of Christian missions into the interior to combat the advance of Islam, and it was Wilson's responsibility to train suitable candidates from among the colonists and natives to man these stations.

Just as the Wilsons were settling in, Dr. Hall was looking to return home. Suffering from poor health, in June of 1835 he announced that he could no longer continue as the MSCS agent at Cape Palmas. In one of his last influential acts, Hall worked to convince the society to select a black man to run its colony. Hall had come to believe that the West African climate was particularly deadly for white men; he had watched the colony at Monrovia struggle as one white agent after another was broken down by fever, and he did not want the Cape Palmas colony to suffer from the same problems of unstable leadership. Initially, the MSCS rejected Hall's advice and appointed Oliver Holmes Jr., a white dentist from Maryland, to succeed him as agent. But when Hall returned to Baltimore in June of 1836, he continued to advocate for the appointment of a black governor. His personal experience and medical expertise gave him

²⁰ Ibid., 71-72.

²¹ "Annual Report," *The Missionary Herald*, January 1835, 5; "Western Africa - Nature and Objects of the Mission," 399-403.

significant influence over the MSCS board members, and he eventually persuaded them to offer the position to a Liberian colonist, John Brown Russwurm.²²

Dr. Hall and John Brown Russwurm had both grown up in Maine. Russwurm, the son of a Virginia merchant and his Jamaican concubine, was born in Port Antonio, where he lived until the age of eight. After spending four years at a Quebec boarding school, Russwurm moved to his father's home in Portland, Maine and attended Hebron Academy. Hall later remembered that when the elder Mr. Russwurm first came to Portland in 1811, he had not attempted to hide their relationship. According to Hall, Russwurm had been proud of his son and had "introduced him into the best society in Portland, where he was honored and respected."²³ In 1824, Russwurm went on to attend Bowdoin College. After graduating in 1826, he worked as an editor of the New York newspaper the *Freedman's Journal*. Dissatisfied with his life and its limited opportunities in the United States, he immigrated to Monrovia in 1829. One of the best-educated black Americans of his day, Russwurm quickly rose to a position of prominence in the colony where he served as superintendent of schools, colonial secretary, and editor of the *Liberia Herald*. In 1833, he married Sarah McGill, the daughter of Lieut. Governor George McGill.²⁴ Russwurm and Hall's common experiences in Portland, Bowdoin, and Liberia, and Russwurm's exceptional education, made Russwurm an obvious candidate for Hall's recommendation.

Despite his early success, Russwurm welcomed the opportunity to leave Monrovia. The schools he superintended received positive reports, as secretary he held an important role in public affairs, and the newspaper was successful under his editorship. He also prospered in his private business as a merchant trader. But as the colonial administrations of Mechlin and Pinney wore on, life grew increasingly difficult for Russwurm. When the colonial agents failed to pay out funds, a want of teachers and supplies forced Russwurm to close schools. When he tried to report on administrative incompetence or criticize policy in the *Herald*, the ACS

²² Campbell, 86-87, 90.

²³ Sandra Sandiford Young, "A Different Journey : John Brown Russwurm, 1799-1851" (Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 2004), 16.

²⁴ Amos Jones Beyan, *African American Settlements in West Africa : John Brown Russwurm and the American Civilizing Efforts*(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); William M Brewer, "John B. Russwurm," *The Journal of Negro History* 13, no. 4 (1928); Young.

censored him. Frustrated and depressed, he resigned from the paper. The offer to be chief administrator at Cape Palmas came at an opportune time, and Russwurm gladly accepted the position of power and authority that he believed he deserved.²⁵

Maryland in Liberia was only a few years old when Russwurm took over in 1836. Russwurm quickly realized that the colony urgently needed to improve its defenses. The colonists disliked Africans and often abused their Grebo neighbors. War could easily break out at any time and the colony would probably lose. Latrobe, now president of the MSCS, directed Russwurm to make the militia a more visible entity in the colony.²⁶

To maintain the most basic defense, Russwurm needed to enforce the colony's constitutional requirement that all men living in the territory, between the ages of sixteen to sixty, be enrolled in the militia. The majority of immigrants were women and children, and the colony suffered from a shortage of men, so it could not afford to excuse any man from militia duty. Russwurm faced a difficult challenge enforcing this provision. Although the colonists were generally quick to support a call to take up arms against the Grebo, they disliked drilling or performing any community service or public work. As the new governor, Russwurm assumed the difficult job of enforcing discipline.²⁷

The missionaries at Cape Palmas made Russwurm's task even more difficult. Wilson and the other missionaries were confused about their place in West Africa. They relished their independence, but they depended heavily on resources and accommodations provided by the colony. From the start, the ABCFM instructed Wilson on the importance of this relationship, explaining that the colonies were important auxiliaries, and that without them "the blighting influences of climate and of the slave trade combined, would wither all the missions we might plant upon the coast," ruining the missionaries' hopes of ever moving into the interior. The commissioners explained that the colonies served important functions by providing landing places, places of rest and refreshment, vital defenses, and by acting as posts of observation and inquiry. The ABCFM lectured to Wilson that the work done by colonists to collect

²⁵ Hall, 141-143; Young, 284.

²⁶ Campbell, 127-130; Martin, 96-98.

²⁷ Campbell, 130-135.

information, open roads, and establish commercial intercourse would “greatly facilitate” its mission’s “entrance among the several tribes and nations of the interior.”²⁸ In return, the colony would benefit from the spiritual, moral, and educational services that the missions would provide.²⁹

But despite his instructions, Wilson believed that it was best to maintain a clear distinction between the mission and the colony. He supported colonization in the abstract but he held a low opinion of the Liberian colonies. He admitted that Maryland in Liberia could set an example of civilized life for the Grebo, but he predicted that the colonists would “do very little in the way of communicating religious instruction.”³⁰ At the same time, he had no interest in preaching to colonists who were already nominal Christians. The true glory, he believed, came from introducing the gospel to the heathen. As far as Wilson was concerned, if he had wanted to preach to freed slaves, he could have stayed at home and saved his health.

The colony and the mission had enjoyed good relations during Dr. Hall’s administration. Wilson liked Hall and described him as an excellent man.³¹ The doctor was older, and Wilson respected his experience and authority. As a novice in Africa, Wilson had relied on Hall and looked up to him as a mentor, but when Russwurm took over, relations between the colony and the missions deteriorated. Russwurm, who was ten years older than Wilson, had been raised to believe that he was a man of quality. He was well-educated and considered himself to be the equal of men like Wilson.³² This attitude provoked the slave-owning missionary. Wilson disagreed with the MSCS decision to turn over administration to a colonist, and he determined to keep the mission separate from the colony in every way possible.

Despite frequent bouts of illness, the Wilsons continued to successfully build their mission. In 1836, Wilson was training fifteen boys and four girls at the Fair Hope seminary to be teachers and lay preachers, and his wife was running a common school where she taught

²⁸ “Western Africa - Nature and Objects of the Mission,” 402.

²⁹ Martin, 132-135.

³⁰ Phillips, 209.

³¹ Wilson’s description of meeting Dr. Hall in Baltimore when he was first planning to form an association with the MSCS, quoted in Du Bose, 57. Phillips also writes that Wilson acted as an informal adviser to Hall during his administration citing Alexander’s History of Colonization. As one of a small group of white men at the place it would have been natural for Wilson to associate with Hall.

³² In fact, Russwurm felt superior to the missionary because Wilson was a slaveowner.

younger children the rudiments of English and western culture.³³ Wilson reported that their pupils were making satisfactory progress, writing that “some of those who have only had three months’ instruction can read with tolerable ease.” He made regular tours into the interior, as far as 120 miles inland, to lay the ground work for additional mission stations.³⁴ In April of 1837, he reported that Fair Hope had grown to “assume a conspicuous appearance from the sea, and somewhat resembles a pleasant, airy, country village.” In addition to the mission house, they had built two other small dwellings, a church, a printing office, a study, a storehouse, and a boys’ dormitory. Next, they planned to start constructing a girls’ dormitory.³⁵

Wilson also worked on translating the Grebo language so that he could preach directly to the people and teach them to read the Bible in their own language. This would make it easier to train teachers, who would no longer need to learn English before they could begin teaching the gospel. The arrival of Mr. James the printer and the construction of a printing house made it possible for Wilson to start printing tracts in Grebo, and he began devoting much of his time to preparing books for the press. His first project was a vocabulary of the Grebo language.³⁶

About this time, the Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church (FMSPEC) decided to open its own mission at Cape Palmas. It began somewhat informally when the FMSPEC agreed to support colonists Mr. and Mrs. James Madison Thompson’s plans for a school. With the Protestant society’s backing, Thompson began to build a school at the cape. He negotiated with the colony for an elevated plot of ten acres at the end of Maryland Avenue, the colony’s main road, and by March of 1836, he began clearing the land and erecting a mission house and a school building; he already had seven students. The society named its mission Mt. Vaughan, after the secretary of the FMSPEC, the Reverend John A. Vaughan.³⁷

³³ “Missions,” *The Missionary Herald*, January 1837, 4.

³⁴ Du Bose, 79-81; “Mission at Cape Palmas,” *Religious Intelligencer*, 23 September 1837.

³⁵ Du Bose, 81.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Hening, 19-21.

Expanding on the Thompsons' plans, the FMSPEC began preparing three white missionaries to take over the Mt. Vaughan project: John Payne, a student at the Theological Seminary of Virginia, Launcelot B. Minor another member of the Virginia Diocese, and Thomas S. Savage, a doctor from Connecticut. Savage went out first to prepare things for the others. He sailed from Baltimore on November 1st in the brig *Niobe*.³⁸ Pleased with what he found in Africa, Savage praised Thompson's work:

His school, as has been his custom every Sabbath, was assembled at his house, at the Cape, and a few others, with his own family, were pouring out upon the altar which he has consecrated to God, the sweet incense of prayer and thanksgiving. Oh! never shall I, to my last breath, forget the emotions which swelled my bosom on this occasion.

Like Wilson, Savages' initial reports from Africa were enthusiastically positive and full of high praise for the local people and the surrounding area. Payne and Minor arrived at the cape months later, on July 4th, 1837.³⁹

Wilson quickly drew the Mt. Vaughan missionaries into his power struggle with Russwurm. Wilson tolerated the missionaries at Mt. Vaughan as long as they respected his seniority and followed his lead, and he expected them to support his assertion that the missions were beyond colonial authority. He insisted that anyone connected to Fair Hope was under his jurisdiction, not the colony's, and therefore exempt from militia service. Wilson stood on shaky ground, his decision contradicted his instructions and the ABCFM did not support it. The ABCFM had supported his decision to keep the mission separate from the colony, but it still considered the mission subject to colonial jurisdiction. After all, Fair Hope was situated in the colony on land that had been transferred to the ABCFM by the MSCS, just as any government might sell a parcel of public land. The colony had never surrendered its jurisdiction over that land.⁴⁰

Still, because of the circumstances, the colony did allow the missions certain exemptions. It classified white missionaries, like Wilson, as resident aliens and did not ask them to perform civic duties. This policy created a gray area that Wilson exploited. He argued

³⁸ Ibid., 22-23.

³⁹ Ibid., 52-53.

⁴⁰ John H.B. Latrobe to Rufus Anderson, 2 July 1838, Rufus Anderson to John H.B. Latrobe 25 June, 11 July 1838, H.R. 283, 101-108.

that anyone employed by the mission should be classified as a missionary. Russwurm objected, but Wilson and the ABCFM convinced the MSCS to extend the exemption to include black Americans specifically trained in the United States for work as teachers or mission assistants. If the ABCFM invested its resources in training these workers, the MSCS agreed that the mission should have the full benefit of their labor. But this extension did not cover colonists who became employed by the mission after they immigrated to the colony, or native Africans who came to work and live at the mission, leaving plenty for Wilson and Russwurm to argue over.⁴¹

The mission competed with the colony for scarce labor and Russwurm did not want to give Wilson any advantage. He complained that Wilson was recruiting the few young men that arrived at the colony. Young men who went to work for the mission to train as teachers or other such posts had just the sort of skills and raw potential that the colony needed to build its own workforce. The colony desperately needed skilled tradesmen and administrative staff, and Russwurm resented Wilson's attempts to siphon off the colony's most valuable resource: intelligent young men. Wilson was not only challenging his authority as governor, he was a threat to the colony's survival.⁴²

In actuality, only three black men: Benjamin James, John Banks, and John Dorsey, worked at the mission full time. James, the printer, qualified for an exemption because the ABCFM had recruited him in America. But Wilson had recruited the other two men in the colony. Both men had come out as colonists and had signed the colony's constitution, pledging their allegiance to Maryland in Liberia and agreeing to its terms. When Russwurm tried impressing them into the militia, Wilson interfered. Russwurm insisted that they serve, believing that enforcing the law at this early stage of the colony's development was essential. If he allowed these men exemptions, the missions would quickly become popular havens from public service, a duty that most colonists were eager to avoid. So when Banks and Dorsey

⁴¹ John H.B. Latrobe to Rufus Anderson, 2 July 1838, Rufus Anderson to John H.B. Latrobe 11 July 1838, H.R. 283, 102-108.

⁴² Hall, 155-156.

failed to enroll in the militia, Russwurm imposed fines on them and sent an officer to Fair Hope to collect.⁴³

Wilson responded to Russwurm's challenge by returning the deed to Banks' colonial homestead, and declaring that Dorsey, who had left the colony to open a new mission station, was now a non-resident. Russwurm and Wilson were at a stand-off and referred the dispute to their respective governing bodies back home. The MSCS and ABCFM exchanged a series of friendly letters, but the matter could not be resolved until Russwurm and Wilson reconciled their personal differences or one of them left the colony.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, like the ACS, the MSCS pinned its hopes for survival on the U.S. government. Naval vessels visiting the coast made a point to stop at Monrovia, but so far none had called at Cape Palmas. So when USS *Potomac* arrived at the cape in December of 1836, it was an occasion to celebrate. Latrobe happily commented that the visit "added greatly to the prestige of the colony with the natives, who had been altogether incredulous as to the Americans ever having any large vessels of war."⁴⁵

Between 1833 and 1836, the Maryland Colonization Society and the ABCFM invested a great deal of time and money in their West African projects. And the four men who led these projects: Latrobe, Hall, Russwurm, and Wilson, had taken great risks and made great personal sacrifices for what they believed could be great accomplishments and rewards. They all looked to the U.S. government, and especially to the navy, for support and protection for their fledgling interests from the many threats that surrounded them. They may have been optimistic, but their hopes were not unfounded. The United States had a practice of protecting Americans and their interests abroad, and as the next section of this chapter shows, President Jackson and the navy under his command, promoted and expanded this policy in various regions around the globe.

⁴³ Ibid., 174-176.

⁴⁴ John H.B. Latrobe to Rufus Anderson, 2 July 1838, 8 December 1842, Rufus Anderson to John H.B. Latrobe 25 June, 11 July 1838, 28 December 1842, H.R. 283, 101-110; Campbell, 130-135.

⁴⁵ Latrobe, 55-56.

U.S. Foreign Policy

During Jackson's presidency, naval visits to West Africa continued to be casual and sporadic, as they had been during John Quincy Adams' administration. Typically, vessels assigned to the Mediterranean or Brazilian stations would call briefly at Monrovia, but the government made these visits a low priority. Jackson's foreign policy focused on advancing American commerce around the globe, relying on a combination of diplomacy, treaties, and a revitalized navy. He believed in the importance of maintaining a strong peacetime naval force to protect the nation's honor and expand its commercial relations, but with few American interests and relatively little apparent commercial opportunity, West Africa held little interest for him.⁴⁶

In the past, the Americans had focused on protecting their interests closer to home, along the U.S. coastline, in the nearby Caribbean, and along the coast of North Africa, where it seemed important to compete for a share of the Mediterranean trade. Piracy had thrived during the Napoleonic wars and Spanish colonial revolutions, especially in the Caribbean. Between 1815 and 1823 the navy received reports of some three thousand attacks on American merchantmen. To combat this threat to American security and commerce, the government had created a West Indies naval squadron.⁴⁷ As American trade expanded around the globe, its vulnerability to pirates also expanded. By the 1830s, growing American interests in the southern hemisphere and the Indian Ocean seemed to warrant the same type of attention. Jackson could not tolerate attacks on American shipping, which he interpreted as disrespect for the American flag, and he used naval force to demand respect from villagers in far flung places and to avenge insults to American interests around the globe. In doing so, Jackson expanded U.S. policy for combating pirates and deterring threats to American commerce, and set a clear precedent for Americans to follow when the *Mary Carver* was attacked a few years later.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Belohlavek, 2-10; Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 19-20.

⁴⁷ E. B. Potter, *The Naval Academy Illustrated History of the United States Navy* (New York: Crowell, 1971), 58-59.

⁴⁸ Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 20. For a more detailed analysis of Jackson's foreign policy see: Belohlavek. This depiction contrasts with Howard Jones' theory that later U.S. foreign policy was rooted in isolationism. As the succeeding chapters show, Americans felt that significant naval responses were justified whenever American interests were deemed sufficient to warrant protection from imminent or ongoing threats.

In 1831, when the American merchantman *Friendship* was attacked off Quallah Battoo, a small port in the popular East Indian pepper trade, it was not unusual that the U.S. government dispatched a man-of-war to respond. *Friendship's* captain, Charles Endicott, had been ashore buying pepper when armed Malays boarded the vessel and attacked its crew, killing three Americans and wounding another three. Endicott escaped to a neighboring port where he organized a rescue mission. With the help of three American merchantmen, he returned to Quallah Battoo and successfully retook his looted vessel.⁴⁹

Massachusetts senator, Nathaniel Silsbee, was a senior partner in the firm of Silsbee, Pickman, and Stone that owned *Friendship*. Silsbee, along with a host of New England merchants and politicians, appealed to Jackson to take action, but Jackson did not need prodding. He interpreted the attack on *Friendship* as an insult to American honor and a sign that the United States needed to present a tougher image in that part of the world. He immediately sent the U.S. frigate *Potomac* to Sumatra. Capt. John Downes' orders instructed him to investigate the attack and demand either restitution of *Friendship's* plundered property or an indemnity. If the local officials did not comply with this demand after a reasonable time, then he was to seize any of the actual murderers and stolen property that he could find and destroy any boats that had been used in the attack. Finally, if necessary, the administration instructed Downes to destroy any forts and dwellings near the scene and threaten to inflict additional punishment unless the people swore to give up piracy and made full restitution.⁵⁰

Despite the latitude given to Downes, he had to use caution when carrying out this mission. Officers were responsible for producing the desired result (restitution and punishment), but they were also expected to bring honor and respect to the American flag. They needed to follow the accepted protocol, beginning with investigation, diplomacy, and demands, and including punishment only as a last resort if necessary. Downes must have had his friend and mentor David Porter's experience in mind when he received this assignment. In 1824, Commodore Porter had landed a party of two hundred marines and sailors in the Spanish territory of Puerto Rico to demand an apology from the town of Fajardo for sheltering pirates

⁴⁹ Endicott reported losing specie and goods worth \$41,054 in the attack. Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 26.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

and insulting American naval officers. But Porter had been too aggressive and the navy had court-martialed him for overstepping his authority. Downes came dangerously close to meeting the same fate, but Jackson protected him and in the process changed American policy.⁵¹

Potomac reached Sumatra on February 5th, 1832, a year after the attack on *Friendship*. Finding no vessels on the coast, Downes ignored his instructions to investigate the case. Claiming that diplomacy would be pointless, he did not present any demands for satisfaction or restitution to the officials at Quallah Battoo. Instead, on February 6th, he landed with 250 marines and sailors and attacked the town. The marines killed over one hundred Malays and burned the town and its forts; they did not recover any stolen property or indemnity. The following day, *Potomac* bombarded the town until its people raised a white flag. Only then did Downes meet with local officials. After determining that neither recovery nor restitution was possible, he left. *Potomac* made a brief cruise of the neighborhood and then returned to the United States.

When news of Downes' actions reached Washington, Jackson chose to publicly support him. Privately, Jackson was angry that the captain had disobeyed his orders. In the midst of a re-election campaign, Jackson's political enemies were on the attack. At first, the opposition press criticized Jackson for the incident. While not willing to criticize Downes, the opposition accused Jackson of abusing his authority by initiating a war without congressional authorization. The pro-Jackson press defended him by framing Downes' actions as a necessary defense of American honor and the just punishment of savage pirates; it accused critics of being soft on piracy. The opposition responded by painting the Malay as sympathetic victims, describing them as civilized people who had achieved respectable progress in the arts and literature.⁵² The legitimacy of these heavy-handed military tactics was tied to the racial and cultural status of the victims. Portraying the Malay as half-naked savages made it easier for people to imagine them as ruthless pirates, therefore justifying the naval response. The distinction implied that naval commanders should only be expected to use diplomacy when dealing with civilized people.

⁵¹ Belohlavek, 161-162.

⁵² Ibid., 158.

Congress investigated the Quallah Battoo incident, but dropped the case as soon as it realized that Downes had violated his instructions. The public never criticized Downes, whose actions were praised as brave. And Jackson was only angry at the officer for disobeying his orders and causing a political scandal; he approved of Downes' action against the Malay. The failure to obtain restitution was disappointing, but Downes had successfully punished the natives, demonstrated the power of the American navy, and restored honor to the American flag.

Another dispute, this time over American fishing rights off the Falkland Islands, occurred at roughly the same time, and gave Jackson a second opportunity to demand respect for the American flag. In July of 1831, Argentinian authorities seized the American vessel *Harriet* for hunting seals in violation of local regulations. Military Governor Jules Vernet arrested *Harriet*'s captain, held its crew at Port Soledad, and sent *Harriet* to Buenos Aires for trial.

U.S. sloop *Lexington* arrived at Buenos Aires in December, and after learning of the seizure, Capt. Silas Duncan immediately demanded the release of the Americans and their property. He threatened to sail *Lexington* to the Falklands and effect the restitution himself if the Argentine government did not agree to his demands within three days. He also demanded that they try Vernet as a pirate and a thief. When the Argentinians did not comply with Duncan's demands, *Lexington* sailed for the Falklands and destroyed the islands' colonial defenses and arsenal. Duncan ordered the arrest of several colonists, seized property belonging to *Harriet*, and gave notice that interference with American fishing rights was piracy.

When Jackson learned of the seizure he immediately issued special instructions that belittled Vernet's authority, and directed the navy to investigate the matter and defend American fishing rights. Although Vernet had been appointed by the recognized government of Buenos Aires, the Americans denied his authority and called him a pirate. Jackson characterized Vernet as a renegade who was using the Falklands as a base for piratical acts, thereby justifying his order to break up Vernet's operation and deliver him to Buenos Aires for trial. Duncan acted before he received Jackson's orders, but when the president eventually

read Duncan's report, he immediately supported the captain's actions. Although there was some public criticism, Americans generally approved of Duncan's actions because he had clearly acted to defend their rights.⁵³ Again, the characterization of Vernet as a pirate, although an obvious exaggeration, helped legitimize the navy's aggressive response and its clear disregard for diplomatic protocol when dealing with weak or supposedly inferior peoples.

Americans had always relied on their navy to combat piracy and protect commerce. They did not object to aggressive action, including burning villages, but in the past these extreme measures had only been used after diplomacy had failed. People had expected the navy to at least make a perfunctory diplomatic overture before resorting to force, even if it was only a pretense. Officers like David Porter, who had ignored this protocol, had been punished. Jackson's aggressive use of the navy to defend American commerce around the globe and expansive definition of piracy modified U.S. foreign policy and changed public perception. Officers no longer faced court-martial for bypassing diplomacy when dealing with supposedly weak and inferior people. Although the navy's actions at Quallah Battoo and the Falkland Islands failed to recoup financial losses or resolve diplomatic disputes, Americans considered them successful because they had avenged American honor and asserted American rights. Some Americans questioned this new disregard for diplomacy, but in general the American people increasingly came to accept that diplomacy could be bypassed when dealing with inferior, uncivilized peoples.

Jackson's interest in foreign policy followed American commercial interests, which consequently made Africa a relatively low priority for his administration. Although Americans participated vigorously, and sometimes dominated trade in African ports, on average, trade with Africa totaled less than one percent of overall U.S. foreign commerce. Jackson pursued commercial treaties in Egypt and East Africa, where he perceived potential for growth through cultivated relationships with powerful leaders like Mehmet Ali and the Sultan of Muscat, but

⁵³ Ibid., 182-190; Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 29-30.

markets in West Africa were small and diffuse and had yet to demonstrate significant promise. The current policy of making occasional visits to the coast seemed more than sufficient.⁵⁴

Jackson's policies suited the times; American interests in West Africa were new and relatively undeveloped. Latrobe, Hall, Russwurm, and Wilson all hoped for greater support from the U.S. government and the American people. And although Jackson had little interest in West Africa, they were not entirely disappointed. These men, with their stakes in the new Maryland colony, wanted some sort of attention from the government, and in 1836 they received it when a U.S. naval vessel visited Cape Palmas for the first time.

The U.S. Navy and Liberia

Although the navy had played an instrumental role in establishing the first colonial settlement at Cape Mesurado, it had not paid much attention to the Liberian colonies since. Occasionally, a man-of-war attached to the Mediterranean squadron would call at Monrovia for a brief visit, but the navy did not assign any vessels to the African coast. Still, these sporadic naval visits helped to cultivate support for the colonies in the United States. The colonists acted as gracious hosts, entertaining and courting officers with generous dinners and educational tours that showed off their farms and settlements to the greatest advantage. Officers from varied backgrounds were frequently won over and grew sympathetic towards the poor, struggling settlers. For example, USS *Ontario*'s captain wrote: "Since I have visited this colony, I have felt a strong interest in its prosperity, and hope that it will thrive under the auspices of a society, among whom are some of our most distinguished citizens."⁵⁵ Similar to the early letters penned by American missionaries to West Africa, sympathetic officers sent positive reports back to the United States describing the settlements as tropical paradises along the Atlantic coastline. These reports downplayed the dangers of deadly fevers, insisted that the climate was more salubrious than generally supposed (at least for colored persons),

⁵⁴ See: Norman Robert Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 95, no. (1959); Clendenen and Duignan; Howard, "American Involvement in Africa South of the Sahara, 1800-1860".

⁵⁵ John B. Nicolson to Henry Clay, 17 March 1828, H.R. 283, 815-817.

and offered constructive advice for continued improvements. American newspapers published many of these reports, further helping to promote the colonies and their interests.

USS *Potomac* visited Cape Palmas and Monrovia in December of 1836. Describing the visit, Capt. J. I. Nicholson noted that the colonies had grown significantly in recent years. He estimated Monrovia's population at about one thousand, and its annual exports at \$75,000. He reported that about seventy-five vessels stopped at the port each year, one-third of which were American.⁵⁶ Overall, Nicholson gave the colony a mixed review, explaining that wars between neighboring African peoples, prompted by slavers, had significantly depressed its trade. He wrote that:

Not only has [the slave trade] diverted the industry of the natives, but it has effectually cut off the communication with the interior. The war parties being in the habit of plundering and kidnapping for slaves all whom they meet, whether parties of the war or not, the daring of the slaver increases with the demand for slaves, which could not of late be supplied by the usual means. The slavers have, therefore, excited the natives to war, by the distribution of their goods, an appeal to their avarice which is but too successful, and within a year four slave factories have been established almost within sight of the Colony.⁵⁷

Frequent wars, caused by the demand for slaves, were threatening the colony's survival.

Colonists wanted to defend themselves and to destroy the slavers' operations, but they lacked the necessary resources to mount such an attack. When *Potomac* arrived, they appealed to Nicholson for help. The captain reported that:

the colonists say they are deterred from marching to destroy [the slavers], by the certain revenge to which their helpless trading vessels are exposed. If the slavers were kept from the coast, which, I am informed, could be effected, if the colony possessed an armed vessel, to be manned by their own people, this cause of four fifths of the wars would be removed and the natives would return to their peaceful pursuits.⁵⁸

Nicholson wanted to help the colony. He believed that an expanded naval presence in West Africa could help combat the slave trade and protect American commerce, and he forwarded the Liberians' request for arms and ammunition to the Navy Department.

Naval visits also offered more tangible and immediate assistance to the colonies.

Officers often supplied the colonies with whatever arms and ammunition they could spare, and

⁵⁶ Joseph J. Nicholson to Mahlon Dickerson, 8 January 1837, *New Bedford Mercury*, 31 March 1837.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

the U.S. flag flying atop a man-of-war helped to demonstrate Americans' power and strength to West Africans. Nicholson described how *Potomac's* arrival had helped colonists settle a dispute with their African neighbors at the Bassa Cove settlement. About one hundred and fifty colonists lived at the new settlement situated at the mouth of the St. John River, about fifty-miles south-east of Monrovia. Forty houses were defended by a few pieces of artillery. According to Nicholson, the settlers' "good understanding with the natives had been occasionally interrupted by the influence of the slavers; but on the appearance of this ship all differences were settled by a treaty by Mr. Buchanan [Bassa Cove governor] and the neighboring Princes, or head men, obliging themselves to renounce the slave trade forever, and to be obedient to the laws of the Colony, as far as practicable in their condition."⁵⁹ Sympathetic naval officers were pleased to lend their impressive guns to support the colonists' plans for territorial expansion, domination of the coastline, and suppression of the slave trade.

From Bassa Cove, *Potomac* sailed south to Cape Palmas. Nicholson was particularly impressed by the Maryland colony and thought that Harper, the colonial town, was a model settlement. He noted that it appeared to have "profited by the errors of the older colonists, in avoiding as yet all trade with the natives of the interior, and devoting their whole energies to agriculture." And he predicted that "in due time a large and profitable trade in camwood, ivory, rice and palm oil will reward their prudent forbearance."⁶⁰ Nicholson counted about 190 residents occupying fifty-four houses at Harper. Beyond this central town, the colony extended along twenty-five miles of coastline from Rocktown to the Cavally River, and up river forty miles to Denah. Colonists shared this territory with two Grebo towns and about two thousand Grebo people.

The Maryland settlement's progress impressed Nicholson. He wrote, "The colonists appear to be on very good terms with all the Kings and people of the neighborhood, and I cannot refrain from expressing my agreeable surprise, at the evidence of industry and foresight that were exhibited through the settlement – so much have they advanced in solid prosperity in the short space of three years." Once again, the Americans used the man-of-war to

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

demonstrate their power. Nicholson invited some of the Grebo headmen on board *Potomac*, and reported the success of this diplomatic effort. "They were so much astonished at her size," he wrote, "that for want of language to convey their impressions to their friends, they measured her length and breadth with fishing lines."⁶¹ While the Grebo had heard of such vessels, *Potomac* was the first American warship to ever stop at Cape Palmas.

Potomac's visit to the coast helped encourage Americans to pay closer attention to West Africa. Several newspapers printed Nicholson's report of growing American interests in West Africa, and the positive tone of his findings encouraged support for those interests.⁶² In addition to Liberian colonies and missions, Americans were also developing an interest in trade along the coast. By the time *Potomac* visited West Africa, most European-controlled ports had reduced protective tariffs and were allowing Americans to trade on a non-discriminatory basis. Positive reports from naval officers like Nicholson encouraged more American merchants to take a chance in West Africa.

American Trade in West Africa

When Jackson took office, Americans were looking for markets to trade in. The British had closed their West Indian ports to Americans in 1826, and those ports remained closed until 1830. In the meantime, Americans sought new markets for their goods. A few men looked to West Africa for opportunities. Some established markets existed in West Africa, but they were mostly controlled by Britain and France. Europeans had been competing for trade and establishing informal colonial control along the West African coast since the late eighteenth century. Although the volume of that trade never compared to trade with the West Indies, they prized West Africa for its commercial potential and wanted to establish trade monopolies there.⁶³ France dominated the Senegambia region of the windward coast and the British attempted to monopolize the territory on either side of Sierra Leone.⁶⁴ European customs

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "American Colonies in Africa," *New Hampshire Patriot*, 5 June 1837.

⁶³ Brooks, 74-75.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 184.

officials did their best to enforce trade laws and customs duties, but even with naval support these restrictions were difficult to enforce.

The presence of American traders complicated European efforts to control trade along the West African coast. Americans held several advantages over their European competitors: American goods were popular and consistently in demand in West Africa, European merchants could not profitably compete with Americans in the popular tobacco or rum trades.⁶⁵ Americans were the biggest traders in Senegambia, largely due to their love for peanuts, a developing Gambian export.⁶⁶ And Americans could usually find a ready market for American flour and other familiar foodstuffs in European and settler communities throughout the region.

The rising prospects of West African trade attracted a few enterprising American merchants including Johnson Williams, a successful merchant from Waterville, Maine. Williams formed a partnership with another local merchant and shipbuilder, Nathaniel Gilman, and the new firm of Johnson Williams & Company began building vessels on speculation. Soon after, the business relocated to Bath, a busy port town at the mouth of the Kennebec River. In addition to shipbuilding, Johnson Williams & Co. also engaged in trade. With West Indian ports closed to Americans, they began speculating in Africa. On December 21, 1829, the company sent its vessel *Transit*, under the command of Capt. Charles Thomas, to West Africa. *Transit* returned to Bath on June 3rd of the following year with a cargo of hides and ivory. Despite the death of the mate, Isaac Crooker, it appeared to have been a successful voyage.⁶⁷ Thomas returned to Africa with *Transit* in 1831 and again in 1832, each time returning safely to Maine with a cargo of hides and ivory.⁶⁸

In January of 1832, Williams & Co. expanded its African business by sending a second brig, *Lydia*, to Africa. The small firm was growing and its preliminary success encouraged its owners to increase their investment in the West African trade. They commissioned master

⁶⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 6-7, 182, 185.

⁶⁷ William A. Baker, *A Maritime History of Bath, Maine and the Kennebec River Region* (Bath, Me.: Marine Research Society of Bath, 1973), 241-242.

⁶⁸ Gilman had been building ships and riverboats at Waterville since 1807. From 1825 to 1835 Johnson Williams and Co. commissioned at least another eleven or twelve vessels. Ibid., 306-307, 318-319. On 16 April 1824, Johnson Williams & Co. offered the newly constructed hull of the 138-ton brig *Governor King* for sale in the *Maine Gazette* of Bath. They advertised their cargoes for sale in local papers, for example: *Maine Inquirer*, 27 July 1832.

builder James Lowell to build another new brig, the 214-ton *Macandy*, designed especially for the African trade. After three successful voyages to West Africa, Thomas was the obvious choice to command *Macandy*, but when he demanded that the firm double his monthly salary from \$100 to \$200, Williams, Gilman, and their new partner Ebenezer Farwell, replaced him with Capt. John Thomas of Bowdoinham, Maine at the old pay rate. The fifty-year-old John Thomas had been at sea for thirty-one years, and commanding merchant vessels for the past twenty-four, but he did not have the same African experience. The decision would turn out to be a costly mistake for Johnson Williams & Co.⁶⁹

After a rough trip down the Kennebec River, *Macandy* made the open Atlantic on September 7, 1833. She reached the Cape Verde Islands in late October, where Thomas traded for hides before sailing for the African coast. By December, the brig was on the Rio Nuñez, a popular trading center. Thomas recorded *Macandy*'s arrival in the ship's log:

Brig Macandy in the Rionoonos 3d December 1832 Comences foggy and wind off the Land... at ½ Meridian got under ay with a light Breeze and Stood up the River aith the Flood tide End calm.

Tuesday 4th all this 24 hours nearly calm. Toed up got as far as the settlement on the Banks of the river my self very unwell.

Wednesday 5th light airs and very hot Got up to our anchorage and mored Ship my self very sick.⁷⁰

It was the last entry he made. Sick with fever, Thomas died on December 9th and was buried at sea. *Macandy* was suffering a serious outbreak of fever, in addition to her captain, the vessel also lost three of her crew. *Macandy* finally returned to Bath on August 9, under the command of first mate William Mc Lanathan, with just five of her original complement. But despite the risks that the loss made all too real, Williams & Co. continued to employ *Macandy* and *Transit* in the African trade; and in 1835, the firm's young new partner, Eben Farwell, seized the opportunity created by Thomas's death and took command of *Macandy* himself.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 242-243.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 244-245. *Macandy* Log Book, Capt. John Thomas Papers, M175, Bowdoin College.

Eben Farwell & Vassalboro, Maine

Eben Farwell's gruesome murder would make his death an object of national attention, but in life Farwell was never a particularly important man. Rather, he was a seemingly ordinary young family man from a respectable family of country gentlemen on the Maine frontier. By virtue of Maine's relative power and influence in national government, and the Farwell family's connections and proximity to the centers of state power in Augusta and Portland, Eben Farwell had a few advantages in his early life that served him well. He relied on these connections, opportunities, and influential friends to help him succeed in his early years, without them he would never have gone on to captain the *Mary Carver*.

Eben Farwell lived on a parcel of the Farwell family farm in Riverside village in Vassalboro, Maine. His parents and extended family of brothers, sisters, in-laws, and cousins all lived nearby. They were a prominent, comfortable, well-established local family. Eben's great-grandfather, Isaac Farwell, had helped found the town in the 1760's, his father, Capt. William Farwell, shared business interests with several of the area's leading men, and Eben was a successful young family man with a promising future.⁷¹

Incorporated in 1771, the township of Vassalboro was one of only thirty-four towns in Maine prior to the Revolutionary War. Part of the colonial American frontier, Vassalboro and central Maine grew during the American War for Independence, despite the hard times and scarcity of food. The colonists who settled this territory migrated from southern New England, mainly Cape Cod and New Hampshire, leaving behind crowded villages for "virgin" farmland to the north. By 1790, Maine's population had increased from pre-war estimates of 29,000 to 96,540, with seventy-two incorporated towns.

In 1800, Maine's population reached 151,719, with 126 towns. Vassalboro was part of what Alan Taylor calls the frontcountry: territory settled earlier by more affluent people who had either purchased land from the Great Proprietors or, like Isaac Farwell, had been granted

⁷¹ John Dennis Farwell, Jane Harter Abbott, and Lillian Mae Wilson, *The Farwell Family, a History of Henry Farwell and His Wife Olive (Welby) Farwell of Boston, England, and Concord and Chelmsford, Mass., 1605-1927, with Twelve Generations of Their Descendants; Also Lineages of Many Allied Families, with a Hundred and Fifty Illustrations from Original Photographs, Daguerreotypes, Oil Portraits, Etc.; Records of John Dennis Farwell* (Orange, Tex.: F.H. Farwell and Fanny B. Farwell, 1929), 87-88, 230-231.

land claims by the king. In contrast, backcountry towns were typically settled later by poorer people: squatters who took possession of the land, made improvements, and then hoped to retain ownership. While backcountry settlers in central Maine mounted an agrarian resistance movement against proprietary landowners, frontcountry towns like Vassalboro maintained important links to influential and prominent businessmen in New York and Boston and generally prospered.⁷²

Vassalboro's location on the eastern banks of the Kennebec River facilitated its participation in Maine's diverse economy and the town's early success. Vassalboro shipped surplus agricultural produce down river to Atlantic ports, and the townspeople built ships right along the banks. The neighboring town of Hallowell was a bustling seaport. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich describes how "from early April to late November, ocean-going vessels sailed up the Kennebec, forty-six miles from the open Atlantic, bringing Pennsylvania flour, West Indian sugar, and English cloth and hardware, returning with shingles, clapboards, hogshead and barrel staves, white ash capstan bars, and pine boards destined for Boston or Bristol or Jamaica."⁷³ Although it was an agrarian community, Kennebec County was also a busy commercial center and inland seaport.⁷⁴

Vassalboro's inland topography supported a mixed economy of agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce.⁷⁵ Shipping and commerce were important to the town, but they never dominated its economy or its political interests. Most men found their primary employment in agriculture and supplemented their income with manufacturing and commerce. Residents took advantage of the good soil, rolling hills, streams and riverfront access to build a productive, diversified community.

⁷² Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 253.

⁷³ Laurel Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 3.

⁷⁴ See also: Henry D. Kingsbury and Simeon L. Deyo, *Illustrated History of Kennebec County, Maine; 1625-1799-1892* (New York: Blake, 1892); Ernest Cummings Marriner, *Kennebec Yesterdays* (Waterville, Me.: Colby College Press, 1954); James W. North, *The History of Augusta, from the Earliest Settlement to the Present Time: With Notices of the Plymouth Company, and Settlements on the Kennebec; Together with Biographical Sketches and Genealogical Register* (Augusta, Me.: Clapp and North, 1870).

⁷⁵ George Jones Varney, *A Gazetteer of the State of Maine* (Boston: B. B. Russell, 1886), 551.

Vassalboro's location on the Kennebec River also meant that it maintained close and easy access to Augusta and Portland, the centers of political and commercial power in Maine.⁷⁶ Of the four original Kennebec County towns, Hallowell, Winthrop, Winslow, and Vassalboro, the latter never developed much cultural activity. Residents established schools, churches, post offices, mills, and factories, but no library or newspaper. They were content to rely on their neighbors in Hallowell, the county seat, for news and entertainment.⁷⁷ As the population of the county grew, Hallowell was subdivided and the northern portion, which bordered Vassalboro, became the town of Augusta.

Eben Farwell was born June 30, 1808 at his family's farm *Seven Oaks* in Vassalboro.⁷⁸ He was named for his paternal grandfather, whose family had been one of the original ten families to settle the area. In 1771, Ebenezer Farwell married Jane Howard, daughter of Colonel Samuel Howard, who was stationed at nearby Forts Halifax and Western. The Howards were agents for the Kennebec proprietors and prominent ship owners who controlled much of the traffic on the Kennebec River.⁷⁹ On the strength of his own family history and his advantageous marriage, the elder Ebenezer established himself and his family as important and respected figures in the county. He served as a town selectman, town treasurer, and justice of the peace. He performed hundreds of marriages and rendered verdicts in local criminal cases. Together with his father Isaac, Ebenezer built *Seven Oaks*, a two-and-a-half story federal house.⁸⁰ At his death in 1807, his estate was valued at \$1,920 and included: 215 acres of land, several farm buildings, ten head of cattle, twelve sheep, four swine, and a fifty-percent stake in a grist mill.⁸¹ Prosperous and influential, Ebenezer Farwell was one of Vassalboro's most successful first-generation residents. While a handful of wealthy men owned property valued at over \$5,000, the majority of property-owners held assets worth between \$500 and \$2,000.⁸²

⁷⁶ For the history of Vassalboro see: Alma Pierce Robbins, *The History of Vassalborough, Maine, 1771-1971*(Clearwater, Fla.: 1971).

⁷⁷ Clarence Albert Day, *A History of Maine Agriculture, 1604-1860*(Orono, Me.: Printed at the University Press, 1954), 142.

⁷⁸ Farwell, Abbott, and Wilson, 366.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 141-143.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 141; Angela M. Foster, *Vital Records of Vassalboro, Maine*(Rockport, Me.: Picton Press, 2003), 1-9, 59-60.

⁸¹ Inventory of the estate of Ebenezer Farwell, Esq., recorded 19 December 1807, Kennebec County Probate Court, Augusta, Maine.

⁸² Vassalboro Tax Records, 1806, VHS; Inventory and Valuation of Vassalborough, 1839, MSL.

By the time Eben was born, the Farwells were comfortably situated at the top of Vassalboro's middle economic class.

By 1817, the town of Vassalboro was developing into a comfortable, if still quite rural, hamlet. Residents completed construction of the town meeting house in Riverside and opened a second post office at Brown's Corner near the Farwell farm. The town welcomed its new Congregational missionary, the Reverend Thomas Adams, who organized the first regular services at the new meeting house. And the largest tannery in New England was operating in the village of North Vassalboro. When Maine entered the Union in 1820 with 298,335 citizens, 2,434 of them lived in Vassalboro.⁸³

William Farwell, Eben's father, prospered as both a sea captain and farmer. His wife, Elizabeth Horn, and his mother, Jane Howard, both came from influential shipping families that helped establish him in business. When William retired to the family farm, it included: 120 acres, two horses, seven head of cattle and a few swine. He had built a large Cape Cod-style frame house facing the river and planted an orchard alongside. He owned a chaise to carry the family to meetings at the Riverside meeting house, and held shares in various local mills. But William's success would be difficult for his sons to replicate. Rapid growth in the area was already putting pressure on growing families. William owned only half as many acres as his father had, and it would be impossible for all four of his sons to thrive in Vassalboro as farmers.⁸⁴

Instead of farming, William Farwell's sons went to sea to make their living. The eldest, William Howard, died of yellow fever during a voyage to the West Indies. The third son, James Dumeresq, served as a volunteer officer during the Mexican War and Irish famine, but quit the sea to try his luck in California, where he eventually prospered as a merchant and developer during the boom years. The youngest son, Albert, briefly tried to follow his brother's example

⁸³ Sarah B. Adams, *Reminiscences of the Churches and Pastors of Kennebec County*(Hallowell, Me.: Register Job Print, 1894); Calvin Montague Clark, *History of the Congregational Churches in Maine : Vol. 1, History of the Maine Missionary Society, 1807-1925*(Portland, Me.: Southworth Press, 1926), 287-288; Robbins.

⁸⁴ Inventory and Valuation of Vassalborough, 1839, MSL; Farwell, Abbott, and Wilson, 230-231.

but gave up and soon returned home. Of all the Farwell brothers, Eben had the most success as a merchant sailor.⁸⁵

On January 6, 1835, twenty-six-year-old Eben Farwell married twenty-four-year-old Laura Walter Abbott in Sidney, Maine.⁸⁶ Like Eben, Laura came from a respected local family. Her father, Joseph Rodney Abbott, held various political offices including: representative to the state legislature, registrar of deeds, town clerk, and justice of the peace. He held a liquor license, operated a shop, owned a pew in the Riverside church, and served as head of the local Masonic lodge.⁸⁷ Joseph Abbot was not a wealthy man, but he was active in local Whig politics and had many connections to important men in Kennebec County.

Shortly after his marriage, Eben took command of *Macandy* and sailed to Marseille on his first voyage. The young couple's future looked promising, but Eben Farwell's first voyage as captain of *Macandy* did not go as smoothly as his partners might have hoped. When *Macandy* returned to New York, the cook William Morris brought libel charges against the captain, claiming that Farwell had failed to pay him his wages and owed him \$34.70. The court issued a warrant for Eben's arrest and set bond at \$100.⁸⁸ There is no surviving record to indicate how the case was resolved, but shortly afterwards Eben set sail again. *Macandy* returned to New York from Rum Key on July 6, 1836 without much notice.⁸⁹ Later that year, when Eben Farwell embarked on yet another voyage in *Macandy*, with good family connections, established business partners, and a good ship under his command, the young captain's future seemed to be wide open.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 231, 368-370.

⁸⁶ "Marriages," *Kennebec Journal*, 21 January 1835.

⁸⁷ *Christian Register*, 20 September 1822; *Christian Intelligencer and Eastern Chronicle* 2 March 1827; "Abolition of Capital Punishment in Maine," *Christian Register and Boston Observer* 12 August 1837; "Steamboat Meeting," *Kennebec Journal* 15 August 1838; "Great Whig Meeting," *Kennebec Journal*, 5 September 1838; *Kennebec Journal* 10 March 1843; "Brandreth's Pills Advertisement," *Kennebec Journal* 19 January 1844; "Masonic," *Kennebec Journal*, 19 January 1844; "Senatorial Convention," *Kennebec Journal*, 2 August 1844; Inventory and Valuation of Vassalborough, 1839, MSL; Foster, 67-74, 226; Kingsbury and Deyo, 1099. See also: "Inventory of the Estate of Joseph R. Abbot," recorded March 1851, Kennebec County Probate Court, Augusta, Maine; Deeds 102:422, 102: 423, 124: 580, 126: 166, 194: 507, 201:160, Kennebec County Registrar of Deeds, Augusta, Maine.

⁸⁸ William Morris v. Eben Fairweather, NARA RG21, M919, Admiralty Cases, roll 41, case# A-IA-178. The defendant in this case is named Eben Fairweather, master of the Brig "*McAndy*" and while there is no evidence to definitively confirm that this is the same Capt. Eben Farwell it is most probable. Eben Farwell was known to be a part owner of *Macandy* and in command of the brig later in 1836, shortly after this case. There are no records of another Brig named "*McAndy*" or "*Macandy*" active at this time. Records for *Macandy* are relatively complete for this period and do not mention a Captain Fairweather. Finally the similarity of the names Eben Fairweather and Eben Farwell suggest that there was some mistake or possibly alias in the case as names were often misspelled or given wrongly in court documents of this time.

⁸⁹ *Portland Eastern Argus*, 12 July 1836.

Conclusion

By the time Andrew Jackson left office in 1837, Americans' interest in West Africa was increasing. The actions of a small number of ambitious young men who saw opportunities for rapid success in Africa were beginning to attract public attention. American colonization societies, missionary organizations, and merchant trading firms tested the waters and reaped favorable results that encouraged them to increase their investments in the region.

The early success of one small merchant trading company in Maine attracted the attention of an ambitious young yeoman named Eben Farwell. With the support of a good and prosperous family, Eben not only had the means to invest in the firm, but was able to win the confidence of his partners and take command of one of their most valued vessels. Although still young and inexperienced, after a few initial voyages Farwell was ready to captain his first trading voyage to West Africa.

American interests in West Africa were not yet significant enough to capture the attention of older and more established businessmen. The volume of the trade in that part of the world was still relatively small compared with American interests elsewhere, and the risks were still quite high. But reports authored by naval officers during periodic visits to the coast encouraged interest in the region and reassured Americans about the viability of these commercial, political, and philanthropic projects.

President Jackson and his administration concentrated their efforts to protect and expand American commercial interests in other sectors of the globe where these interests were more developed. Jackson used the navy to aggressively avenge attacks on Americans and defend their interests in areas that were beyond the immediate control of European powers. He justified the use of severe force by labeling people in these areas pirates and savages. This practice built on precedent and firmly established this U.S. policy. As a result, Americans had every reason to expect that as their investments in West Africa grew, the navy would defend and protect them as well. In 1837, Americans had good reasons to be optimistic about their growing interests in West Africa.

From 1830 to 1836 a few young Americans planted seeds for American commercial and philanthropic interests in West Africa. They often struggled, but they achieved enough success to attract increasing attention and support back in the United States. During the coming decade, when West Africa, colonization, and the slave trade would become subjects of significant political and diplomatic concern in the United States, Americans would look at these small but growing projects with increasing interest. And when West Africa became the subject of diplomatic conflict for Americans in the 1840s, they would rely on the policies and precedents established during Jackson's tenure.

CHAPTER 4

CAPTAINS OF THE FLAG: THE AMERICAN FLAG AND THE SLAVE TRADE, 1836 - 1840

West Africa had not been very important to the United States during Andrew Jackson's presidency. American interests in that part of the world had been too small and too new to attract much attention. But circumstances changed quickly and Americans' interest in West Africa increased significantly during Martin Van Buren's presidency. The infant colonies, missions, and commercial interests that Americans had planted were growing, and both supporters and detractors in the United States followed their development with interest. And a dramatic change in the Atlantic slave trade, involving alleged American participation, put West Africa at the center of a diplomatic dispute between the United States and Britain that Americans could not ignore.

Changes in the slave trade during the late 1830s drew the United States into a heated diplomatic dispute with Britain that Americans followed with interest. Britain added a new equipment clause to its slave trade suppression treaty with Spain which allowed the British navy to seize Spanish vessels for carrying slaving equipment. In response, slavers began to fly the U.S. flag for protection on their outbound voyages. The United States refused to participate in any such treaty, and consequently its flag protected vessels from being searched by the British navy.¹ This obstacle frustrated the British, and they pressured the United States to concede the right of search, like Spain and Portugal, and allow their navy to police American vessels. Americans steadfastly refused to concede this right and frustrations mounted. By the end of the decade Britain was accusing practically every American vessel sailing the Atlantic of involvement in the slave trade.

Historians have not written very much about American foreign relations during the Van Buren years. Histories of the slave trade generally describe the period from 1824 to 1841 as a

¹ Fehrenbacher and McAfee, 161-163.

time when the United States did little to suppress the trade. British historian Christopher Lloyd writes that for twenty years the British failed to make any progress in their effort to increase American cooperation in the fight to suppress the slave trade, and concludes that the British were compelled to continue the work alone.² But in their haste to discuss the Webster-Ashburton treaty of 1842, Lloyd and other historians gloss over the important series of events that led up to that treaty.³ This is a serious oversight considering that the treaty was meant, at least in part, to address issues that developed during Van Buren's presidency. This limited understanding has led to erroneous conclusions about the U.S. government's motives for creating the treaty and the Africa squadron.

This chapter takes a closer look at the events of the late 1830s and argues that they had a direct influence on U.S. policy regarding West Africa. The United States did not suddenly take an interest in West Africa when Daniel Webster and Lord Ashburton opened treaty negotiations in the spring of 1842; Americans had been developing an interest in that region throughout the 1830s, first with the seeds of interest planted in the form of colonies, missions, and commercial ventures, and then second as the British placed increasing pressure on the U.S. government to help suppress the slave trade. As this chapter argues, a detailed understanding of these events is necessary to explain how and why the United States created the Africa squadron just a few years later. The Van Buren administration developed its West African policy based on events, precedent, and long-standing American beliefs, and in turn this policy had a direct influence on the subsequent administration when it came to negotiate the treaty with Britain.

Donald Canney has come closest to pointing out that Van Buren's decision to send cruisers to West Africa was a notable change in U.S. West African policy, but Canney focuses almost exclusively on the navy and the slave trade, ignoring the diplomatic side of the story.⁴ Canney's analysis also suffers from an oversimplification of Britain's West Africa policy. He assumes that the British were driven solely by their philanthropic desire to suppress the slave

² Lloyd, 52.

³ Harmon, "Suppress and Protect the United States Navy, the African Slave Trade, and Maritime Commerce, 1794-1862", 76-77; Lloyd, 52-55; Soulsby, 51.

⁴ Canney, 22-27.

trade, but ignores Britain's commercial interests.⁵ Canney mentions almost no politicians or diplomats from this period by name, and his explanation of the American position on West Africa and the slave trade is narrowly limited to the right of search issue. Although he briefly lists some of diplomatic incidents from this period, and asserts that repercussions from these events "brought an appropriate response," he does not explain specifically how or why these incidents led Van Buren to order naval cruisers to stop ongoing British practices.⁶ Canney's descriptions are correct, but they are incomplete, and they fail to adequately explain these events, which ultimately precipitated the U.S. decision to form an Africa squadron in 1842.

This chapter describes and analyzes the Van Buren administration's policy towards West Africa and events that preceded the Webster-Ashburton treaty in closer detail than previous studies. It incorporates both the diplomatic and naval aspects of the story to form a more complete history of this period, and draws new connections that produce new conclusions about U.S. policy, the Africa squadron, and its purpose. Lloyd's conclusions are far too pessimistic; Britain did force Americans to get more involved in the effort to suppress the slave trade after 1836. The British accomplished three things in particular: they forced American courts to rule on the issue of foreign vessels fraudulently flying the American flag, they forced an investigation and ultimate resolution to the problem of corruption at the American consulate in Havana, and they forced the United States to send the first naval cruisers to West Africa in fifteen years. Britain may not have extracted the right of search from the United States, but it did force the Van Buren administration to pay closer attention to West Africa and related issues.

The British practice of stopping and searching American vessels outraged Americans, caused a flurry of diplomatic activity, and ultimately forced Van Buren to station U.S. naval cruisers on the West African coast for the first time.⁷ By the end of his term, Van Buren admitted the need for a regular naval presence on the African coast to protect American

⁵ Steven Mitton argues that British policy regarding the slave trade during this period was heavily influenced by, and perhaps inseparable from, British commercial interests because their "Great Experiment" of emancipation and free labor had proven a failure and therefore the British were attempting to level the playing field by promoting worldwide abolition. Mitton.

⁶ Canney, 22-27.

⁷ Since 1824, U.S. cruisers had only made brief, intermittent visits to the coast of West Africa while assigned to other squadrons in the Mediterranean or Caribbean. And these visits were largely confined to Monrovia.

interests from the British, investigate accusations against Americans, discourage abuse of the U.S. flag, and protect American honor. By this time, Americans' interest in West Africa had significantly increased. It was no longer a place that only ambitious young men cared about; it was the scene for yet another battle with Britain. As a result, the U.S. government could no longer afford to ignore West Africa.

This chapter follows the development of American interests in West Africa as they grew during Van Buren's presidency. It begins by describing Eben Farwell and his character, establishing just what sort of man the United States avenged during the *Mary Carver* affair. The second section describes changes in the slave trade after 1836, its effects on Liberia, and the growing diplomatic dispute between the United States and Britain that followed. These events prompted Van Buren's decision to send naval cruisers to West Africa for the first time, an important change in U.S. West African policy that set the stage for the creation of the U.S. Africa squadron.

Eben Farwell

Eben Farwell's character is important to the story of the *Mary Carver* affair and the history of the Africa squadron. The United States used his murder to justify sending a naval squadron to West Africa and destroyed a string of African villages to avenge him. It stands to reason then that Americans should want to know what sort of man they were risking the safety of their sailors and marines for. But curiously, during the *Mary Carver* affair people said almost nothing about Farwell the man. Instead, they used him as a symbol of American trade and enterprise to advance their own private and political interests. But just as knowledge of Farwell's life and character was irrelevant or even threatening to those interests, it is necessary to fully understand the *Mary Carver* affair and its role in the creation of the Africa squadron.

Eben Farwell first invested with the Maine trading firm of Johnson Williams and Company in the early 1830s. Although small, the firm was growing, and by 1836 it had moved from Maine to New York City, and the senior partners, Johnson Williams and Nathaniel Gilman

decided to trust Farwell with the command of one of their newest vessels, the *Macandy*.⁸ Farwell spent the next several years captaining voyages to Europe, the Caribbean, and West Africa, and with each successive voyage he got into more and more trouble. His name frequently appeared in lawsuits and news reports, all of which revealed some new defect in the young captain's character. He was developing a reputation as a man of questionable character, and ultimately parted ways with his business partners, but he never received widespread attention. The trials of Eben Farwell were of limited concern to his fellow sailors and merchant captains in the Northeast and to the residents of New York City and Kennebec County Maine where Farwell divided his time on shore.

Eben Farwell came from a successful seafaring family. These connections provided him with business opportunities at a relatively young age, and he quickly rose to a position of respectability as a sea captain and small land owner in Maine.⁹ On the surface, he appeared to have an ideal American life that included a new wife and young son. But his character and actions brought him into frequent contact with the law and his fortunes changed. His friends and connections supported him at first, but he never seemed to learn from his mistakes. By the end of the decade his friends and business partners abandoned him.

On December 22, 1836, twenty-eight-year-old Eben Farwell set sail from New York in *Macandy*, bound for Portugal. Things started going wrong immediately. Before *Macandy* even cleared New York waters, Farwell was already in danger of losing control of the vessel. It was not a good sign when some of the crew mutinied as they were just getting under way. The captain, the pilot, and a few riggers managed to sail the vessel down to Sandy Hook, at the southern end of the bay. Farwell put two of the mutineers in irons and threatened to hold them prisoner until he could deliver them to the American consul in Portugal, but the pilot convinced the men to return to their duties and the captain released them. The mutiny was thus put down, but the incident was just the beginning of what turned out to be a very

⁸ Johnson Williams and Nathaniel Gilman relocated their businesses to New York City sometime in the 1830s. In addition to the shipping interests, Nathaniel Gilman also was a partner in the firm of Gilman, Smull, and Company of New York City. They specialized in hides and leather. Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa; a History through Documents, 1802 to 1865*, 283, 308.

⁹ Farwell, Abbott, and Wilson, 366.

troubled voyage. By the time *Macandy* reached Figueroa, Portugal on January 26th the cook was dead, and Farwell stood accused of his murder.¹⁰

John Brown, who was described as a bright mulatto man, had signed on as cook and steward for *Macandy*'s voyage to Portugal. It was the twenty-three-year-old's first experience at sea, and he clearly lacked the necessary skills for the job. His incompetence became obvious to everyone on board within the first few days of the voyage. Brown failed to serve meals at regular times, and often spoiled the food. The crew found his hair in their food and considered his cooking inedible. Brown ignored Farwell's orders to tie his hair up, and so the captain ordered it cut off. Brown was clumsy and ill prepared for the voyage. He wore lightweight, warm-weather clothing that was too big for him and fancy dress shoes with heels: totally inappropriate attire for a winter voyage across the Atlantic. The legs of Brown's trousers dragged on the deck and he always seemed to be tripping over them, dropping things, and breaking dishes. The crew complained that his oversized shirt sleeves repeatedly dragged in their food. Farwell ordered Brown to tie up his clothes or have them cut off as well, but Brown also ignored this order. By the second week his condition had not changed, he was not doing his duty, and he was dirty and sloven. Annoyed, Farwell relieved Brown from his duties, leaving the men to cook for themselves.¹¹

Farwell also removed Brown from his berth in the state room and made him sleep in the long boat with some pigs. He had Brown's cotton shirt sleeves cut off at the elbows, his duck trousers cut off at the knees, and his hair cut. He reassigned Brown to more general duties: mostly chopping wood, pumping ship, greasing and sloshing the masts, and taking turns at the wheel. And he kept Brown at work most of the day and night. Crossing the Atlantic in cold and rainy January weather, the crew wore pea jackets, flannel shirts, mittens, and other warm clothing. Brown, in contrast, climbed the masts in his bare feet, without any coat or

¹⁰ Eben Farwell Case File, U.S. Circuit Court, Southern District, New York, NARA; Also in: NARA RG 21, M885, roll 1, Criminal Cases, Defendants A-G.

¹¹ For details of the case see depositions given by *Macandy* crew members: James Bell, Walter Landells, George Gundy, and James Mc Turk, 8, 9 August 1837, Eben Farwell Case File, U.S. Circuit Court, Southern District, New York, NARA RG 21, M885, roll 1, Criminal Cases, Defendants A-G.

hat, and his shortened clothes were often wet from working the pump. Brown did have some additional clothing on board, but he was not allowed to wear it.

Farwell flogged the cook often and even made Brown tie himself to the rigging. After two or three days of hard labor and sleeping in the long boat, Brown became ill. His legs swelled so much that the crew had difficulty removing his boots. When Brown's condition worsened he was moved to a berth in the forecastle. Farwell provided him with food and medicine and Brown continued to work for some days more. Then, on January 17th, twenty-six days out, Brown died at about a quarter to five in the morning. The crew sewed up his body in a blanket and carried it on deck, and at eight o'clock, Farwell read prayers over the body and it was thrown overboard.

When *Macandy* reached Figueroa nine days later, Farwell reported Brown's death to the American consulate.¹² On February 16th, four of *Macandy*'s crewmen were called before Vice Consul Edward Baker to sign a statement swearing that Brown had "found himself so ill and unable to do his duty or keep on deck from severe attacks of the Venereal disease which increased so much on him that on the Seventeenth day of January 1837 he expired, notwithstanding every attention that circumstances would admit of was shown and given to the said John Brown."¹³ Shortly after, *Macandy* returned to the United States. Eben Farwell returned to his home in Vassalboro. When Farwell returned to New York in May, he was a wanted man. While he had been visiting his family in Maine, *Macandy*'s crew had changed their story. U.S. District Attorney William Price had charged him with assault and cruel and unusual punishment causing the death of John Brown, and the U.S. District Court in New York had issued a warrant for his arrest.¹⁴

When U.S. marshals arrested Farwell in New York on Friday May 19th he did not go quietly. Farwell knocked one of the marshals to the ground with a "severe blow on the breast," and fled. "The captain escaped, but the officer recovering, went in pursuit and

¹² "Shipping News," *Portland Eastern Argus*, 4 April 1837.

¹³ Statement of the crew of the brig *Macandy*, 16 February 1837, Figueroa, Portugal, Eben Farwell Case File, NARA.

¹⁴ United States vs. Eben Farwell, Indictment for Cruel and Unusual Punishment, U.S. Circuit Court, 3 August 1837, Eben Farwell Case File, NARA.

overtook the prisoner in the park.”¹⁵ After his failed escape attempt, marshals delivered Farwell to the court. He was arraigned and the court set bail at \$2,000. Things did not look good for Farwell. The *New York Journal of Commerce* reported, “The particulars of the case, as deposed to yesterday [at the arraignment], evince such a refinement of cruelty, that in justice to the accused, we consider it right to suppress them until they are fully substantiated, or disproved, on his trial.”¹⁶

On August 3, 1837, a New York grand jury indicted Eben Farwell, charging him with assaulting John Brown from “malice and hatred and revenge and without any justifiable cause,” and with cruel and unusual punishment.¹⁷ The court granted the defense a delay so that Farwell’s witness, Anthony A. Ganvia of Virginia, could travel from Portugal to New York to testify on his behalf. Finally, in November, Farwell went on trial before Judge Betts and Judge Thompson. The prosecution’s case rested on the testimony of the four crewmen who had signed the statement exonerating Farwell at Figueroa. Their stories varied, but as the *New York Morning Herald* reported, they all testified that the “captain had behaved with great severity, and as they said, cruelty towards the cook, both before and after he was taken sick.”¹⁸ The prosecution argued that exposure to the elements had either caused or hastened Brown’s death, and for having made him sleep in the boat and depriving him of adequate clothing, Farwell was responsible.¹⁹

The defense stipulated to most of the facts in the case: that Brown had been removed from his duties as cook for incompetence, that he had been made to sleep in the long boat, that his shirt and trousers and hair had been cut off, that he had been made to cut wood and pump ship, and that he had been given a berth in the forecastle sometime before he died. Defense attorney John Morrill argued that Brown had caused his own misfortunes and that Farwell’s actions had been justified and reasonable, considering the circumstances. He

¹⁵ “Charge of Murder,” *The New-Yorker*, 27 May 1837, 152.

¹⁶ “From the *New York Journal of Commerce*,” *The Liberator*, 2 June 1837, 92.

¹⁷ United States vs. Eben Farwell, Indictment for Cruel and Unusual Punishment, U.S. Circuit Court, 3 August 1837, Eben Farwell Case File, NARA.

¹⁸ “Important Trial,” *New York Morning Herald*, 18 November 1837.

¹⁹ In addition to the crew men’s depositions, the case file also includes papers filed by Eben Farwell’s attorney relating to the witness Anthony Ganvia. Eben Farwell Case File, NARA.

suggested that Brown had been sick when he shipped on *Macandy*, and that this illness, combined with his ineptitude, had caused his death.²⁰

The defense claimed that early in the voyage it had been obvious that Brown was dirty and slovenly, and that Farwell had thought the cook had venereal disease and lice. Crew member Walter Landells testified that the captain had found a three-inch long vial of clear medicine in Brown's bag which Farwell had called spirits of niter. The defense suggested that this and another medicine in Brown's possession proved that he had shipped sick. The crew disagreed and testified that Brown had initially appeared healthy, and that his illness had been the result of mistreatment and exposure. They added that Brown had denied having venereal disease. But the defense claimed that Brown was put in the long boat as a sort of semi-quarantine, not from malice; and likewise, that his hair had been cut off because of the lice, not as some arbitrary act of abuse. And defense witness Anthony Ganvia, who had worked out his passage to Portugal on board the brig, testified that Brown had been barred from the forecastle and removed to the long boat because the crew had complained about him.²¹

The defense also blamed Brown for not bringing the proper clothing for the voyage. His clothes had been too light and did not fit, and his heeled shoes had been totally inappropriate. After watching him fall on deck several times, often breaking dishes, Farwell had them cut short. And as for the wet conditions on board ship, the defense explained, it had rained a fair amount during the voyage, and as the crew testified, *Macandy* was a leaky ship. After losing his position as cook, Brown had been expected to perform some duty, so he had been made to cut firewood and pump ship, and since it was so leaky, a lot of pumping had been necessary. Pumping was a wet job and the defense implied that Brown had been better off in short pants than falling down in wet clothes. Morrill portrayed Brown as an incompetent fool who had no idea how a sailor should act. He had been sick when he came on board, and his legs had swelled up from the venereal disease he had contracted before shipping, not because he had slept in the long boat and been exposed to the elements. The defense concluded that under

²⁰ Information about the case is primarily found in the crew men's depositions in the case file, these include cross-examinations by the defense.

²¹ Eben Farwell Case File, NARA.

the circumstances, Farwell had dealt reasonably with Brown, while still enforcing discipline among a crew that had challenged his authority from the beginning.²²

In contrast, the prosecution portrayed Farwell as a cruel master who had withheld simple considerations from a sick man, and argued that this abusive treatment had caused Brown's illness and hastened his death. The crew testified that Brown had asked permission to return to the forecastle to die, and although Farwell had allowed him to move, Brown was given a berth with no mattress. The prosecution contended that this was another example of the cruelty that Farwell inflicted upon the dying man. The defense countered that Brown's mattress, still in the long boat, had been soaking wet, and that Farwell had ordered it to be dried out; and Walter Landells testified that "all the beds were wet, [because] it leaked very much forward."²³ They had all had to make due. At first one of the men had shared his mattress with Brown, and then later the captain gave him a mattress from the cabin.

The defense argued that Farwell had done everything reasonably possible for the sick man: he had given him medicine, and had tried to make him comfortable in the forecastle. And then John Morrill stood up and delivered what the *Herald* described as "one of the most eloquent and masterly speeches we ever heard in that court." According to the *Herald*, Morrill:

alluded to the certificate before the consul at Figueroa – showed its variance with the testimony given in this city – the discrepancy in the testimony of the witnesses for the prosecution – their variance with the witness for the defence, except on those points which went in favor of the captain – met boldly the points on which the district attorney rested principally for a conviction – repelled them readily – scattered the evidence for the prosecution like chaff – contended that the cook did not do harder duty than any other seaman, nor even such hard tasks – he merely took his turn at the pumps because of a serious leak. In short, he left no point of attack untouched, and before he sat down, it was evident that he had convinced the court and jury of the propriety of acquitting Capt. Farwell.²⁴

The court reminded the jury that this was an important matter involving the character and reputation of Captain Farwell. The Farwell and Abbot families were well-connected in Augusta, the new state capital, which bordered the town of Vassalboro. Several important

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "Important Trial."

Maine politicians including the governor, the state secretary of state, U.S. Sen. Reuel Williams,²⁵ and State senators, Luther Severance²⁶ and Elijah Robinson, provided affidavits testifying to Farwell's good character and "highly respectable" family connections, and "universally esteemed him as a man of correct deportment and human disposition."²⁷

Then the court instructed the jury on the law. In 1835, Congress had attempted to protect the comforts and rights of seamen by delineating the type, and restricting the amount, of punishment that captains could inflict on them. In order to meet the standards of this law, the court explained, the prosecution must prove that the captain had inflicted cruel and unusual punishment with malice, anger, or hatred. In this case, the court continued, it may have been proved that Farwell had been cruel to Brown while he was cook, by kicking him and so forth, but that no evidence had been presented to show that he had acted maliciously. After Brown had been turned off his duties as cook, the court further explained, the cruelty he suffered (such as having his clothes and hair cut) could not be considered punishment for neglect of duty because technically he had no duties. Finally, the court concluded that the captain had been justified in putting Brown to work at something. Although Brown, who continued to work and take orders, was clearly still acting as a member of *Macandy's* crew, the

²⁵ Reuel Williams was born in Hallowell, Maine, in 1783, just a few miles from the Farwell farm. After studying law he went to work for Augusta attorney James Bridge. Having developed a thriving law practice he was elected to the Maine State legislature in 1812. And for the next twenty-five years he held various state political offices before being elected to the Senate in 1837. John A. Poor, *Memoir of Hon. Reuel Williams : Prepared for the Maine Historical Society ; Read at a Special Meeting of the Society in Augusta, February, 1863*(Cambridge, Mass.: Privately printed by H.O. Houghton and Co., 1864). Williams had represented Eben's father William Farwell and the extended Farwell family was active in local business that often involved the county courts. Williams was in a good position to know the character of Eben Farwell's family and connections. In 1809 William and his cousin Jeremiah Farwell sued a yeoman named James Doe for payment of a debt of \$413.48 and both Williams's and Bridge's names were listed as parties, presumably attorneys, to the case. Kennebec County U.S. Court Records, Maine State Archives, May 1809, vol. 3, no. 1566, 246, box 34-15. Williams clearly knew William Farwell, and as Farwell had his share of dealings in legal and business matters, appearing in the Kennebec County Court records in at least five cases before 1837, it is probable that the two men were well-acquainted.

²⁶ State senator, Luther Severance, was also acquainted with Eben Farwell's family connections. A newspaperman, Severance had quit the *National Intelligencer* in 1824 and moved from Washington D.C. to Augusta, Maine where he established his own paper the *Kennebec Journal*. Severance was an active player in Maine party politics, in addition to publishing the *Journal* he also served in both houses of the state legislature. James Gillespie Blaine, *Memoir of Luther Severance*(Augusta, Me.: Printed at the office of the Kennebec journal, 1856). As a local Whig leader, Severance was acquainted with Eben Farwell's father-in-law, Joseph Abbot, another active member of the Augusta Whigs. Joseph Abbot's name is occasionally mentioned in news reports of local Whig Party functions in the Augusta, Maine area. The *Kennebec Journal* noted that Joseph R. Abbot was present at a Whig party meeting in Augusta, September 5, 1838. Senator Williams may have known Abbot at the time as well. The following summer the two men served on a local committee assembled to investigate citizen concerns about the dangers of steamboats. Abbot served as the committee's secretary. *Kennebec Journal*, 15 August 1838.

²⁷ Copies of these affidavits have not been found, only the Herald's description in its article: "Important Trial."

court reasoned that after losing his position as cook he was no longer entitled to the protections the law afforded to sailors.²⁸

The court was skeptical of the sailors' testimony. It warned the jury that seamen were apt to swear to the facts loosely and together as a crew. It granted that the prosecution had presented evidence of some pretty harsh treatment, but a guilty verdict required proof that the severe treatment had come from improper motives in each specific instance. Judge Thompson charged the jury in a manner described by the *Herald* as "lucid, fair and masterly," at which point the jury returned a not guilty verdict "without leaving their seats or deliberating two minutes." And with that, Farwell left the courtroom with many friends who warmly congratulated him.²⁹ He had much to celebrate: he was a free man and a few weeks later his wife Laura gave birth to their first child, William H. Farwell. But the good times were short lived. Within months, U.S. Marshals were looking for Eben Farwell again.

After the tragedy of the *Macandy* voyage, Eben Farwell returned to sea in command of the old Johnson Williams' vessel *Transit* and sailed for West Africa. *Transit* traded along the coast for some months, and at some point took four Africans on board, including a young boy named Yazee. On the return voyage, Yazee became ill, and when *Transit* reached the United States Farwell sent the sick boy to stay with his father, William Farwell, in Maine. *Transit* arrived in New York on May 25th, 1838.³⁰

Later that summer, anti-slavery activist David Ruggles discovered three emaciated Africans alone in New York City. They did not speak any English, but they managed to explain their situation to Ruggles. As one newspaper described, "It appears that three of them were turned adrift in [New York] to shift for themselves, without a knowledge of our language."³¹ Acting on behalf of the Africans, Ruggles filed a complaint against Farwell in U.S. District Court, and on August 24th U.S. marshals arrested Eben Farwell again.

This time, the prosecutor charged Farwell with kidnapping the four Africans and bringing them to New York for the purpose of enslaving them. The case came before Judge

²⁸ Eben Farwell Case File, NARA.

²⁹ "Important Trial.," "Trial for Cruelty at Sea," *New Bedford Mercury*, 30 November 1837.

³⁰ "Marine Journal," *Salem Gazette*, 29 May 1838.

³¹ "The Charge of Importing Africans," *The Liberator*, 14 September 1838.

Betts, who had presided over Farwell's trial the previous year. At a hearing the following day, Farwell explained that he had hired the men as regular seamen and claimed he had paid them regular wages. Judge Betts set bail at \$5,000, *Transit* was bonded for that amount and Farwell was discharged.³²

The court delayed the trial for a week so that Yazee could be brought from Maine to New York. At the next hearing on September 5th, Farwell demonstrated that the men had been hired to assist in navigating *Transit* home and that three of them had been paid off and discharged when they reached New York. The fourth, Yazee, had been left to convalesce with the Farwell family in Maine "until an opportunity should be afforded of sending him home to Africa."³³ As the *New York Spectator* put it, "The act under which Captain Farwell was accused, applies only to cases in which persons are brought into the country with intent to make them slaves, and as there was no appearance of such intent on the part of the captain, the complaint was of course discharged." His behavior, setting these poor, ignorant men adrift in the wilds of New York City may have seemed callous and distasteful to some, but it did not meet the court's definition of kidnapping or enslavement.

The surviving evidence does not suggest that Farwell was directly engaged in the slave trade. More likely, he found himself short handed, and selfishly took advantage of these African sailors.³⁴ It is possible that he had selfish motives for taking Yazee to Maine, possibly thinking that the boy would make a convenient servant at home or on a subsequent voyage.³⁵

³² "Another Case of Importing Slaves," *The Emancipator*, 30 August 1838; "Another Case of Importing Slaves," *New York Morning Herald*, 24 August 1838; "The Charge of Importing Africans.," "U.S. District Court - More Slave Cases," *The New-Yorker*, 25 August 1838. Some of these articles identify the vessel name as *Criterion* and some as *Transit*. All evidence indicates that case in question involved Farwell and the *Transit*. There were two vessels named *Criterion* active in the Northeast in 1838. One was American and commanded by a Capt. George Richards, the second was English and commanded by a Captain Tisdale. The reports of Captain Farwell in command of *Transit* are most certainly correct as he was affiliated with *Transit*'s owner, Johnson Williams & Co. Additionally, there was a case in U.S. Admiralty Courts in August of 1838: *United States v. Transit*, NARA RG21, M919, Admiralty Cases roll 46, case# A-IA-466. Unfortunately, this case file is missing from both the NARA microfilm and original manuscript files. Farwell's bond was recorded in the minutes of the court NARA RG21, M886, roll 8.

³³ "The Kidnapping Case," *New-York Spectator*, 6 September 1838.

³⁴ Captains sometimes employed this practice when necessary, but did not typically abandon African sailors in the United States with little hope of finding return passage. For example, another Johnson Williams' vessel, the brig *Robert* carried one Africa sailor back to the United States on its return voyage from West Africa in 1841. This same African sailor shipped with the *Robert* when she returned on a new voyage to Africa the following year. Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa; a History through Documents, 1802 to 1865*, 298.

³⁵ The *Transit* returned to the African trade under a new captain. In 1839 she became entangled in local African politics in the Rio Nuñez region and was later captured and ransomed. She was condemned shortly thereafter and left some property and unfinished business in the Gambia. Another vessel, also owned by Johnson Williams & Gilman, the *Robert*, was sent out in 1840 and given the responsibility for cleaning up the *Transit*'s affairs. *Ibid.*, 283-291.

The Kennebec papers did not take much notice of the case, and only printed a passing reference stating that Farwell had been discharged, “it having been proved that they entered his service voluntarily.”³⁶ Meanwhile, Eben returned home to Maine. Laura gave birth to their second child, Joseph Farwell on March 22, 1839, and a few weeks later Eben went back at sea in yet another vessel.

The merchant vessel *Franklin* cleared New York harbor on April 16, 1839, bound for Liverpool, under the command of Eben Farwell.³⁷ Not much is known about *Franklin*, but it probably did not belong to Johnson Williams & Co. The partners seem to have parted ways after the *Transit* case.³⁸ Perhaps Farwell had become too big of a risk; his character too questionable, his conduct too controversial. Whatever the case, Farwell continued to find vessels to captain and crews to command.

Franklin’s voyage to Liverpool was anything but peaceful. The vessel carried a number of passengers and personal conflicts turned into violent confrontations. Spoiled and inadequate provisions on the return crossing made matters worse. When they returned to New York in July, the captain and crew filed complaints against one another with the court. Farwell accused the crew of having attempted a revolt and marshals arrested the men.³⁹ The steward, John Jewett, alleged that Farwell had assaulted and imprisoned him, and the mate William Vittle claimed that Farwell had assaulted him with a dangerous weapon. On July 19th, marshals arrested Eben Farwell for the fourth time in as many years.⁴⁰

Franklin had carried several passengers during the voyage. Jewett’s wife Sarah had come along as a cabin passenger, and according to the *Herald*, the steerage passengers included “some very interesting and rosy cheeked Irish lasses.” Farwell took a special interest in one of these girls, Mary Ann Hely, whom he “adopted” and moved into the cabin on the second day of the voyage. This relationship raised eyebrows on board and in the courtroom. As the *Herald* drily remarked, “Whether she did duty, or kept watch of a night did not appear,

³⁶ *Kennebec Journal*, 17 October 1838; *Maine Farmer*, 25 September 1838.

³⁷ “Shipping News,” *Charleston Southern Patriot*, 20 April 1839.

³⁸ Eben Farwell’s estate paid Johnson Williams \$79.38. The notation reads “val. on writ” possibly suggesting that there had been some sort of litigation between the two parties: Account of the estate of Eben Farwell, recorded April 1851, Kennebec County Probate Court, Augusta, Maine.

³⁹ *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, 18 July 1839.

⁴⁰ Eben Farwell Case File, NARA; *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, 22 July 1839.

but one thing was certain, that the young lady always had the weather side of the quarter deck, and the best seat at the dinner table.”⁴¹

The captain’s behavior upset Mrs. Jewett, who had “looked gingerly” upon the “captain’s lady.” Mrs. Jewett’s attitude caused a row between the captain and her husband the steward that ended with Jewett shut down in the run, in irons, for three days with only biscuits and water and two small pieces of beef to eat. Jewett’s case against Farwell rested on the testimony of the two women, Mrs. Jewett and Mary Ann Hely, who gave such different accounts that the prosecution had little chance for a conviction. The *Herald* commented that “somehow or other they both seemed laboring under a very extraordinary hallucination of ideas while on board, or else to see and hear a very different state of facts, if facts they can be termed, when one sort must undoubtedly be what Col. Stone calls false facts.”⁴² Justice Kirtland also heard the mate William Vittle’s case against Farwell. Vittle accused the captain of threatening his life, telling the court that Farwell had brandished a cutlass and threatened to run him through, and that as a result he had been in constant fear for his life for the remainder of the voyage. Kirtland set Farwell’s bail at \$300.⁴³

Eben Farwell was probably not too worried about the outcome of these cases; his experience had certainly taught him that it was difficult to convict a master of cruelty. Order and discipline on the high seas demanded that a captain be the master of his ship and courts were reluctant to second guess a master who used a heavy hand. Masters also held higher social and economic positions than sailors and junior officers, and often had important business and political connections. The *Herald* acknowledged that “there are many and obvious reasons why but few of the many charges of cruelty, brought by seamen or petty officers against ship-masters are ever sustained,” but this was one captain that it hoped to see convicted. The paper opined, “We do hope and trust that this case will prove an exception, especially when it is remembered that the accused only escaped a conviction of manslaughter by the skin of his teeth; and that very few persons who listened to that testimony but were of opinion that if the

⁴¹ “U.S. Marshal’s Office,” *New York Morning Herald*, 22 July 1839.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Bail in the Jewett case was set at \$100, and at \$200 in the Vittle case.

poor negro's death did not lie at the door of Eben Farwell, he at least accelerated and embittered that poor wretch's unhappy doom."⁴⁴ The *Macandy* case still haunted Farwell, and by now it was clear to the people of New York that he was a man of questionable character.

On July 31st, district attorney B.F. Butler filed two indictments against Eben Farwell. In the Jewett case, he charged Farwell with assault, imprisonment, and withholding suitable food and nourishment.⁴⁵ In the Vittle case, he charged Farwell with assault with a dangerous weapon. But Farwell escaped punishment once again when the court dismissed both indictments.⁴⁶ It must have felt like a small consolation to those who had suffered in his employ or listened to the testimony at his trials, when in yet another case a couple of weeks later a court finally found against Farwell. A third member of *Franklin's* crew, sailor John Reid, claimed that *Franklin's* provisions had run out during the return voyage from Liverpool, and that the captain had left the crew to eat tainted beef. The court found for Reid and mulcted Farwell \$25.69 in damages for failing to supply him with good and sufficient food during the voyage.⁴⁷

Reid's case was the exception that proved the rule. Reporting the fine, a *Portsmouth Journal* article carried the headline "Caution to Shipmasters."⁴⁸ Anyone familiar with Captain Farwell must have thought the warning ironic. Nevertheless, American commerce was important, especially to cities like Portsmouth, and even the Democrats in power believed that it must be protected. The fact that Eben Farwell most needed protection from himself was easily lost in a world where facts mattered less than symbols and political rhetoric. And protecting the rights of masters and ship owners was of paramount concern to Americans, even if some of them had less than honorable characters.

⁴⁴ "U.S. Marshal's Office," *New York Morning Herald*, 22 July 1839.

⁴⁵ The full charges were assault with force and arms and from malice, hatred and revenge and without justifiable cause; imprisonment; and withholding suitable food and nourishment.

⁴⁶ Eben Farwell Case File, NARA; Minutes, 2, 5 August 1839, NARA RG21, M886, roll 8.

⁴⁷ "Caution to Shipmasters," *Portsmouth Journal of Literature & Politics*, 17 August 1839.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

U.S. Foreign & Naval Policy

Americans wanted to protect their trade, but they were not necessarily willing to pay for an expanded navy to do the job. Americans needed to see clear and imminent threats in order to justify this expense. Before he left office, President Jackson tried to convince the American people to support expansion. In his 1837 farewell address, he wrote that:

Now is the time, in a season of peace and with an overflowing revenue, that we can year after year add to [the navy's] strength without increasing the burdens of the people. It is your true policy, for your Navy will not only protect your rich and flourishing commerce in distant seas, but it will enable you to reach and annoy the enemy and will give to defense its greatest efficiency by meeting danger at a distance from home.⁴⁹

Jackson envisioned a new, more aggressive role for the peacetime navy, but most Americans failed to see the need for such expansion.

During Van Buren's presidency, the navy continued to punish people for threatening American commerce as it had during Jackson's administration. Van Buren did not have Jackson's taste for aggressive naval diplomacy but established policy dictated that the navy be used to avenge attacks on American merchantmen, and Americans generally expected and supported such reprisals. In 1838, responding to Americans' complaints, the navy returned to Sumatra and punished the people of Quallah Battoo for another offense. In 1840, American naval forces landed at Fiji to punish its people for attacking a party of American explorers and surveyors. And in 1841, the navy burned the villages of accused murderers on Drummond Island and Samoa.⁵⁰ But these incidents were relatively minor compared to more ominous threats. Over the course of Van Buren's term in office, it became increasingly clear that the real threat to American trade came from Britain, and in the Atlantic, this threat was thoroughly intertwined with British efforts to suppress the slave trade.

⁴⁹ Andrew Jackson, "Farewell Address, 4 March 1837," in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1902*, ed. James D. Richardson (New York: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1897), 307; Sprout and Sprout, 106-107.

⁵⁰ Grimmett.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade

The slave trade became a problematic issue for the United States during Van Buren's administration. Britain had outlawed slavery in 1833 and subsequently increased its efforts to police the slave trade through a combination of treaties and naval patrols. In 1835, Britain had concluded a new treaty with Spain that included an equipment clause, which now made vessels equipped for the slave trade liable to condemnation in the mixed courts. In response, Spanish slavers began flying the U.S. flag, posing as Americans to elude capture by the British. The United States was not a party to any such treaty and therefore the British navy and these mixed courts had no legal authority over American vessels. During Van Buren's administration, the growing presence of the American flag in the slave trade became a source of tension between the United States and Britain.⁵¹

Although direct American participation in the slave trade had not increased, some Americans did help to facilitate the abuse of their national flag. For example, American shipbuilders, eager to capitalize on the demand for vessels that could pose as American, took orders from Spanish slave traders. These shipbuilders would register newly-constructed vessels in American ports, thereby obtaining American papers, and then promptly deliver them to waiting buyers in Cuba.⁵² The American captains responsible for delivering these vessels often remained on board for the subsequent voyage to West Africa to pose as captain in case any European naval cruiser wanted to check the ship's papers. These false captains came to be known as "captains of the flag" because while they had no real authority on board, as American citizens they did have the right to fly the American flag on board their vessel. To maintain the illusion of American ownership, these American captains would wait until the last moment, just before the true captain boarded his cargo of slaves, before formally executing

⁵¹ For a history of the British effort to suppress the slave trade see: Lloyd.

⁵² David Eltis describes American involvement in the trade as minor. After 1810, he estimates that 11 percent of slave vessels were French, 18 percent were Spanish, and 71 percent were Portuguese. Acknowledging that after 1840 many slave ships began their voyages in U.S. ports and flew the U.S. flag during outbound voyages, he reports that ownership of many of these vessels and their cargoes remains unidentified and concludes that "most were in reality owned by citizens of Spain and Portugal." David Eltis, "The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2001): 29, 41. For a study of American involvement in the slave trade during this period see: Howard, *American Slavers and the Federal Law, 1837-1862*.

the sale of their ships. Once the vessel finally loaded its cargo of slaves, it stopped flying the American flag because under U.S. law slave trading was a capital crime.

The British commissioners at Havana and officers of the British navy's Africa squadron were not fooled by this new practice and quickly reported it to the British foreign office and the American Consul at Havana. British Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston received the first reports in October of 1836 and forwarded the information to the U.S. government by the end of the year. Meanwhile, with no official American presence on the coast of West Africa, officers of the British navy followed their consciences when deciding how to handle this new situation.⁵³

No U.S. navy vessel had visited West Africa since the *Potomac* in 1836. The only official American representative in West Africa was the U.S. agent at Monrovia responsible for receiving recaptured Africans and this position carried very narrow, limited authority. With no real American presence in West Africa, British officers were left to use their own judgement with regard to flag abuse. Believing that the United States would want Britain to seize vessels fraudulently flying the American flag, British naval officers began to visit and search suspicious American vessels. This practice prompted numerous complaints and developed into a serious diplomatic dispute between the United States and Britain. Ultimately, the Van Buren administration concluded that the United States needed a more official presence, in the form of naval cruisers, to represent U.S. interests in West Africa and protect American rights from British interference.⁵⁴

Liberia

The slave trade made life at Cape Mesurado unstable and threatened to ruin the Liberian colonies. It caused frequent wars between the local people, depressed legitimate trade, and corrupted colonists. So in 1839, when Liberia's new colonial governor, Thomas Buchanan, took over responsibility for the colony, he made fighting the slave trade a priority.

⁵³ For a collection of correspondence between British and U.S. diplomats and civil servants on this subject see: U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Commerce, *African Colonization*, 27 Cong., 3 sess., 1843. H.R. 283, 481-485.

⁵⁴ Martin Van Buren, "Message from the President of the United States, transmitting a report from the Secretary of State, in relation to seizures or search of American vessels on the coast of Africa, &c.," 3 March 1841, H.R. 283, 478-730.

In his dual capacity as chief colonial administrator and U.S. agent for recaptured Africans, Buchanan worked to gather information on the trade, and he reported his findings to both the ACS and the U.S. government. He planned and organized attacks against nearby slave markets, but with limited resources and no support from the United States, Buchanan could not fight the trade as aggressively as he wanted to.

In 1839, in an effort to survive and to devolve some of the burdensome responsibilities of operating private colonies, the struggling ACS declared a new Commonwealth of Liberia that embraced all of the settlements on the coast (except for the Maryland colony). And it appointed Thomas Buchanan, whom the ACS had previously employed to establish its settlement at Bassa Cove, to manage it.⁵⁵ Buchanan arrived at Monrovia in April of 1839 with a new constitution and an arsenal of weapons. In one of his first acts as governor, he ordered a slaver anchored at a place called Little Bassa to leave or have its property seized. The colony could not yet claim possession of all of the soil along the coast, but it did claim jurisdiction. Buchanan believed that the slave trade and British expansionism were two of the greatest threats to Liberia's future and he hoped to minimize these threats by extending the colony's legal authority and practical control over as much territory as possible.⁵⁶

Slaving wars amongst the natives limited the colonists' access to the interior and disrupted trade and communications all along the coast. Americans believed that the best way to combat the slave trade was to destroy it at the source. Buchanan began attacking the slave barracoons that infested the neighborhood. His first target was a British trading factory at Little Bassa. When the slave dealer ignored Buchanan's order to leave, some one hundred colonists marched to Little Bassa while the governor sailed the colonial schooner loaded with ammunition down the coast to meet them. The colonists took possession of the slaver's barracoon and were engaged in a gun battle with natives in the nearby bush when Buchanan arrived. During two days of fighting, the colonists burned villages, gained control of the beach,

⁵⁵*African Repository*, March 1839, 68-71; Archibald Alexander, *A History of Colonisation on the Western Coast of Africa* (Philadelphia: Martien, 1846), 569-570.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 570-580.

and forced the natives to surrender. The Liberians lost one man and the natives admitted to losing ten. Buchanan confiscated the slaver's property and the slaves in his barracoon.⁵⁷

Over the course of the summer and fall, slavers continued to prosecute the trade "with vigor" along the coast, but the Liberians managed to drive them away from the immediate neighborhood. Buchanan then turned his attention to American participation in the trade and compiled a "complete list" of the American vessels engaged in the slave trade during that summer. He reported, "Since my active hostility to the Slave Trade has become generally known, slave vessels have grown quite shy of the Colony, and of course I have not the same facilities for gathering information with regard to the presence of American slavers on this coast, though I occasionally collect a few facts."⁵⁸ He described two vessels that had been recently captured and taken to Sierra Leone: "the 'Jack Wilding' of Baltimore, a fine large schooner, with a full cargo and eleven hundred doubloons on board, taken at Acra, about a month ago [and] the 'Waukeen' of New Orleans, taken at New Cesters a few weeks since." And he identified two other "American" schooners that were currently in the neighborhood as regular slavers. Buchanan lamented the abuse of the American flag and repeated the remarks that he had made to *Potomac's* Captain Nicholson at Bassa Cove back in 1836, pledging to drive off slavers if only someone would supply him with an armed vessel.⁵⁹ "I would undertake," he wrote, "with a single American cruiser and proper authority to act, to make more seizures and more effectually injure the Slave Trade here than the whole of [the British squadron]." "The reason is obvious," he explained, "in nineteen cases in twenty, [the British] dare not touch a vessel under the American flag, and every slaver now is furnished with that sovereign protection."⁶⁰

On a recent visit to Sierra Leone, Buchanan had been embarrassed by British officials who had given him a tour of the captured slaver, *Zete de Abril*, formerly the *Mary Cushing*.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Also see: Thomas Buchanan to S. Wilkeson, 10 August 1839 reprinted in: American Colonization Society, *The 23rd Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States* (1840), 16-21.

⁵⁸ Thomas Buchanan to S. Wilkeson, 10 August 1839 reprinted in: American Colonization Society, 16-21.

⁵⁹ Joseph J. Nicholson to Mahlon Dickerson, 8 January 1837, *New Bedford Mercury*, 31 March 1837.

⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Buchanan did not actually envision himself capturing any slavers. In the next paragraph of his letter Buchanan pleaded severe and frequent illness from fever and strongly expressed doubts that he would be able to continue in "this arduous office." Thomas Buchanan to S. Wilkeson, 10 August 1839 reprinted in: American Colonization Society, 16-21.

“Of all the scenes of misery I ever saw,” he wrote, “this was the most painful.” Buchanan’s cheek “tinged with shame and indignation” when he heard that the *Mary Cushing* had come on to the coast and had “sailed for some time, until her cargo was ready, under American colors.”⁶¹ The *Mary Cushing*’s American captain, Benjamin Reynolds, also known as Benito Louis Reynals, had been on board *Zete de Abril* when the British seized her.⁶² Buchanan asked officials at Sierra Leone to deliver Reynolds to Monrovia so that he could be sent to the United States for trial. Buchanan closed his report to the ACS by asking, “Is there any hope that our Government will hang him?”⁶³ Buchanan wanted the United States to make an example of Reynolds and redeem American honor.

Despite Buchanan’s dedication and animosity towards the slave trade, neither the British nor the U.S. government took him very seriously. The United States chose not to invest in building up an official outpost at Monrovia, and the British saw the little colony as more of an irritant than a potential partner. Although Liberia was willing to take a more active part in suppressing the slave trade and in resolving tensions between the United States and Britain, neither of those governments took advantage of the opportunity. Perhaps Liberia might have played a larger role in suppressing the trade if Buchanan had arrived in the colony sooner. But as it was, tensions between the two countries had been slowly escalating for several years.

British Abuses and U.S. Diplomacy

The diplomatic dispute between the United States and Britain had been growing for three years and was already coming to a head by the time Buchanan arrived to take charge of Liberia in 1839. The British navy was detaining, searching, and capturing an increasing number of vessels flying the American flag, and these incidents generated numerous diplomatic complaints. Americans complained that the British navy violated their rights and they demanded compensation. In return, Britain complained that the United States was allowing

⁶¹ Thomas Buchanan to S. Wilkeson, 6 November 1839 reprinted in: *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶² H. W. Macaulay and Walter W. Lewis to Lord Palmerston, 7 April 1839, H.R. 283, 709-712.

⁶³ Thomas Buchanan to S. Wilkeson, 6 November 1839 reprinted in: *American Colonization Society*, 31.

slavers to abuse its flag.⁶⁴ The United States claimed the sole right to police vessels flying the American flag during peacetime, but they simultaneously denied the responsibility for preventing foreign criminals from fraudulently hoisting the Stars and Stripes. Between 1836 and 1839, Britain tried various tactics to force the United States to change its position, including capturing suspect vessels and delivering them to the United States for trial. These tactics failed to change U.S. policy and the British grew increasingly frustrated, but they persisted. In the autumn of 1839, Britain sent the United States a lengthy and detailed report listing numerous complaints and serious accusations against Americans, and it continued to press complaints through the end of Van Buren's term in office.⁶⁵ Although Britain failed to persuade the United States to concede the right of search, it did force the Van Buren administration to take a more active interest in West Africa.

One of the cases that Britain complained about involved the schooner *Rebecca*. Slavers typically carried multiple sets of papers to hide their true identities and avoid capture. If a slaver was overhauled by a naval cruiser, it would often destroy all but one set of papers, by either burning or throwing the other sets overboard, to keep the incriminating evidence from falling into British hands. *Rebecca's* crew failed to destroy all of her incriminating documents and the British recovered letters proving that she was really a Spanish slaver flying a false U.S. flag. Britain expected that this evidence would persuade the United States to redeem its flag from such dishonor by conceding the right of mutual search. But the Americans minimized the problem as the bad acts of a few criminals and did not believe it merited serious attention.⁶⁶

Rebecca was owned by Frederick Neill of Baltimore, where she had been built the previous year. Cuban slave traders ordered many of their ships from Baltimore builders. In letters found on board, Neill instructed his agent, an American named George Watson, to captain *Rebecca* from Havana to the West African port of Gallinas and deliver the schooner to a factor named Don Pablo Alvarez. Upon transfer of the vessel at Gallinas, Neill directed Watson

⁶⁴ Martin Van Buren, "Message from the President of the United States, transmitting a report from the Secretary of State, in relation to seizures or search of American vessels on the coast of Africa, &c.," 3 March 1841, H.R. 283, 478-730.

⁶⁵ Henry Fox to John Forsyth, 30 October 1839, H.R. 283, 581-644.

⁶⁶ Henry Fox to John Forsyth, with enclosures, 1 February 1841, H.R. 283, 674-684.

to cut the ship's register in two and to send each half separately to him at Baltimore so that he could cancel his bonds at the custom house.⁶⁷

Rebecca cleared Havana on January 21, 1839 with a crew of thirteen, all Spaniards, except for "Captain" Watson. She carried a cargo of twenty-six casks, three half-barrels, and seven bags of rice, 585 demijohns of rum, forty barrels of biscuit, fifteen guns, five hundred half-barrels of gunpowder, and a large quantity of tobacco. Neill had already sold the schooner to Silvestre Iriarte and Tomas de Trigoyen of Havana, and they shipped their own captain, Don Domingo Artata, a native and resident of Biscay province in Spain, on board *Rebecca*, with his own instructions:

On your arrival at Gallinas, you will place yourself under the orders of Don Pablo Alvarez, and observe those which he may give you with the greatest exactness. You will both take care that the American schooner 'Rebecca' keeps her flag till the moment of putting the cargo on board. You will bring in the vessel citizen Watson, with a slave (bulto) which he has our permission to bring with him.

When Artata returned with *Rebecca* to Cuba, his employers advised him on how to make a safe delivery: "If, in consequence of any unforeseen circumstance, you should arrive at a port in this island more to the eastward than those which have been mentioned above, you will send the vessel to [Havana]; and it will remain, with the slaves (bultos) ashore, at your disposal, until we proceed thither."⁶⁸

Rebecca arrived on the West African coast in March. She landed her cargo at Gallinas, where she encountered the British warship HMS *Forester*. *Rebecca* was not flying any flag, and when Lieutenant Campbell visited her he did not find any papers on board. *Rebecca's* mate,

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Silvestre Iriarte and Tomas de Trigoyen to Domingo Artata, 21 January 1839, H.R. 283, 677-678. There was no doubt that these men were fully involved in the slave trade. The British also found letters from Trigoyen to his contacts on the African coast that described other business plans. Trigoyen wrote to a Don Juan Batalla at Gallinas: "Sir, and My Friend: In consequence of your two esteemed letters of 10th and 24th October of last year – the first from Petit Bassa, and the second from Gallinas – we have determined to dispatch to you a vessel of (capable of carrying) 300 to 350 slaves (bultos) within twenty or thirty days... The vessel will carry all of the merchandise, and every thing else that you can ask for; and even if you were to make 1,500 slaves (bultos) per annum, you would not exhaust your resources, for you have only to ask for what you require." Tomas de Trigoyen to Juan Batalla, 22 January 1839, H.R. 283, 678. Trigoyen explained that, on his recommendation, his partners had decided to purchase a vessel, and "the scarcity of American vessels of the class and burden which we require" had caused some delay. But "as vessels of the description required are constantly arriving, and as, amongst several that are expected, it cannot be difficult to find one that suits us, you may, with all certainty, reckon upon one sailing for your place about the 25th of next month, (February.) Relying upon this as sure, take your measures, calculating the passage so that on her arrival she may find the cargo ready, and experience the shortest possible delay in her return." Racon & Co., Tomas de Trigoyen, Manuel Masino and Juan Suriz to Juan Jose Batalla, 22 January 1839, H.R. 283, 678-679. With the ease and certainty of obtaining suitable American vessels at Havana they did not hesitate to proceed with their expensive plans.

Nicholas Echevarria, explained that the master, Artata, had taken the papers on shore with him.⁶⁹ Suspicious, Campbell detained *Rebecca* as illegally-equipped Spanish property. Had she been flying the American flag she would have been protected, and Campbell would not have been allowed to search her. It was a costly mistake. Campbell sent *Rebecca* to Sierra Leone for trial and she was condemned. The letters and instructions eventually found on board, detailing the fraudulent use of the American flag, helped to convict her.

Rebecca's captain had been careless and unlucky. The mixed court at Sierra Leone usually refused jurisdiction over vessels flying the American flag when captured. This policy frustrated British diplomats and naval officers because they believed that the vessels in question were actually Spanish-owned, vessels that the court had full jurisdiction over. But instead of giving up and ignoring suspicious vessels sailing under the U.S. flag, the British navy decided to capture and deliver them to America. If they were going to make any progress against the slave trade, Britain needed to resolve this jurisdiction problem. The United States was not enforcing its laws, and the British navy thought that the arrival in U.S. ports of slavers captured under American colors might change Americans' minds.

The successful condemnation of *Rebecca* had been an exception; the problematic cases of *Eagle* and *Clara* were more typical. The American brig *Eagle* of Baltimore had sailed from Havana under circumstances similar to *Rebecca*. Her purported captain was an American named Joshua Littig. HMS *Buzzard* had detained *Eagle* off the West African coast in December of 1838, and HMS *Lily* had stopped her again in January of 1839. *Lily's* commander had sent *Eagle* to Sierra Leone for trial as a slaver, and even though Littig had confessed to British officers that she was no longer a truly American vessel, the court refused to hear the case. *Eagle* was returned to Littig and resumed her voyage.⁷⁰

In April, Captain Tucker arrived on the coast to take command of the British West Africa squadron. Informed of Littig's confession, and of a similar case involving the *Clara*, Tucker decided to send both vessels to the United States for disposition. He explained, "I feel

⁶⁹ H. W. Macaulay and Walter W. Lewis to Lord Palmerston, 10 April 1839, H.R. 283, 649-650.

⁷⁰ Signed Statement written by Lt. Charles Fitzgerald, HMS *Buzzard*, 12 March 1839, H.R. 283, 573-574. Joshua Littig also signed this statement.

it a duty incumbent on me, as the senior officer on this coast, as much out of respect to the American Government as in duty to my own, to represent and forward by you, as the principal in this instance, the said vessels, with their masters and papers, to the seat of Government in the United States, to be dealt with as the authorities of that country may deem fit; trusting it will be considered that my only motive for taking upon myself this delicate interference can be but that if zeal for a strict discharge of my duty, which renders it imperative on me to take the earliest opportunity of laying before the Government of a friendly Power (with proofs) the abuse to which its national flag is subjected on this coast, in covering and protecting the property of persons (not citizens of the United States) concerned in this inhuman traffic in slaves, which I am employed to suppress.”⁷¹ In doing so, the British navy began an experiment of capturing suspicious vessels flying the American flag and delivering them as prizes to the United States.

Lieutenant Fitzgerald of HMS *Buzzard* set about recapturing *Eagle* and *Clara*. Once he had both vessels under his control, he sailed them to the United States. When his little convoy arrived in New York, Fitzgerald notified Henry Fox, the British minister at Washington, explaining that he had detained two vessels “with *fictional* American papers; both vessels being *bona fide* Spanish property, owners living in the Havana, and the crews all Spaniards or Portuguese.”⁷² Fitzgerald described how Littig and the *Clara*’s American captain, Samuel B. Hooker, had been “*merely* hired for the voyage” by the Spanish owners in order to use the American flag, and reported that both men had confessed that their vessels had been intended for slave cargoes. Fitzgerald delivered Littig and Hooker to the authorities in New York and waited for a decision about the vessels. He told Fox that he was prepared to deliver the vessels to the U.S. government, “if claimed as American property,” and if not, that he would take them to Sierra Leone, “and there give them in, as Spanish vessels, for adjudication in the court of mixed commission.” The enormous publicity this case generated forced the United States to address the issue. The British commissioners at Sierra Leone noted with approbation,

⁷¹ William Tucker to Charles Fitzgerald, 5 April 1839, H.R. 283, 572.

⁷² Charles Fitzgerald to Henry Fox, 12 June 1839, H.R. 283, 570-571.

the excitement and indignation that Fitzgerald had caused when he arrived in America with two captured slavers.⁷³

If the United States accepted responsibility for *Eagle* and *Clara* there would be trials, followed by the arrival of more suspect vessels, not to mention the diplomatic humiliation of admitting that the British had captured American slavers. If the United States refused to claim *Eagle* and *Clara* as American property, the mixed court at Sierra Leone would be more likely to accept jurisdiction over future cases involving vessels flying the American flag. Neither prospect appealed to Americans. After examining the evidence, U.S. Attorney Benjamin Butler concluded that neither *Eagle* nor *Clara* was American property, and he indicted Littig for participation in the slave trade and fraud (Hooker had died shortly after arriving in New York). But since *Eagle* had never boarded any slaves, Butler doubted that Littig would be convicted.⁷⁴

While the Americans sorted out the cases against *Eagle* and *Clara*, a third vessel, *Wyoming*, arrived in the United States, commanded by another British prize crew. Again, Butler determined that *Wyoming* was Spanish, not American, property. But this time he proceeded with charges against *Wyoming*'s owners for violating the 1792 act of Congress regulating the registration of vessels because they had failed to return the vessel's register after completing the overseas sale. The prosecution succeeded and the court condemned *Wyoming*.⁷⁵ The United States auctioned off vessels condemned for such registration violations and kept the bulk of the money. As informers, the British were only entitled to one-fourth of the value, at best. The British quickly learned that delivering prizes to the United States would not be a profitable business and they abandoned the practice. British officers brought the captured vessels *Catherine* and *Butterfly* to New York in August and September, but by the time they captured *Douglas* in October, the British navy had suspended the practice and resumed delivering such prizes to Sierra Leone. It had proven its point, if officers could show that a vessel had been carrying fraudulent American papers and that it was actually Spanish

⁷³ Charles Fitzgerald to Henry Fox, 12 June 1839, H.R. 283, 570-571; R. Doherty and L. Hook to Lord Palmerston, 31 January 1840, H.R. 283, 687-688.

⁷⁴ Benjamin Butler to Aaron Vail, 9 August 1839, H.R. 283, 578-580.

⁷⁵ H.R. 283, 660-661.

property, the mixed court at Sierra Leone was now more receptive to hearing the case than it had been before.

Despite these efforts, slavers' use of the American flag became so common that before long British officers began to suspect every American vessel, even Liberians' colonial schooners, of participating in the slave trade.⁷⁶ The British navy stopped as many vessels flying the American flag as they could. American captains strongly resented these inquisitions for the delays that they caused and the insult to American honor, and they began filing a stream of complaints with the U.S. State Department, asking for protection and compensation. Americans suspected that the British navy was purposely abusing its power in order to give unfair advantages to British traders. In the summer of 1839, shortly after *Eagle* and *Clara* arrived in New York, the United States began lodging formal complaints with Britain, accusing British naval officers of violating the rights of American citizens.

The first American complaint of the year concerned the American merchantman *Susan*. The brig had been sailing along the coast of South America when she encountered HMS *Grecian* a little after 7pm on April 10th, 1839. *Grecian* fired a blank charge, signaling *Susan* to heave to. Captain Thomson of the *Susan* reported that he "*immediately* hove the maintopsail to the mast."⁷⁷ But *Grecian*'s Commander Smyth did not see any reaction to his signal and fired a live round that, according to *Susan*'s log, "was seen and heard to hiss through the air within a few feet of the ship." *Grecian* came alongside *Susan* and hailed her. According to Thomson, the Americans replied, "Susan from Rio de Janeiro," and then asked, "What do you mean by firing a shot into us?" Smyth claimed that that he heard the somewhat saltier reply, "The Susan, from Rio de Janeiro; God damn you, what do you mean by firing a shot across our bows? I'll blow you out of the water."⁷⁸ It was dark and there was a considerable sea when one of *Grecian*'s officers, N. B. Pearse, attempted to board *Susan*. He did not receive a warm welcome, the Americans did not offer him a rope or any of the "usual assistance," and Pearse

⁷⁶ African grown rice was a primary staple of the colonists' diet. Colonial schooners frequently sailed up and down the coast to purchase rice. The British considered rice a suspicious commodity because slavers fed it to slaves on the voyage across the Atlantic.

⁷⁷ For the American version of these events see: John Forsyth to Andrew Stevenson with sub-enclosures, 17 July 1839, H.R. 283, 485-487.

⁷⁸ For the British version of these events see: Lord Palmerston to Andrew Stevenson with sub-enclosures, 23 April 1840, H.R. 283, 510-513.

“had considerable difficulty in scrambling up her side.” The Americans’ insolence irritated Pearse. Again, Thomson interpreted events somewhat differently and described five men boarding *Susan* “in a piratical manner – they being armed with cutlasses and muskets.”

Once on board, Pearse complained that he was “immediately surrounded by several persons who were most clamorous and noisy – particularly one person of the name Brewer, whose language and general deportment were most insolent and abusive,” and that he had to wait fifteen minutes just to see the captain.⁷⁹ According to Thomson, there was no delay.⁸⁰ The issue of timing was important because Americans protested these visits in part because they caused costly delays. The British always insisted that they conducted their visits with minimal intrusion, and blamed Americans’ uncooperative attitudes for any delays. When he finally saw the captain, Pearse demanded to know who had dared to hail Her Majesty’s brig and ask why it had fired. When Thomson repeated the query, Pearse threatened to send him on board *Grecian*. At this point, *Susan*’s passengers began to interfere, exclaiming that the British would have to use force to take their captain. The Americans later claimed that when they showed Pearse the ship’s register, the purported reason for his visit, he did not even bother to look at it. In response, the British claimed that their business on board *Susan* had only lasted five minutes, and that it would have been much easier had the Americans not obstinately refused to identify themselves or to present their papers. After seeing the register, Pearse returned to the *Grecian* and *Susan* went on its way.

After their encounter with HMS *Grecian*, *Susan*’s passengers wrote to Secretary of State John Forsyth complaining of the insults they had suffered. They described the British manner as piratical and asked the government to clarify their rights. “Feeling indignant,” they wrote, “as citizens of the United States, at an outrage to our flag of this nature, we wish that you should be informed of it; and, for our information, to respectfully ask of you how far the rights of foreign men-of-war extend to our merchant vessels?”⁸¹ It was a simple question, but the answer was far from straightforward. In theory, the British could hail a vessel to determine her

⁷⁹ N. B. Pearse to Commander Smyth, 10 December 1839, H.R. 283, 512-513.

⁸⁰ “Excerpt from the log book of the ship ‘Susan,’ of Boston, April 10, 1839,” George Bancroft to John Forsyth, 27 June 1839, H.R. 283, 486-487.

⁸¹ Dan P. Austin, Theodore D. Parker and Jas. H. Brewer to John Forsyth, 20 May 1839, H.R. 283, 486.

identity. And some argued that this principle included the right to visit a vessel and inspect her papers to verify that identity. But in the current climate of animosity, any interaction was bound to cause trouble.

Forsyth called the *Susan* incident an outrage and instructed Andrew Stevenson, U.S. minister in London, to present the case to the British government as a “violation of the respect due to the flag of the United States from friendly powers.”⁸² Stevenson complied and asked British Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston to open an inquiry, requesting that if these complaints turned out “to be well founded, that conduct and language so unwarrantable, and disreputable to Her Majesty’s naval service, may meet the reprehension and punishment they merit.”⁸³ The United States wanted an apology.

The *Susan* incident was just the first of several such disputes that year. The British navy detained or captured the American vessels *Edwin* in July, *Mary* in August, and *Douglas* in October, and the United States formally complained each time. When the captain of the *Mary* died after the British interrupted his voyage, Americans blamed the British for his death. HMS *Forester* had captured *Mary* near Gallinas and sent her to Sierra Leone for trial. The court refused to hear the case on the grounds that *Mary* was an American vessel and had been flying the American flag at the time she was captured. *Mary*’s Captain Tomlinson left Sierra Leone on August 24th, but while he was trying to re-provision his vessel and recoup some of his losses he fell ill with fever. He died September 23rd. *Mary*’s owners blamed the British for Tomlinson’s death and their financial losses, and they wanted compensation.⁸⁴ Forsyth called the case an “impudent violation of our flag,” and he instructed Stevenson to request an indemnity from Britain and to demand that *Forester*’s officers be punished.⁸⁵

Frustrated, Palmerston complained about growing American involvement in the slave trade, and he pressed the United States to address the problem both at home and abroad. He wrote to Stevenson complaining about “the progressively increasing extent to which the citizens and vessels of the Union are engaged in the slave trade; for not only do vessels which

⁸² John Forsyth to Andrew Stevenson, 17 July 1839, H.R. 283, 485.

⁸³ Andrew Stevenson to Lord Palmerston, 26 August 1839, H.R. 283, 487-488.

⁸⁴ Andrew Stevenson to Lord Palmerston, 15 May 1840, H.R. 283, 514-516.

⁸⁵ John Forsyth to Andrew Stevenson, 18 March 1840, H.R. 283, 508.

are not the property of citizens of the United States fraudulently assume the United States flag, in order to cover their criminal undertakings, but, in contempt and violation of the laws of the Union, vessels are built for slave trade in the ports of the United States, and United States citizens engage more and more in that traffic.” And he expressed his government’s earnest hopes “that the President will take effective means for putting down this evil, by enforcing, in the ports of the Union, the law against the slave trade, and, by sending an adequate number of cruisers to the coast of Africa, to prevent the abuse which is now made of the flag of the Union.”⁸⁶ But Americans were skeptical; Britain seemed to suspect every ship that sailed the Atlantic, and Americans doubted the accuracy of their reports.

The volume of accusations, the obvious exaggerations, and British self-interest made Americans doubt British accusations; while national pride made it easy for them to believe fellow Americans who claimed to have been abused by imperious British officers. The U.S. State Department received numerous complaints from American merchant captains protesting their innocence and claiming that British officers had abused them in a piratical manner. Cases like the *Edwin*, in which a British officer had seized the American brig for carrying a cargo of lumber, an apparently suspicious article, severely damaged British credibility.⁸⁷ Where British officers saw lumber to build a slave deck, Americans saw boards to construct colonial houses, missions, and legitimate trading factories. British officers were either overzealous, or they had ulterior motives. These cases in which Americans appeared to be the innocent victims of British abuse fueled American skepticism.

Stevenson complained about *Edwin*’s capture and Palmerston dutifully opened an inquiry into the case. He reassured Stevenson that “strict orders have been given to Her Majesty’s cruisers employed for the suppression of the slave trade not to interfere with vessels belonging to countries with which Great Britain has no treaty conceding mutually a right of search.”⁸⁸ To Palmerston, it was only a minor, isolated incident, and he quickly moved on to what he considered the more important issue of American participation in the slave trade. But

⁸⁶ Lord Palmerston to Andrew Stevenson, 15 February 1840, H.R. 283, 502-503.

⁸⁷ Deposition of the crew of the brig *Edwin* given before George W. Slocum, U.S. Consul, Rio de Janeiro, 12 October 1839, H.R. 283, 491-492.

⁸⁸ Lord Palmerston to Andrew Stevenson, 15 February 1840, H.R. 283, 502-503.

for Stevenson, the *Edwin* case was the main issue: British abuse of American rights. Offended by Palmerston's attempt to minimize the matter, he replied:

The complaint which the undersigned had the honor of submitting to Her Majesty's Government was not, as Lord Palmerston states, in consequence of Lieutenant Elliot's examination of the papers of the American brig, but for an outrage of a marked character upon the flag of the United States and the rights of its citizens. By reference to the note of the undersigned, and the papers which accompanied it, his lordship will perceive that Lieutenant Elliot was charged with having not only boarded and searched the 'Edwin,' and forcibly taken possession of her log book and papers, but with having, in a very insulting manner, forced the captain on board the British ship, and there detained him as a prisoner, under guard, until the hatches of his vessel were opened, the cargo removed and strict search made in every part of it for slaves.⁸⁹

To Americans, this British practice of holding U.S. citizens against their will and subjecting them to illegal searches was a serious violation of their national rights to navigate the seas freely and a great insult to their national honor. Palmerston's dismissal of the issue added further insult to injury.

The two governments could not agree on the main issue at hand. Britain was focused on ending American involvement in the slave trade, while the United States was focused on stopping British abuse of American citizens. Neither side took the other's concerns very seriously. At the end of his letter, Stevenson gave only a very generic answer to Palmerston's complaints about American participation in the slave trade. Referring to himself in the third person, Stevenson wrote that "of the extent to which the citizens and vessels of the United States are now engaged in the slave trade, the undersigned is wholly unformed."⁹⁰ Palmerston must have been incensed by this remark; the two men had been exchanging letters on the subject since 1836. Stevenson continued, still referring to himself in the third person:

Upon that subject, he can only repeat the assurances which he has already had the honor of giving Lord Palmerston, that nothing has been omitted on the part of the Government of the United States, within its constitutional powers, to enforce its laws and regulations for the suppression of the slave trade and the solicitude which it feels for its entire abolition. Indeed, the same just and benevolent motives which produced the interdiction now in force against the odious traffic will no doubt continue to be felt by the American Government, in giving the fullest efficacy to their own laws and regulations for the suppression of this great evil.

⁸⁹ Andrew Stevenson to Lord Palmerston, 17 February 1840, H.R. 283, 503-504.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

And then he returned to his main theme:

This however, can give no right to the naval officers of those countries who have treaties on the subject of the slave trade to board and search the vessels of the United States, and harass their commerce, however qualified or restricted the right claimed may be, or under whatever pretence done; and that, consequentially, the conduct of Lieutenant Elliot, in the present instance, can be regarded in no other light than as an insult to the flag of the United States, and an outrage upon the rights of its citizens.⁹¹

According to Stevenson, the British were the ones who dishonored the American flag, not slave traders. With this sort of contentious diplomacy, it is no wonder that the British were frustrated with the Americans.

Palmerston was ready with his response. Just as he received Stevenson's letter, a report came in from Lieutenant Matson of HMS *Waterwitch*, providing fresh evidence of American participation in the slave trade. Palmerston forwarded a copy of Matson's report, describing three more vessels that were known to be "carrying on the slave trade on the coast of Africa, under cover of the United States flag," to Stevenson. Matson stated that:

on the 8th of July, after a chase of five hours, I captured the Portuguese schooner 'Constitucao,' (which vessel I had seen on the evening of the 6th, standing out from Lagos and followed in her supposed track,) having on board 344 slaves. This vessel was sailing under American colors, and by the name of Dolphin, until the day she embarked her slaves.⁹²

Soon after Matson sent the *Constituição* to Sierra Leone, *Waterwitch* encountered a second suspicious vessel: the American schooner *Hound* from Havana. When Matson boarded *Hound* he found her "completely equipped for the slave trade." The master, two mates, and one seaman were Americans, while the rest of the crew was Spanish and Portuguese. Matson did not seize *Hound*, but he did report hearing that the schooner had loaded a cargo of slaves under Portuguese colors.

Matson's encounter with a third suspicious American vessel provided the most damning evidence of American participation in the slave trade. After a four-hour chase on September 27th, *Waterwitch* captured the Portuguese schooner *Zete de Abril*. Matson found 427 slaves on board and sent the prize to Sierra Leone for trial; he had been after the *Zete de Abril* for some time. Matson reported:

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Lord Palmerston to Andrew Stevenson with sub-enclosures, 24 February 1840, H.R. 283, 504-505.

I had several times boarded this vessel during the last three months; at which times she was sailing under American colors, and by the name of 'Mary Cushing;' was not then equipped for slave trade, though with every appearance of being intended for it. It is quite evident that this, as well as all slavers hoisting the American flag, are sailing with false colors and papers. The papers of the 'Zete de Abril' are dated October, 1838; whereas she was sailing so late as the 15th of September, 1839 with American colors and papers. The American who formerly acted as master being on board at the time of capture, I have considered it my duty to detain him for the disposal of the senior naval officer, to whom I have specially reported the case.⁹³

This was the same *Mary Cushing* that Governor Buchanan was embarrassed to tour at Sierra Leone. Like many other suspicious vessels, *Mary Cushing* had been recently built at Baltimore and then shipped from Havana for West Africa. She carried a predominantly foreign crew, mostly Spanish, and a token American to serve as captain of the flag. Although Matson had been forced to release her in the past, this time he captured her flying the Portuguese flag while carrying 424 slaves and the court at Sierra Leone condemned her.⁹⁴

Presented with Matson's report, Stevenson made only a token acknowledgement and promised to forward the information to Washington.⁹⁵ Forsyth dutifully ordered investigations, but they proceeded slowly. Both sides were growing increasingly frustrated as new cases continued to arise while the underlying problems went unresolved. In October, Britain pushed for a resolution. In Washington, British minister Fox wrote a lengthy report detailing American involvement in the slave trade. He recounted as much recent evidence as he had available. His report actually demonstrated that few Americans were directly involved; most of the slave traders, crews, and factors that he identified were Spanish subjects.⁹⁶ Fox's report included a collection of twenty-five documents: mainly reports submitted by British naval officers, and commissioners stationed at Sierra Leone or Havana. They all told similar stories of American vessels, usually from Baltimore or New Orleans, built on commission for known slave traders in Havana that had sailed to West Africa under American colors and then switched to the Portuguese flag when they loaded cargoes of slaves.

⁹³ Lieutenant Matson to Rear Admiral the Hon. G. Elliot, 9 October 1839, H.R. 283, 505.

⁹⁴ Lord Palmerston to Henry Fox, 29 September 1840, H.R. 283, 709.

⁹⁵ Andrew Stevenson to Lord Palmerston, 25 February 1840, H.R. 283, 506.

⁹⁶ Henry Fox to John Forsyth, 30 October 1839, H.R. 283, 581-644.

From Fox's point of view, the evidence and details he was relating might be new, but this story of false flags was old. But his report did contain one new and serious charge: it formally accused Nicholas P. Trist, the American consul at Havana, of abetting the slave trade. Recently, British naval officers had started noticing Trist's signature on papers belonging to suspected Portuguese slavers. And then, in 1838, Lieutenant Oliver of HMS *Fair Rosamond* had reported finding blank consular documents, signed by Trist, on board the captured slaver *Constituição*. This evidence suggested that the American consul was deliberately helping Portuguese slavers to disguise their identity with false papers. Convinced of Trist's guilt, Palmerston had forwarded these reports to Fox, and shortly after someone leaked them to the American press.⁹⁷ Fox included this information in his report to Forsyth, formally accusing Trist of potentially criminal misconduct. These reports, he wrote, "disclose circumstances of a painfully suspicious character, with respect to the practices followed in the consulate of the United States at the Havana – practices which have no doubt had the effect of affording material assistance to the detested traffic, and which have a moral tendency, still more deplorable, of inducing the world to believe that the authorities and Government of the republic are not in earnest resolved to labor for its extinction."⁹⁸

Controversy surrounded Trist, and newspapers around the United States printed new articles about him every month.⁹⁹ In addition to the British allegations, aggrieved American sailors accused Trist of routinely mistreating them, and they were petitioning the government to recall him from his consular post. Newspapers reported that there was a strong feeling of indignation against Trist in Britain, suggesting that his continued appointment was damaging U.S. relations with that country.¹⁰⁰ And when a British prize crew arrived in New York to deliver the schooner *Catherine* for trial as a slaver, newspapers explicitly noted that she

⁹⁷ *Niles' National Register*, August 3, 1839; *The Philanthropist*, August 13, 1839.

⁹⁸ Henry Fox to John Forsyth, 30 October 1839, H.R. 283, 581-599.

⁹⁹ *Christian Register*, 21 December 1839; *Liberator*, 25 October, 13 December 1839, 3 January, 21 February, 27 March 1840; *Niles' National Register*, 13 July, 3, 17 August 1839, *Catholic Telegraph*, 22 August 1839, *New Yorker*, 7, 14 September 1839, *Maine Farmer*, 19 October 1839, *Christian Reflector*, 13 November 1839, *Albion*, 16 November 1839, *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 21 November 1839. During the fall of 1839 there was also a movement of American merchants and sailors based in New York to petition the government to recall Trist based on their claims that he abused American seamen at Havana.

¹⁰⁰ *Atkinson's Saturday Evening Post*, 14 September 1839; *New Yorker*, 14 September 1839.

carried papers with Trist's signature.¹⁰¹ It seemed that every article about the slave trade now included some reference to the beleaguered consul. The worst came in December, when abolitionist newspapers printed a letter written by Dr. Richard R. Madden, a British commissioner at Havana.¹⁰² Madden provided details and statistics about the slave trade at Havana, and accused Trist of ongoing participation in corruption at that port. Among other things, Madden accused the consul of signing false papers that were used to smuggle slaves from Cuba into Texas under the pretense that they were free men or indentured servants.¹⁰³

The British claimed that by routinely signing and authenticating fraudulent and suspicious papers, Trist was turning a blind eye to American involvement in the slave trade and abuse of the American flag. And they objected to Trist using his signature and consular seal to authenticate Portuguese papers while the Portuguese consular office in Havana remained vacant. Considering Portugal's tolerance for the slave trade, Trist's service to that country seemed to court opprobrium. And even worse, the British claimed that Trist knowingly signed false documents for the Portuguese: purposely authenticating phony bills of sale, and even selling blank consular forms to notorious slave traders. The British commissioners at Havana called Trist's service to the Portuguese "disgraceful."¹⁰⁴

Fox's report provided fresh examples and numerous documents emphasizing the size and importance of the problem of abuse of the American flag in the slave trade, which he referred to as "frauds and evasions practiced for the purpose of covering the most cruel and sordid acts of barbarity." He expressed the British government's frustration and its hope that the United States would concede the right of search. "It will be seen" he wrote, "that Spanish, Portuguese and Brazilian slave traders, with outlaws and pirates of all nations, are now flocking

¹⁰¹ *Maine Farmer*, 19 October 1839; *Liberator*, 25 October 1839. The *Liberator* copied this article from the *New York Journal of Commerce*; merchants, abolitionists, and Americans in general took an interest in Trist because the scandals surrounding him touched on a variety of political issues.

¹⁰² *Christian Register*, 21 December 1839; *Liberator*, 13 December 1839.

¹⁰³ A month later Madden appeared as a key witness on behalf of the *Amistad* Africans. His testimony thwarted Van Buren's plans to return the Africans to Spanish authorities in Havana.

¹⁰⁴ J. Kennedy and Campbell J. Dalrymple to Lord Palmerston, 27 October 1839, H.R. 283, 493-496; Henry Fox to John Forsyth, 30 October 1839, H.R. 283, 581-599.

under the cover of the American flag.” Fox predicted that unless the United States took severe measures, the stars and stripes would become an international symbol for the slave trade.¹⁰⁵

Forsyth responded to Fox’s report by defending American foreign policy and Trist’s character.¹⁰⁶ But the serious and public nature of the accusations against the consul prompted an investigation. Forsyth explained, “It is alike due to the source of these representations, and to the character of Mr. Trist, that a close inquiry should be instituted into his official conduct.”¹⁰⁷ He wrote to London requesting more information, especially copies of the alleged blank forms; and he asked Alexander H. Everett, former minister to Madrid and brother of Massachusetts Governor Edward Everett, to investigate the Havana consulate.¹⁰⁸ In the spring of 1840, Trist traveled to Washington to defend himself, while Everett went to Havana to investigate the accusations against him.¹⁰⁹

It took Forsyth several months to reply to Fox’s overall report. The official U.S. response was defensive and critical of the British. Speaking on behalf of the president, Forsyth claimed that the United States had “faithfully performed” its duty to suppress the slave trade. He countered Fox’s accusations by attacking the British practice of buying the right of search from weaker governments. To Americans, who continued to insist on protecting their rights over all other concerns, this buying and selling of rights appeared tragic. Forsyth wrote, “If the traffic still exists as a disgrace to humanity, it is to be imputed to nations with whom Her Majesty’s Government has formed and maintained the most intimate connexions, and to whose Governments Great Britain has paid for the right of active intervention, in order to its complete extirpation.”¹¹⁰ The United States had no intention of selling its rights to the British; instead, it would address weaknesses in its existing laws. President Van Buren, Forsyth explained, was aware that “a fraudulent use of the American flag has been made by foreigners,” and of “the defects of the laws regulating the transfer of vessels sold abroad, under which those frauds have been attempted or perpetrated.” Accordingly, he replied, “The

¹⁰⁵ Henry Fox to John Forsyth, 30 October 1839, H.R. 283, 581-599.

¹⁰⁶ John Forsyth to Henry Fox, 12 February 1840, H.R. 283, 644-648.

¹⁰⁷ John Forsyth to Andrew Stevenson, 25 January 1840, H.R. 283, 500.

¹⁰⁸ *Liberator*, 21 February 1840.

¹⁰⁹ Some papers reported that Trist was “under process” from the Supreme Court to return to Washington. Edward Everett was named U. S. minister in London in 1841, replacing Stevenson.

¹¹⁰ John Forsyth to Henry Fox, 12 February 1840, H.R. 283, 644-648.

President has lost no time in calling the attention of Congress to the subject, by whom it will, without doubt, be fully considered, with a view to the adoption of all necessary amendments.”¹¹¹

The United States was more concerned about preventing violations of American rights than the criminal acts of foreigners who posed as Americans. From the American point of view, the real problems were the British navy's lack of respect for the American flag and its practice of abusing American citizens. Therefore, Van Buren decided that the United States needed to maintain a naval presence on the West African coast “as a measure of precaution, to protect American vessels from improper molestation in that quarter of the globe; and, also, to detect those foreigners who may be found carrying, without proper authority, the flag of the United States.” There had been too many of these incidents of “improper molestation,” and hopefully an American naval presence in West Africa would deter the British from abusing Americans any further.¹¹² In November of 1839, Secretary of the Navy James K. Paulding announced that the United States was sending two naval vessels to West Africa. These vessels would be the first U.S. naval vessels ever assigned to West Africa, and their primary mission was to protect Americans and their interests from further abuse by the British, not to suppress the slave trade.¹¹³

The U.S. Navy & the Slave Trade

The 224-ton U.S. brig *Dolphin* and the 172-ton U.S. schooner *Grampus* arrived on the coast of West Africa early in 1840. *Dolphin* visited Sierra Leone and Liberia, where her commander, Capt. Charles Bell, gathered as much information as he could about the state of affairs along the coast. Bell focused his efforts on the American colonies and the slave trader

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ “Report from the Secretary of the Navy,” *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 2 January 1840, 1-4. It should be noted that in this report Paulding described the purpose of this mission as: arresting violations of American laws relating to the slave trade and prostitution of the American flag, and violations of the rights of the people of Africa. This should not be interpreted as a mission to suppress the slave trade. Documents produced during the course of this mission clearly show that its primary purpose was to establish an American naval presence off the coast of West Africa in order to deter this practice of British abuse and protect American rights. Both *Dolphin* and *Grampus* were expected to enforce American laws against the slave trade, within their limited means, but more so to improve relations with the British rather than to suppress the slave trade. Historians who analyze the Africa squadron tend to ignore or dismiss this mission and the important precedent it set just prior to negotiating the Webster-Ashburton treaty.

Theodore Canot, who was living near Monrovia. *Grampus* and her commander, Lieut. John Paine, worked more closely with the British navy's Africa squadron to address the problem of slavers' abuse of the American flag. Together, the two U.S. cruisers fulfilled their mission to protect American interests from abuse and infringement by the British, and to investigate American involvement in the slave trade as a first step towards better enforcement of U.S. laws against that trade.

Bell believed that the American people were misinformed about West Africa and tried to provide the government with more accurate information. In particular, he tried to correct misperceptions about the Liberian colonies. "It has been stated," he wrote, "by some injudicious friends of the [colonization] society, that [Liberia] extends from Cape Mount to Cape Palmas; between which there is one of the most famous slave stations on the coast; and the enemies of the society, after hearing these statements, have said that the slave trade was permitted within the jurisdiction of the colony, when such is not the fact."¹¹⁴ Actually, Bell explained that Liberia was only a collection of scattered settlements that aspired to control all of the territory between Cape Mount and Cape Palmas, but in reality, it was still quite far from achieving this goal.¹¹⁵ As Bell reported, the colony did not have the resources or the manpower to exercise physical control over the entire stretch of coastline, and therefore it should not be blamed for whatever slave trading took place there.

Bell had been skeptical of estimates claiming that 250,000 Africans were being sold into slavery annually, but after visiting the coast he changed his mind. He estimated that the sixty-two captured slavers that had been delivered to Sierra Leone in 1839 represented about one-sixth of the total slavers in operation. Calculating that slavers had an average capacity for three hundred slaves, and adding the number of slavers caught in Brazil and the West Indies, Bell concluded that the current estimates were quite reasonable. He identified the two

¹¹⁴ Charles H. Bell to Alfred Chester, 3 April 1840, H.R. 283, 822-829.

¹¹⁵ Bell explained that "the territory of Liberia, over which the Colonization Society has jurisdiction, extends from about six miles north of the St. Paul's river to Tabaconee, a few miles south of the river St. John. There is also a small detached settlement, called Greenville, at Sinou, about half way between this and Cape Palmas; this is also under the jurisdiction of the society." Charles H. Bell to Alfred Chester, 3 April 1840, H.R. 283, 822-829.

primary slave markets on the coast between Cape St. Anne and Cape Coast Castle, as Gallinas and New Sestros, and reported that these markets were owned by Spaniards and Portuguese:

who pretended to place themselves under the protection of the negro king in their vicinity; they furnish [the king] with muskets, ammunition, &c., which makes him more powerful than all the chiefs around him, on whom he makes war. He attacks their towns, puts to death all the old persons and small children, and the rest are brought to the coast and sold to his employers. Here they are placed in slave barracoons, (or prisons,) ready to ship when a vessel arrives.¹¹⁶

Bell's colonial informants undoubtedly helped to shape his perceptions about the slave trade, and he had sympathy for the colonists who suffered from living near these slave markets, but despite Buchanan's remonstrations that the American flag shielded a large proportion of the slave trade, Bell made no mention of American involvement in his report.

Americans and Liberian colonists believed that the best way to fight the slave trade was to target slave markets on the coast. Colonists supported attacking the problem at its source because it furthered their plans for territorial expansion. Naval officers considered this strategy an effective use of their limited resources. Bell described how "on the rivers, we passed many canoes paddled by emigrants, bringing the produce of the soil to Monrovia, which a little more than twenty years ago, were freighted with the poor negro for the slave-market." And he concluded, "It will occur to every one, that the only effectual way (on this part of the coast as least) to destroy this vile trade is to break up the slave stations."¹¹⁷

Buchanan convinced Bell to target one of these coastal slaving centers in particular. They chose New Sestros, the smaller and more vulnerable of the two slave markets. Located just south of Bassa Cove, it was right in the middle of the coastline that Liberians coveted. In 1836, Theodore Canot had established an outpost at New Sestros for the well-known Gallinas slaver Pedro Blanco, and this satellite operation had flourished.¹¹⁸ Canot had already survived a British blockade, but Buchanan was determined to destroy the slave factories at New Sestros

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ For Canot's description of the station see: Theodore Canot and Brantz Mayer, *Captain Canot; or, Twenty Years of an African Slaver* (New York: Appleton, 1854), 339-343.

and take control of the territory.¹¹⁹ He had failed to persuade the local Africans to evict the slavers, so he turned to the U.S. navy to help him mount an attack.¹²⁰

Bell agreed to Buchanan's plan, and in early March of 1840 he addressed an open letter to the slavers of New Sestros, threatening to destroy their factories if they did not quit the place within two weeks. To justify this violation of territorial sovereignty, he reasoned that the slavers were guilty of piracy, and therefore, he concluded, they had voluntarily placed themselves "beyond the protection of any civilized nation."¹²¹ This was a presumptuous argument considering that international law did not recognize slave trading as piracy and therefore Bell only had jurisdiction over Americans engaged in slave trading. Blanco was certainly not an American; and as a Florentine by birth, Canot's U.S. citizenship was questionable at best. An American attack on these slave marts could be considered an act of war and a violation of the territorial sovereignty of the local African people who controlled New Sestros.¹²²

Canot was not a man to back away from any threat. But there was a great irony in this confrontation. Canot had recently experienced a life altering ordeal, and had already decided to quit the slave trade. While making a slaving expedition to the nearby village of Digby, he had witnessed a savage cannibalistic attack. As he later described it:

There was a devilish spell in the tragic scene that fascinated my eyes to the spot. A slow, lingering, tormenting mutilation was practised on the living, as well as on the dead; and, in every instance, the brutality of the women exceeded that of the men. I cannot picture the hellish joy with which they passed from body to body, digging out eyes, wrenching off lips, tearing the ears, and slicing the flesh from the quivering bones; while the queen of the harpies crept amid the butchery gathering the brains from each severed skull as a *bonne bouche* for the approaching feast!

As soon as he returned to New Sestros, Canot had begun planning to quit the slave trade. The horrors he had witnessed at Digby haunted him and he felt partially responsible. He believed

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 362-368.

¹²⁰ Charles Bell to Alfred Chester, 3 April 1840, H.R. 283, 822-829.

¹²¹ Canot and Mayer, 399-400.

¹²² The British later gave up the practice of destroying slave markets for this reason. See: Lloyd, 95-97.

that the temptations of the slave trade had excited the Africans' "indigenous barbarity" and "passionate natures," encouraging these rival kinsmen to savagely attack one another.¹²³

Canot's employer, Pedro Blanco, had recently left the African coast and retired to Havana with a fortune. Canot described how this news, together with "the late barbarities inflicted on the conquered in a war of which I was the involuntary cause, appalled me with the traffic; and humanity called louder and louder than ever for the devotion of my remaining days to honest industry."¹²⁴ Shortly after, while sailing down the coast, he saw the territory of Cape Mount and was charmed by the location. When the local headman offered him land for a factory, Canot determined to quit the slave trade and start over as a legitimate trader at Cape Mount.

Quitting the slave trade was not easy for Canot. Blanco had left Africa, but he was still running his slaving business from Havana, and he needed Canot's services more than ever. All of Canot's assets were tied up in merchandise at New Sestros and he saw no immediate chance to liquidate them, so he decided to visit Cuba and try to persuade Blanco to buy him out. En route to Cuba, Canot stopped in Britain for two months to enjoy a bit of leisure and to establish some legitimate business contacts. He arranged a deal with London merchant George Clevering Redman; the two men agreed to try out a new business partnership as soon as Canot severed his ties to the slave trade. Encouraged by this prospect, Canot sailed to Havana. But Blanco was in no mood to let him go, he relied too much on his protégé to manage his affairs in Africa. Worried about losing his capital, Canot agreed to return to Africa as supercargo on board an American vessel that had been chartered to carry a cargo of goods to the coast. When he returned to New Sestros in April, he found Bell's threatening letter waiting for him.¹²⁵

Bell's two week ultimatum had expired long before Canot received the letter and nothing had happened to New Sestros. As soon as he returned, Canot wrote an immediate reply, objecting to Bell's authority. He argued that American claims to moral superiority were ridiculous considering the practice of slavery and slave trading carried on in the United States,

¹²³ Canot and Mayer, 382-387.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 391.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 391-398.

he suggested that Bell was overstepping his orders because the United States had not announced any intention to destroy slave factories, and he denied that the United States had the right to attack neutral African territory. Finally, Canot denied that any such action could be considered a defense of Liberia because the United States had always denied responsibility for those colonies, insisting that they were private philanthropic endeavors. If any of his property was destroyed, Canot threatened to claim damages from the U.S. government. Buchanan tried to organize a military force to march on New Sestros but nothing came of it and the Americans never carried out their threats to attack that place.¹²⁶

Meanwhile, the second American man-of-war, the U.S. *schooner Grampus*, arrived at Sierra Leone on March 7th, 1840, where she fell in with HMS *Wolverine*. Taking advantage of the long-awaited appearance of an American cruiser, *Wolverine*'s Commander William Tucker quickly proposed a partnership to *Grampus*'s captain, Lieut. John Paine. Tucker wrote, "Having been informed that the vessel under your command is to be employed on this coast to protect American mercantile interests, and to prevent the flag of the United States being used by people engaged in the slave trade, I hasten to offer you the co-operative services of the squadron under my orders, and to assure you I shall be most happy to enter into and make any arrangements with you, to render mutual assistance, that we may be the better able to carry into execution the orders and views of our respective Governments."¹²⁷ Tucker understood that the American cruisers were assigned to protect American commerce and prevent abuse of their flag, but he believed that cooperation between the two navies could serve the interests of both nations. Tucker informed Paine that he had reports of nine suspected slavers sailing under the American flag that were due to arrive on the coast at any time, providing them with plenty of opportunities for cooperation.

Anxious to see some action, Lieutenant Paine quickly accepted Tucker's offer, replying: "I can assure you that I can in no way more decidedly meet the views of my Government than by a hearty co-operation for the suppression of the slave trade under the American flag." Paine grossly overstated the U.S. position and naively agreed to "enter into

¹²⁶ Ibid., 399-404.

¹²⁷ William Tucker to John S. Paine, 10 March 1840, H.R. 283, 655-656.

any arrangements that may, on further discussion seem proper.”¹²⁸ The two officers formalized their pact the following day, agreeing to “detain all vessels, under American colors, found to be fully equipped for, and engaged in, the slave trade; that if proved to be American property, they shall be handed over to the United States’ schooner *Grampus*, or any other American cruiser; and that, if proved to be Spanish, Portuguese, Brazilian, or English property, to any of Her Britannic Majesty’s cruisers employed on the west coast of Africa, for the suppression of the Slave Trade, so far as their respective laws and treaties will permit.”¹²⁹ As Paine later explained, the agreement was intended to overcome the problem of slavers using multiple sets of papers, and to make it known that the American and British forces had “a good understanding, and a disposition to co-operate” in their mutual goal of combating the slave trade.¹³⁰

When the Navy Department received a copy of the agreement, Secretary Paulding immediately repudiated the pact. He acknowledged the U.S. desire for friendly cooperation with the British, but he rejected any formal agreement, worrying about possible implications regarding the contentious right of search issue. As Paulding interpreted it, the Paine-Tucker agreement gave the British navy the authority to seize vessels flying American colors. He rebuked Paine, informing him that “such a delegation of power is not only unauthorized by your instructions, but contrary to the established and well-known principles and policy of your Government, and is therefore not sanctioned by the Department.” Paulding ordered Paine to inform Tucker that the United States rejected their arrangement and that he could no longer comply with it. Instead, Paulding made the impractical suggestion that U.S. and British vessels cruise together, even though British cruisers outnumbered Americans ten to one on the coast of West Africa.¹³¹

¹²⁸ John S. Paine to William Tucker, 10 March 1840, H.R. 283, 656.

¹²⁹ Paine-Tucker agreement, 11 March 1840, H.R. 283, 656-657.

¹³⁰ John S. Paine to Daniel Webster, 2 May 1842, H.R. 283, 765-768.

¹³¹ James K. Paulding to John S. Paine, 4 June 1840, H.R. 283, 766-767. The discrepancy in the size of the two forces meant that they could not cruise in pairs and Americans feared that the British would take advantage of the situation. All U.S. cruisers would be paired off with a British cruiser that could closely monitor the Americans’ activities, leaving the remaining British vessels free to abuse Americans at will. Americans’ distrust of the British prevented any real cooperation.

Despite Paulding's repudiation, the Paine-Tucker agreement had a brief life of its own. The British had already put it to immediate use. Just days after Tucker and Paine made their pact, HMS *Bonetta* detained a suspicious vessel, the *Sarah Anne*, flying the U.S. flag in the Rio Pongas, and delivered her to *Grampus*.¹³² Paine happily accepted charge of the *Sarah Anne* and held an American passenger, Raymond Fronte, on suspicion of slave trading. He told his British counterparts: "I am confident that I only carry out the views of my superiors in office, in thanking you, and offering my cordial co-operation for the suppression of the slave trade, as far as existing treaties allow us to act."¹³³ The agreement appeared to be working. Henry Fox later wrote to Forsyth: "Her Majesty's Government [has] been much gratified by the intelligence of this zealous co-operation, on the part of the United States commander, for the attainment of an object which both Governments have equally at heart."¹³⁴

When Paine eventually received Paulding's rebuke he was naturally disappointed. But instead of complying with his new orders, Paine took advantage of the distance between Washington and West Africa, and he delayed informing the British about the cancellation for an entire year. At first he simply ignored Paulding's missive and did nothing, and then, after several months, he finally composed a letter to Tucker. In a tone that reflected the impotence of his position, Paine wrote that "the best, if not the only means of co-operation left, would seem to be exchanging information or cruising in company." He held out little hope for this option, writing: "If any thing can be effected by this vessel, within such limits, while on the coast, it will be gratifying to me to aid you, or any of Her Majesty's officers, in forwarding so desirable an object."¹³⁵ But failing to meet Tucker in person, Paine never delivered this letter. On June 17, 1841, he finally informed Tucker's successor that his government had repudiated the agreement, but by this time *Grampus*'s second cruise on the coast was nearing an end, and the effort was a mere formality. Washington's denunciation had already reached London, and the British admiralty had issued orders canceling the agreement back in February. Still feeling

¹³² John Stoll to John S. Paine, 16 March 1840, H.R. 283, 662-664.

¹³³ John S. Paine to John Stoll, 16 March 1840, H.R. 283, 664.

¹³⁴ Henry Fox to John Forsyth, 15 August 1840, H.R. 283, 655.

¹³⁵ John S. Paine to William Tucker, 27 April 1841, H.R. 283, 767.

bitter about the subject a year later, Paine remarked that “any expression of my opinion of Mr. Paulding’s letter to me would have been improper, and would still be indecorous.”¹³⁶

Meanwhile, diplomatic tension between the United States and Britain over the pending complaints and inquiries was increasing. In the spring of 1840, the United States received a long-awaited reply to its complaint regarding the *Susan*, but it was not the answer that Americans had expected. Palmerston’s response outraged the Van Buren administration. The British inquiry into the *Susan* case had amounted to nothing more than the collection of written statements from Commander Smyth and Master Pearse describing the events of April 10th.¹³⁷ Since both Smyth’s and Pearse’s reports portrayed the Americans on board *Susan* as rude and boorish, Palmerston concluded that the United States had no grounds for complaint. Rather, the British complained about *Susan*’s passenger Mr. Brewer. “From what is stated in these reports,” Palmerston wrote, “there seems strong reason to suspect that MR. Brewer was not unconnected with slave trade undertakings.”¹³⁸ The Americans were indignant. President Van Buren, Forsyth explained, had received Palmerston’s report with surprise and regret. Forsyth wrote: “The conduct of the British officers is attempted to be justified on their bare and unsupported statements, totally at variance with, and in entire disregard of, the facts registered, with every formality usual on such occasions, in the log book of the ‘Susan’.”¹³⁹

Forsyth challenged the British policy of interfering with American vessels, and suggested that the British were using the abuse of the U.S. flag as a pretext for “boarding, visiting, and interrupting vessels bearing the American flag.” He insisted that this practice should be abandoned, as several cases had already demonstrated the potential for abuse. “The President,” he wrote, “on learning the abuses which had grown out of it, and with a view to do away every cause for its longer continuance, having now directed the establishment of a competent naval force to cruise along those parts of the African coast which American vessels are in the habit of visiting in pursuit of their lawful commerce, and where it is alleged that the

¹³⁶ John S. Paine to Daniel Webster, with enclosures, 2 May 1842, H.R. 283, 765-768.

¹³⁷ Lord Palmerston to Andrew Stevenson with enclosures, 23 April 1840, Commander Smyth to Commodore Sullivan, 10 December 1839, N.B. Pearse to Commander Smyth, 10 December 1839, H.R. 283, 510-513.

¹³⁸ Lord Palmerston to Andrew Stevenson, 23 April 1840, H.R. 283, 510-511.

¹³⁹ John Forsyth to Andrew Stevenson, 8 July 1840, H.R. 283, 516-518.

slave trade has been carried on under an illegal use of the American flag of the United States, has a right to expect that positive instructions will be given to all Her Majesty's officers to forbear from boarding or visiting vessels under the American flag."¹⁴⁰ *Dolphin* and *Grampus* were not in West Africa to police the slave trade, they were there to protect Americans from obnoxious British officers who acted like the police of the seas. Stevenson relayed Forsyth's message to Palmerston and made it clear that these irritations endangered the existing good understanding between the two governments.¹⁴¹ The disappointing result of the *Susan* case, the growing list of insults to American merchantmen, and the British government's failure to admit any fault confirmed Van Buren's decision to send warships to West Africa.

Dolphin and *Grampus* cruised the West African coast from December of 1839 to July of 1840. When *Dolphin* returned to the United States, Captain Bell wrote to Secretary Paulding, explaining that as an American and a public servant, he felt that it was his duty to report his observations of Africa. Bell was upset by news reports that praised Britain's philanthropy in Africa and denounced U.S. actions. From what he had seen, the British were not as altruistic as these reports suggested. Bell criticized the British navy for its ineffective and illogical approach to combating the slave trade, reporting that "on my arrival at Sierra Leone, I was informed by Governor Doherty, the British Governor of that colony, that during the last year sixty-two slavers had been sent into that place; that not more than *one* vessel in *six* was captured by the British cruisers; and that upwards of three hundred thousand slaves were sent from Africa yearly."¹⁴² The British "usually cruise out of sight of land" he explained, and "it is customary for the slavers to run into one of these stations in the evening take on board three or four hundred negroes during the night, and run off with the land breeze the next morning." According to Bell, if a slaver could make it thirty miles from the coast without meeting a cruiser, it was safe until it reached the West Indies. Thus, the farther off the coast a cruiser patrolled, the less likely it was to catch any slavers.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Andrew Stevenson to Lord Palmerston, 14 August 1840, H.R. 283, 536-538.

¹⁴² Charles H. Bell to James K. Paulding, 28 July 1840, H.R. 283, 534-536.

Bell also blamed British fear of sickness and greed for prize money for much wasted effort. He reported having numerous conversations with British officers who, according to Bell, invariably told him that:

This is an unhealthy climate; we come out here to make prize money; if a slaver is captured without her cargo she is sent to Sierra Leone, where the expense of condemnation amounts to nearly the whole value of the vessel, which is the perquisite of those in the employ of the Government at that place; and we, who have all the labor and exposure, get nothing; whereas, if we capture a vessel with slaves on board, we receive five pounds sterling a head for each of them, without any deduction. Therefore, it is not [in] our interest to capture these vessels without their cargoes.

From Bell's perspective, everyone, including the British navy and the colonial government at Sierra Leone, seemed to be profiting from this system of partial suppression. Britain profited from auctions of captured slavers and their equipment at Sierra Leone, and Englishmen, acting as agents for slave dealers, invariably bought these goods at fair prices, so that confiscated vessels and slaving equipment often went right back into the trade. It vexed Bell to hear the British lauded as philanthropists for their noble efforts to end the trade when he saw them profiting from it. "Under these circumstances," he concluded, "the British Government is *not sincere in its attempts to put down the slave trade*."¹⁴³

Bell argued for a plan to end the trade by breaking up the slave factories along the coast, which he described as "badly fortified with a few pieces of cannon and worse manned." He calculated that one hundred men could destroy the factory at Gallinas, capture the slaves, and burn the town in a few hours, and that a force of one-third that size could accomplish the same tasks at New Sestros. "And, to prevent those men who are now in this business from again engaging in it," he recommended, "they should be either sent away from the coast, or (as they are outlaws, and to make a dreadful example) put to the sword."¹⁴⁴ Bell's criticism of Britain struck a popular chord with the Navy Department and Paulding passed his report along; it eventually ended up on Palmerston's desk.¹⁴⁵

Bell's criticisms of the British were not completely fair. The British navy had been blockading slave markets as Bell suggested. During the four years that Canot had been

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ John Forsyth to Andrew Stevenson, 19 August 1840, H.R. 283, 533-536.

operating at New Sestros, the British had blockaded his factory more than once, and although they had not stopped his business, they had slowed it down. In fact, the British had re-established a blockade of New Sestros shortly after Bell and Buchanan's aborted attempt to attack that place. This time, the British navy forced Canot to release slaves that he could not feed and almost succeeded in starving him out completely. It was during a break in this blockade, during the fall of 1840, that Canot shipped his last cargo of slaves from New Sestros, and the British pressure had been a contributing factor in his decision to quit the slave trade.¹⁴⁶

While the British blockaded New Sestros, Canot began converting his barracoons into a trading factory for African produce. Not everyone knew about this conversion, and even those who did were skeptical of Canot's intentions. HMS *Termagant* continued to blockade New Sestros, and when a skirmish broke out between *Termagant* and local Africans, Lieutenant Seagram held Canot responsible. *Termagant* fired on his factory and was on the verge of destroying everything when Canot managed to convince Seagram that he had reformed and had no part in the dispute with the natives. Canot arranged a meeting with Seagram and local headman Prince Freeman at New Sestros to resolve the matter. At the meeting, Canot and Freeman pledged to give up the slave trade forever, and in return Seagram agreed to protect Canot's property. As a sign of good faith, Canot surrendered one hundred slaves to the British.¹⁴⁷

Canot saved himself and his property by promising to abandon the slave trade, but the slavers at Gallinas were not so lucky. Just weeks later, Captain Denman and some two hundred men from HMS *Wanderer* attacked the factories at Gallinas. The Spanish slave traders fled into the woods while the British destroyed their barracoons and confiscated hundreds of slaves.¹⁴⁸ Africans at Gallinas took advantage of the chaos to loot a great deal of valuable Spanish property. When Buchanan received the news that the Africans had turned on the Spaniards at Gallinas he saw an opportunity to seize control of the territory. He wrote, "I have not the

¹⁴⁶ Canot and Mayer, 362-368.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 405-410. Canot provides copies of letters he received from Seagram dated 5 November 1840, and 23 January 1841.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Buchanan to S. Wilkeson, 13 December 1840, reprinted in: American Colonization Society, *The 24th Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States* (1841), 38; Canot and Mayer, 402-409.

least doubt, were a vessel at my command, that in three weeks I could add that splendid country to the territory of the Colony, and secure forever its freedom from the curse of the Slave Trade.”¹⁴⁹ Buchanan complained bitterly to the ACS that he did not have any such vessel at his command, and he blamed the society for the fact that Gallinas lay open and vulnerable to conquest by the British or reconquest by the slavers.

Buchanan was happy to see the slave trade pushed out of the neighborhood, but he was wary of Britain’s motives. He warned the ACS that:

if Seagram made this agreement by authority, it would seem his Government intends occupying that place. This would be a dismembering of our territory by cutting off our northern settlements from Sinou and Cape Palmas.

Liberia claimed jurisdiction over New Sestros and Buchanan had wanted to take control of that territory, but he did not have a sufficient force to do it.¹⁵⁰ “Can it be possible,” he asked, “that a great nation would descend to such a contemptible and wicked thing?” He advised the ACS to ascertain Britain’s intentions without delay.¹⁵¹

Buchanan’s reports worried the ACS. He described an unusual number of trading vessels on the coast that season, which suggested that legitimate commerce was supplanting the slave trade. This should have been good news. Increased trade meant increased revenue and prosperity for the colonies, but the trading vessels were “principally English.” The more lucrative the coastal trade became for British merchants, the more likely their government would be to interfere with the colony’s plans to assert control over the territory between Cape Mount and Cape Palmas. So despite its financial problems, the ACS instructed Buchanan to purchase more land along the coast, and to extend colonial jurisdiction as far as possible. The society believed that this measure would improve communication between its settlements, break up the slave trade, and demonstrate progress to colonization supporters. But its most immediate concern was “that the British Government, and the agricultural and commercial companies preparing to operate in Africa under its protection, are treating with the native kings for territory on the coast.” The society worried that “should they make settlements in

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Buchanan to S. Wilkeson, 13 December 1840, 43-44.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Buchanan to S. Wilkeson, 6 November 1839, reprinted in: American Colonization Society, *The 23rd Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*, 31.

¹⁵¹ Thomas Buchanan to S. Wilkeson, 13 December 1840, 38.

Liberia, it would embarrass, if not defeat, the experiment now making there, of a united Representative Government."¹⁵² The ACS wanted to stake its claims before the British moved in.

The proposed partnership between Canot and the British also worried the ACS; here was another example of British encroachment into Liberian territory. The ACS published attacks against Canot, hoping to discredit him and force him from the coast. The *African Repository* printed an editorial criticizing the United States for allowing Canot to go free. Theodore Canot had been born in Florence to Italian and French parents. From age twelve to seventeen he had apprenticed with an American captain, living at the captain's home in Salem, Massachusetts in between voyages. Although he had not returned to the United States since, his brief residence qualified him for U.S. citizenship. The *Repository* pointed out that because Canot had previously claimed American citizenship in order to protect his property and escape punishment by the mixed court at Sierra Leone, he should be considered a citizen and punished by the United States. It called on Paulding to order his arrest, liberate his slaves, and seize his property.¹⁵³

Canot had no reason to fear the United States, but his neighbors on the other hand, presented a real threat. When news of the chaos at Gallinas reached New Sestros in January of 1841, Prince Freeman suddenly realized that he had agreed to give up the slave trade. Freeman had only made the agreement with Canot and Seagram because he had believed that Canot was playing some sort of trick on the British. He had not believed that Canot sincerely meant to quit the slave trade. But when the British attacked Gallinas and spared New Sestros, it was obvious to Freeman that Canot's bargain was genuine. Realizing their position, the Africans at New Sestros turned on Canot and prepared to attack his factory and steal his property. Forced to abandon his factory, Canot appealed to *Termagant* for protection, and Seagram sent a small contingent of marines on shore to protect him. Under cover of British

¹⁵² American Colonization Society, *The 24th Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*, 15-16; Staudenraus, 237-239.

¹⁵³ "The British Niger Expedition, British Policy, President's Message," *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 15 January 1841, 27.

guns, Canot loaded his property on board *Termagant*, which carried him and his cargo to safety in Monrovia. The locals quickly destroyed the remains of the factory that he left behind.¹⁵⁴

Buchanan was genuinely concerned about the slave trade because of the stain it left on the United States and the problems it caused for Liberia, so he was happy to see Canot give it up. To further help suppress the slave trade and counter the growing British involvement in the region, Buchanan hoped that the United States would increase its involvement on the coast. Buchanan assumed that his responsibilities as U.S. agent for recaptured Africans included assisting in the suppression of the slave trade, and therefore that he should endeavor to provide information and insight on the subject that might be useful to the U.S. government. Accordingly, he sent Paulding reports detailing the slave trade along the coast. He reported that “there have been fewer instances of slave trading under cover of the American flag,” but that “it still unhappily continues to some extent.” He noted that in the last three months three American vessels had sailed from the slave market at Gallinas with full cargoes of slaves.¹⁵⁵

Buchanan also explained the problem of Americans supplying trade goods to slave factories and ships facilitating the illicit trade. He wrote that:

You are probably not aware to what extent the slave trade is sustained by the indirect agency of those who in other respects are engaged in legitimate commerce. I allude to the supplies furnished the factories, of provisions, water casks and merchandize and also to the assistance rendered in conveying their effects from one station to another, procuring information of the movements of the cruisers &c.

When the British began paying closer attention to the coastal areas and empty vessels, instead of just slave-laden ships at sea, slavers adapted. When the coast was clear, the slaver would hurriedly make port, load a cargo of slaves and set sail as quickly as possible before another British cruiser appeared. As a consequence, slavers began to use more specie and bills of trade to purchase slaves; it was much quicker and easier to pay for slaves in cash than it was to unload a shipload of rum, tobacco, and other bulky goods.¹⁵⁶ Legitimate traders, including

¹⁵⁴ Canot and Mayer, 409-410.

¹⁵⁵ Thomas Buchanan to James K. Paulding, 3 July 1840, Correspondence of the Secretary of the Navy relating to African Colonization, NARA, M205, roll 2, Letters received 1826-1841.

¹⁵⁶ Brooks, 114.

many Americans, filled the gap by providing trade goods in West Africa. Americans sold cargoes of goods to slave factors like Canot for cash, and the factors traded those goods to Africans for slaves. The foodstuffs and other basic goods that Americans sold to factors were legitimate, but the supply of these goods to slave traders was essential to the illicit trade. "Some remain here," Buchanan explained, "wholly in the service of the factories, for months collecting rice and in other ways forwarding the operations of the slavers." Americans, if not slavers themselves, were often guilty of acting as willing accessories to the trade. Buchanan told Paulding: "I cannot but hope that measures will be taken to put an end to this kind of legal aid which more than every thing else tends to sustain the traffic."¹⁵⁷

Paulding did not appreciate Buchanan's reports. He rebuked Buchanan and ordered him to stop including information about the slave trade in his reports. Paulding wrote: "It appears to be necessary again to advise you, that you are responsible to the Department only as agent for Recaptured Africans, and that it is expected you will confine yourself to the duties of that office in your correspondence."¹⁵⁸ Paulding was not interested in information about the slave trade or abuses of the American flag. Buchanan's reply to this missive was less than contrite. He told Paulding that he had gotten the idea from one of Paulding's letters "that the Government was desirous of procuring information on the subject as connected with the abuse of the national flag." Nevertheless, Buchanan assured the secretary that "in future I shall carefully avoid including in my letters any matter not immediately connected with the duties of my office."¹⁵⁹ The Van Buren administration thus silenced its own agent, cutting off its main source of information on the slave trade in West Africa. The United States had admitted the need to send naval cruisers to West Africa to protect Americans from British abuse, but it was not particularly interested in using those cruisers, or any other means, to suppress the slave trade.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas Buchanan to James K. Paulding, 3 July 1840, Correspondence of the Secretary of the Navy relating to African Colonization, NARA, M205, roll 2, Letters received 1826-1841.

¹⁵⁸ James K. Paulding to Thomas Buchanan, 6 April 1840, Correspondence of the Secretary of the Navy relating to African Colonization, NARA, M205, roll 1, Letters sent 1820-1844.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Buchanan to James K. Paulding, 5 September 1840, Correspondence of the Secretary of the Navy relating to African Colonization, NARA, M205, roll 2, Letters received 1826-1841.

Nicholas P. Trist

The Van Buren administration's silencing of Buchanan demonstrated that it was clearly not interested in investigating American participation in the slave trade. But under continuing pressure from the British, it could not ignore the subject altogether. Officially, the State Department sent Alexander Everett to Cuba to investigate claims that slavers were abusing the U.S. flag, but his primary task was to investigate the British accusations against the American consul at Havana, Nicholas P. Trist. During the spring of 1840, Everett spent several weeks in Cuba investigating the matter. He never met Trist, who had left the island for Washington, and he had no access to the consular papers, which had been removed. But he read Trist's letters and he interviewed several people, including the resident British commissioners. Everett returned to the United States in mid-June and submitted his report to Forsyth. The report severely, although soberly, criticized Trist's actions, some of which, Everett concluded, "merit[ed] the severest reprobation."¹⁶⁰

Everett reported that "the consul might, without impropriety, have made, (or, rather, that it was his duty to make,) stronger efforts than he has done to check the piratical practices that have been carried on under his eye, with the American flag."¹⁶¹ For Everett, this appeared to be an error in judgement, not official misconduct, and he concluded, that Trist's "omission to do so has not been the result of indifference, or any more corrupt motive; but of a settled conviction that any measures which he could take for the purposes alluded to would be entirely ineffectual, from the impossibility of procuring such evidence as would be available in a court of justice." And, "that in this conviction (though probably erroneous) he is sustained by the practice of the prosecuting and revenue officers at Baltimore, and of the British Government, in cases of similar description."¹⁶² Trist had claimed that there was nothing that he could have done to effectively interfere with the slave trade at Havana, and so he did nothing. He also argued that the authorities in Baltimore did nothing to interfere with the

¹⁶⁰ Alexander H. Everett to John Forsyth, 21 July 1840, reprinted in: U.S. President and John Forsyth, *Search or Seizure of American Vessels on Coast of Africa, & C : Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting a Report from the Secretary of State, in Relation to Seizures or Search of American Vessels, &C*, 26 Cong., 2 sess., 1841. H. Exec. Doc. 115, 483.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 478-479.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 481.

slave ships built in their port, and he claimed that he had interpreted their lack of action as a statement of U.S. policy that he had merely followed. Although Everett considered Trist's analysis to be "erroneous," he was willing to accept it as sincere and excuse Trist of any official misconduct.

But Everett retracted these preliminary conclusions in the second half of his report, which included an examination of Trist's conduct on behalf of the Portuguese consul. Although he had initially been willing to accept Trist's explanations, upon closer examination he found that Trist's dealings with the Portuguese contradicted his own defense. Portugal had recalled its consul from Havana in 1838. Before leaving, the departing consul had asked Trist to authenticate papers for Portuguese nationals in his absence. Trist had agreed, and had been performing this service for more than a year. He claimed that he had felt obliged to do so as a diplomatic courtesy, but Everett thought that Trist should have refused to perform any questionable act, particularly this one.

Everett also questioned Trist's honesty. In his letters, Trist had expressed his "decided gratification" at signing papers that would defy British attempts to search suspected slave ships. Everett criticized Trist sharply, writing: "It is no part of the duty of an American consul to regulate his official duty in any respect by his views, whether favorable or unfavorable, of the policy of foreign Governments." And, "If the error now alluded to had had no other result than a misplaced expression of opinion in official correspondence, it would have been comparatively unimportant; but where it forms one of the inducements to acts of so extraordinary a character as lending the sanction of the consular seal and signature to the papers of forty-one vessels engaged in piratical expeditions, it becomes of the highest consequence, and cannot but be regarded as meriting the severest reprobation."¹⁶³ Trist believed that the slave trade was a positive good and he wrote to the British commissioners in Havana arguing that Africans were better off enslaved. His only concern was that the trade should be regulated to prevent abuses. Everett surmised that "the views of slavery and the slave trade, which are here expressed by the consul at Havana, are not those which form the

¹⁶³ Ibid., 483.

basis of the legislation of the United States upon this subject.” He pointed out that the United States had made participation in the slave trade “a crime punishable by death,” and concluded that “considering this essential difference between the views of the consul upon this whole subject, and those which are expressed in the laws of the United States, it would not be very singular if he should (unconsciously, perhaps, to himself) have exhibited somewhat less activity in the enforcement of these laws than he naturally would have done under other circumstances.”¹⁶⁴ Everett implied that the consul could not be trusted to perform his duties as an official representative of the United States faithfully because he was likely to be swayed, perhaps unconsciously, by his own peculiar beliefs.

Everett also determined that Trist had put too much confidence in a corrupt subordinate, and that this clerk was likely guilty of selling the signed blank consular forms without Trist’s knowledge. Everett did not believe that Trist had acted for personal gain or greed, but his faithful employment of such a dishonest clerk was another example of Trist’s poor judgement and inability to manage the consulate effectively. In his final conclusion, Everett determined that Trist’s personal views on the slave trade, which contradicted the U.S. government’s policy, had interfered with his ability to perform his official duties. Everett reported to Forsyth that:

After looking separately at the several portions of Trist’s conduct, it is necessary, in order to form a correct estimate of the whole, to view different parts in connexion, and examine their bearings upon each other. When, in so doing, we find the consul lending the sanction of his official seal and signature to Portuguese vessels engaged in the slave trade, not only without necessity, but without reluctance, and even with feelings of ‘decided gratification,’ under the influence of his peculiar views on the subjects of national independence and slavery, it is perhaps not unnatural to conclude that these same views may have had some effect in determining his conduct in regard to the vessels of his own country, and may have led him to acquiesce more readily than he otherwise would have done in the supposed impossibility of finding every evidence, available in a court of justice, of facts which are admitted by all to be as notorious as the sun at noonday.¹⁶⁵

Everett concluded that Trist’s own actions compromised his defense and called his character into serious question.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 487.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 487-488.

Trist exhibited poor judgement. His behavior towards the British commissioners was offensive and exacerbated the diplomatic problems between the United States and Britain. He antagonized people, and his dislike of the British clouded his judgement. He placed trust in subordinates of questionable integrity and was regularly absent from his post for extended periods. Had he behaved more diplomatically, perhaps the accusations of abetting the slave trade would not have created such a scandal. But Trist seemed to go out of his way to make his support for the trade known to the world. It was obvious to Everett, and many others, that the man was unfit for his post.

The controversy surrounding Trist continued long after Everett submitted his confidential report to Forsyth in July of 1840. Initially, the press was distracted by the release of the House Commerce Committee's report acquitting Trist of abusing American seamen.¹⁶⁶ But by January of 1841, newspapers including the *Boston Mercantile Journal* and the *Liberator* started questioning why Trist had still not been recalled.¹⁶⁷ In February, when Congress passed a resolution requesting documents related to the search and seizure of American vessels suspected in the slave trade, John Quincy Adams attached an amendment requesting Trist's correspondence.¹⁶⁸ President Van Buren submitted the documents, which included Everett's report, to Congress on his last day in office, March 3, 1841. When Adams saw that these documents included only a partial reply from Trist to Everett's report, he became incensed and accused Forsyth of suppressing documents. Democrats answered that Trist, the notoriously prolix writer, had still not finished writing his response. Congress passed another resolution requesting more information, and again, Adams attached an amendment. Having learned the contents of Everett's report, he demanded the government explain why it had not done anything about it, and he argued that Trist should be recalled.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Commerce, *Report [from] the Committee on Commerce, to Whom Was Referred the Petition of Certain Ship-Masters, Ship-Owners, and Other Citizens, in Relation to the Conduct of N.P. Trist, Consul of the United States at Havana*, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 1840. H.R. 707.

¹⁶⁷ "Consul Trist," *Liberator*, 22 January 1841. This article was copied from the *Boston Mercantile Journal*.

¹⁶⁸ "Congressional," *Christian Reflector*, 10 February 1841.

¹⁶⁹ U.S. President and John Forsyth, *Search or Seizure of American Vessels on Coast of Africa, & C : Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting a Report from the Secretary of State, in Relation to Seizures or Search of American Vessels, &C*, 26 Cong., 2 sess., 1841. H. Exec. Doc. 115. In addition to Everett's report, this document contains Nicholas P. Trist's partial reply, which although it stretches over more than 150 printed pages, remained unfinished: "Examination of Mr. Everett's Report," 505-766. Also see: *New World*, 6 June 1841; *New York Weekly*

Historians have not adequately accounted for the role that the Trist scandal played in the diplomatic dispute between the United States and Britain over the slave trade. Daniel Webster, the new secretary of state, wrote to Trist in July of 1841, recalling him, just a few weeks after Adams' demand. Webster explained that President Tyler had made the decision on the grounds of propriety and expediency, without forming any judgement on the charges against him.¹⁷⁰ Although historian Jesse Reeves writes that upon Everett's investigation, Trist was removed; subsequent historians have either ignored this case or tried to defend Trist by arguing that he was the victim of sectional and partisan politics.¹⁷¹ But the evidence does not support that interpretation.¹⁷²

Trist was more than a troublesome Democrat recalled by a new Whig administration; he aggravated diplomatic tensions with Britain at a time when the United States was trying to improve its relations with that country. Not long after Webster recalled Trist, the *North American Review* published an article listing several incidents, including the McLeod case, the *Caroline* Affair, and Trist controversy, which had contributed to what that publication called the United States' "slippery relations" with Britain. The *Review* argued that the United States should not give Britain any more reasons like Trist to suspect Americans of complicity in the slave trade, implying that he should have been recalled long before, and suggesting that the accusations against him had contributed to the country's deteriorating relations with Britain. The article noted that the country was impatient to know more about Trist. It refused to pronounce judgement on his criminality, suggesting that only the strongest evidence should convict him, but it also stated that only the strongest proof of innocence should have kept him

Herald, 21 June 1841; U.S. President, *Seizure of American Vessels, Slave Trade : Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting a Communication from the Secretary of State in Relation to the Seizure of American Vessels by British Armed Cruisers, under the Pretense That They Were Engaged in the Slave Trade : And Also Correspondence with Consul Trist, Upon the Subject of the Slave Trade, in Compliance with a Resolution of the House of Representatives of the 21st Ultimo*, 27 Cong., 1 sess., 1841. Executive Doc. 34.

¹⁷⁰ Howard, *American Slavers and the Federal Law, 1837-1862*, 36.

¹⁷¹ Robert Arthur Brent, "Nicholas Philip Trist; Biography of a Disobedient Diplomat" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1950); Robert W. Drexler, *Guilty of Making Peace : A Biography of Nicholas P. Trist* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991); Wallace Ohrt, *Defiant Peacemaker : Nicholas Trist in the Mexican War* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1997); Reeves, 31-32; Louis Martin Sears, "Nicholas P. Trist, a Diplomat with Ideals," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 11, no. 1 (1924). Trist's biographers ignore or distort Everett's report to support their claims that he was removed for partisan reasons.

¹⁷² Also see: Alexander Everett to Daniel Webster, 15 July 1841, Mss. 140, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.

at his consular post. The *Review* concluded that Trist's "presumed mal-administration" had brought "mischief and dishonor" on the nation.¹⁷³

Conclusion

The Trist scandal and the growing number of complaints about cases like the *Susan* forced the Van Buren administration to pay more attention to West Africa and the slave trade than the previous administration had. In his last annual message to Congress, Van Buren concluded with a report on the illicit trade. He claimed that "the suppression of the African slave trade has received the continued attention of the Government," something that Jackson could not have claimed. He reported that "the brig Dolphin and schooner Grampus have been employed during the last season on the coast of Africa, for the purpose of preventing such portions of that trade as was said to be prosecuted under the American flag." And according to Bell and Paine, who were sincerely interested in suppressing the trade, their presence on the coast had "in a great degree, arrested the prostitution of the American flag to this inhuman purpose." The president reported to Congress and the American people that slave trade was now "principally carried on under Portuguese colors."¹⁷⁴

In addition to the prostitution of the American flag, Van Buren was also concerned about the role played by so-called legitimate traders on the West African coast. He advised Congress that efforts to suppress the slave trade must "be directed against the facilities afforded by what are now recognised as legitimate commercial pursuits." He called on Congress to forbid Americans from trading with the slave factories on the coast of Africa, thus "giving an example to all nations in this respect, which, if fairly followed, cannot fail to produce the most effective results in breaking up those dens of iniquity."¹⁷⁵ There was no real chance that any such law would be effective without adequate enforcement by the only force authorized to do so, the U.S. navy, and the Van Buren administration made no provision for increased patrols because it was not seriously interested in suppressing the slave trade. To the

¹⁷³ North American Review, October 1841, 438-439.

¹⁷⁴ Martin Van Buren, "Message of the President," 5 December 1840, Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 26 Cong., 2 sess., 1840, 5.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

contrary, when Lieutenant Paine had attempted to cooperate with the British navy, the U.S. government had immediately ordered him to void his arrangement, despite its probable success. And the administration had silenced its own agent, Thomas Buchanan, when he had reported information on the slave trade. Van Buren had offered only token assistance to the colonies and Paulding had rejected many of their requests for aid. The Van Buren administration made it very clear that its priority was to stop the British navy's practice of abusing Americans. Since the British showed no signs of apologizing or curtailing their insulting behavior, Van Buren had been forced to send cruisers to West Africa.

Diplomatic conflict with Britain pushed the Van Buren administration to take a greater interest in West Africa, and these events coincided with the American public's growing interest in that coast. Colonizationists were especially concerned about the negative impact that the slave trade was having on the Liberian colonies, and every American merchantman sailing the Atlantic had to be concerned about the threat of interference from the British navy. Although Van Buren did not have strong feelings about expanding the navy's peacetime role like Jackson had, threats to American interests convinced him to assign naval vessels to cruise West Africa for the first time, thereby expanding existing U.S. policy of using the navy to protect American interests to a new sector of the globe. British pressure and private American interests combined to make West Africa a much more important place to the United States than it had been just a few years before. And the events and consequent decisions made during Van Buren's presidency would have a direct impact on the next administration when the diplomatic dispute with Britain came to a head in 1841.

CHAPTER 5

TRANSITIONS: NEW GOVERNMENTS AND THE HOPE FOR PEACE

1841 was a year of political transition, as new governments took office in the United States, Britain, and Liberia. The Whig administration of William Henry Harrison replaced Martin Van Buren's Democrats in the White House, and then in turn was replaced by John Tyler's quasi-Whig administration. In Britain, Sir Robert Peel's Conservative government replaced William Lamb's Whigs. And the death of Thomas Buchanan led the ACS to appoint colonist John J. Roberts the new Governor of Liberia. These changes in government inspired hope for improved relations between the United States and Britain, but 1841 turned out to be a rocky political year and tensions between the two countries worsened instead of improving. President Harrison died after only a month in office, and domestic political difficulties plagued his successor's administration. In Britain, Lord Palmerston spent his last days as head of the British Foreign Office escalating the diplomatic conflict with the United States: rejecting American indemnity claims, and boldly asserting the new "right of visit." And the appointment of a colonist as leader of Liberia raised contentious issues about black American colonists' capacity for self-government.

Worsening relations between the United States and Britain during 1841 led to treaty negotiations in 1842, and among other things, to the creation of the first formal U.S. Africa squadron. But when analyzing the creation and mission of the U.S. Africa squadron, historians pay surprisingly little attention to the relevant events that preceded the Webster-Ashburton treaty negotiations. Naval histories give cursory descriptions, at best, of the diplomatic events behind the squadron's creation and purpose, and diplomatic histories focus far more on the negotiations than on the precipitating events.¹

¹ As cited in the previous chapter, among naval historians Donald Canney comes closest to addressing this issue, but he provides only limited and general information about the diplomatic background. Canney, 22-27. Alan Booth unsuccessfully attempts to incorporate some elements of diplomatic history into his history of the squadron, but he

As with the preceding chapter, this chapter argues that a close study of the events leading up to the treaty negotiations and the creation of the Africa squadron is essential to understand U.S. reasons for forming the squadron and how the government intended to use it. The Africa squadron was not the product of an inevitable series of events, nor was it merely the easy solution to a diplomatic problem, as historians have suggested.² Rather, the creation of the first formal U.S. Africa squadron was a significant event in American naval and diplomatic history, and it did not come about easily or casually. The roots of this squadron can be traced back to the beginning of American naval history in general, and specifically to the precedents set by Andrew Jackson's aggressive use of the navy to protect and expand American foreign commerce. Certainly, the Van Buren administration's admission that the country needed to maintain a naval presence off West Africa, and its deployment of cruisers to that coast, began to prepare Americans for the possibility of an Africa squadron. This chapter continues this narrative through the year 1841, as the Tyler administration proposed creating a formal Africa squadron, and struggled to win support for that project from Congress and the American people. By ignoring the precipitating events, historians suggest that British pressure and the occasion of the treaty caused the United States to form the squadron in 1842, but as this chapter shows, the Tyler administration proposed creating an Africa squadron as part of its foreign policy agenda long before Britain proposed negotiating a treaty.³ The treaty played an

strangely traces the origin of the squadron proposal to the Paine-Tucker agreement of 1839 and bypasses Upshur altogether. Not only does Booth misinterpret the squadron's purpose to include joint cruising, he ignores far too many and more important diplomatic and naval events that influenced the squadron's creation. Booth. Most histories that touches on the subjects of the squadron, the treaty, or the diplomatic conflict over the right of search focus almost exclusively on just one of these three subjects while giving little, if any, attention to the other two. These histories do not discuss or connect Upshur's work to create an Africa squadron in 1841 with the decision to propose a squadron during treaty negotiations or with the form that his orders to the squadron eventual took. Howard Jones devotes a chapter in his study on the treaty to tracing the history of issues related to slavery, but he does not discuss the navy, Upshur, or his plan to form an Africa squadron. Jones gives very little attention to important right of search issue, and instead focuses almost exclusively on the *Creole* case. The result is a very limited view of the factors that influenced treaty articles eight and nine. Jones, 69-86, 142-143. Also see: Crapol, 113; Reeves, 28-57.

² In addition to the examples cited above, see: Harmon, "Suppress and Protect the United States Navy, the African Slave Trade, and Maritime Commerce, 1794-1862", 76-79. Harmon has studied the history of the U.S. Navy in relation to the slave trade and West African commerce prior to the Civil War, but for some reason he passes over the formal creation of the squadron in a cursory few paragraphs. Although he suggests that the squadron was created in response to the right of search dispute with Britain, his extremely brief description of events misleadingly implies that the squadron idea was natural and inevitable.

³ As Warren Howard describes, some congressmen, including Sen. James Buchanan, opposed the squadron on the grounds that its creation appeared to be the result of British pressure. But their objections were political, and Howard's failure to describe the Tyler administration's policy prior to the treaty leads readers to infer that Buchanan's accusations were accurate and fair when it would be more accurate to say that placating the British was more of an added benefit rather than a primary reason for creating the squadron. Howard, *American Slavers and the Federal Law, 1837-1862*, 40-41.

important part in helping the Tyler administration implement its policy goals, but it was not the cause or source of that policy.

A thorough understanding of the reasons for the squadron's creation and its purpose is necessary to evaluate its success or failure. To develop this understanding, this chapter combines naval, diplomatic, and West African histories, which together show that the idea to create a squadron was not new when Webster proposed it to Ashburton in the spring of 1842. This chapter is divided into two sections. After a brief description of Eben Farwell's activities in 1841, the first section describes colonizationists' ongoing struggles; the second section addresses the Tyler administration's development of U.S. foreign policy related to West Africa.

When Martin Van Buren left office the United States had a small naval presence on the coast of West Africa and a new interest in that part of the world. The presence of American naval cruisers on that coast seemed to be achieving the government's goal of protecting American merchantmen from British abuse, while also discouraging slavers' fraudulent use of the U.S. flag. But despite the navy's preliminary success in West Africa, the diplomatic conflict between the United States and Britain over the right of search continued, exacerbated by Palmerston's assertion of the right of visit. And British-American relations deteriorated further when the British navy and British merchants began to infringe upon Liberian territory, disregarding the colonies' authority and threatening their survival.

The Liberian colonies and the ACS faced difficult challenges in 1841. Political conflicts between the various groups living in and around the colonies threatened the settlements' survival. Colonists, missionaries, and Africans found it increasingly difficult to coexist in close proximity to one another, and the ACS continued to suffer from financial problems and dwindling public support in the United States. Throughout the course of 1841, the society tried to take advantage of high-profile cases like the *Amistad* and *Creole* to renew public and government support for the colonies, but these efforts largely failed. Thomas Buchanan's death struck yet another blow against the colonization project. So when the British decided to challenge Liberian's jurisdiction over territory along the coast, the ACS and its colonies were

particularly vulnerable and understandably alarmed. From the beginning of John Roberts' administration, Britain supplanted the slave trade as the biggest threat to Liberia's survival.

In Washington, the Tyler administration made resolving outstanding disputes and eliminating tensions with Britain a priority. Secretary of State Daniel Webster focused on resolving the northeastern boundary dispute and several other points of conflict with Britain, while the new secretary of the navy, Abel Upshur, took a serious interest in West Africa. Like Van Buren, Roberts, and others, Upshur saw the British as the biggest threat to American interests in West Africa. Believing that American commerce in the region had grown sufficiently large to merit protection, he ambitiously tried to create a permanent Africa squadron to protect those interests.

Upshur tried to extend Jackson's naval policy to include a West African station by converting Van Buren's temporary assignment of cruisers to that coast into a permanent squadron. But in 1841 few people believed that American interests in West Africa were significant enough to warrant such protection. Most Americans objected to Upshur's proposed Africa squadron on the grounds that the threats to American interests in that region, if there were any, were not sufficient to justify the expense of a full-time squadron. In order to win public support, Upshur needed to convince the people that American interests in Africa were both significant and threatened. Throughout 1841, Upshur, Tyler, and other squadron supporters, particularly colonizationists, worked to promote the creation of an Africa squadron as a means of defending American interests in West Africa from the British. They achieved little success. Into the midst of this campaign, Eben Farwell sailed the *Mary Carver* to West Africa on a trading voyage that would ultimately change peoples' minds about the need for this squadron.

Eben Farwell & the *Mary Carver*

Eben Farwell left little evidence of his life and character behind when he died. Besides the records of his legal trials, the biggest piece of evidence that survives to reveal something about the man is the house that he built for his wife and young family in Maine. A study of the

house, its style and contents, and the estate that Farwell left behind reveals a man of grand aspirations, but of questionable substance.

In 1840, Eben Farwell began building a new house in Vassalboro, Maine to symbolize his success as a merchant sea captain. Mariners often used architecture to convey their position in society; impressive houses symbolized individual enterprise, and public improvements signaled a town's prosperity.⁴ Farwell hired local builder C. J. Webber to construct a two-story Greek Revival home on the family farm for his wife and two young sons. The house was situated on a rise along the River Road, next door to his father's house, with a spectacular view of the Kennebec River.⁵



Figure 2. C. J. Webber, Greek Revival house built for Capt. Eben Farwell c. 1841, Vassalboro, Maine. Photograph by the author.

⁴ Richard Candee, "The Appearance of Enterprise and Improvement : Architecture and the Coastal Elite of Southern Maine," in *Agreeable Situations : Society, Commerce, and Art in Southern Maine, 1780-1830*, ed. Laura F. Sprague (Kennebunk, Me.: Brick Store Museum, 1987), 67.

⁵ Deed 124: 580, Kennebec County Registrar of Deeds, Augusta, Maine; Eben Farwell and Children Probate File, Kennebec County Probate Court, Augusta, Maine. Eben Farwell's father-in-law Joseph Abbott served as Registrar of Deeds at the time. William Farwell transferred the deed to the 3 acres of the family estate on which the house was already standing, to his son Eben for \$300.

The Greek Revival style heavily impressed itself upon the Maine landscape in the 1830s and 40s. Both the new state house and the Kennebec County courthouse, recently constructed in Augusta, included significant Greek Revival design elements.⁶ Inspired by this trend, Farwell commissioned a similar design for his new house, suggesting that he was a man of important consequence and wealth. His was only the second Greek Revival house built in Vassalboro, and with its large size and imposing hilltop presence, it definitely stood out in the small frontier village.

When it was completed, the Farwells furnished their new home in a style to match the grandeur of the architecture. They filled it with beautiful things and exotic items that Eben Farwell had acquired on his travels, including a mahogany table with eight chairs, a rocking chair for the nursing mother, and a rocking horse for the boys. The sofa in the double front parlor alone was valued at forty dollars. A fancy clock and case was featured in the main hall, glass lamps and candlesticks lighted the way, and carpets covered the floors. They also had a large assortment of fine linens, china, silver, a hammock, and an ivory tooth from Africa on display.⁷

The size and style of the house was a brash and proud statement of Eben Farwell's success as a merchant sailor that reflected a degree of arrogance. He was still young, and his success was neither established nor secure. Despite his legal troubles, his previous ventures had been profitable, and in addition to building such a grand house he was also able to loan his father-in-law \$1,400 that summer.⁸ But he still had a ways to go. Town records listed his occupation as "yeoman or mariner," not gentleman like his father and grandfather.⁹ He had parted with his business partners Johnson Williams & Co., and he did not own his own vessel or have any assets other than his new house, its contents, and the small piece of land it stood on.

As Webber completed work on the house, the family settled in. It was a stressful time for them. Laura was pregnant when their younger son Joseph suddenly died. Their third child,

⁶ Denys Peter Myers, "The Greek Revival: From About 1835 to 1850," in *Maine Forms of American Architecture*, ed. Deborah Thompson (Camden, Me.: The Colby Museum of Art ; Downeast Magazine, 1976), 95-98.

⁷ Eben Farwell and Children Probate File, Kennebec County Probate Court, Augusta, Maine.

⁸ A sizeable amount, Joseph Abbott put up not only his home on Greene Street in Augusta but also his shares in a local saw mill as collateral. Deed 126: 166, Kennebec County Registrar of Deeds, Augusta, Maine.

⁹ Kennebec County Registrar of Deeds, Augusta, Maine.

Joseph A. Farwell, was born five months later on April 7, 1841. Meanwhile, Farwell began preparing for his next voyage. With the help of his brother James, he chartered the *Mary Carver*, a schooner of one hundred-tons burden. Constructed in 1836, she had already made at least four sea voyages when Farwell prepared her for a voyage to West Africa.¹⁰

In 1841 the West Coast of Africa was a dangerous place for American merchant vessels. They carried valuable cargoes across the sea to trade with potentially hostile natives in a land plagued by yellow fever and malaria; sailors risked their fortunes and their lives every time they sailed to Africa. American sailors relied on their captain to protect them in a place where an American identity carried little weight and U.S. naval vessels rarely visited. The ACS noted: "The importance and necessity of keeping a squadron on the Western coast of Africa, to protect American commerce, [was] every day becoming more apparent."¹¹ Still, in spite of the danger, hundreds of ships, lured by the chance of great profits, carried on a regular trade between American ports and African coastal villages.

In 1841, European colonial ports in West Africa recorded importing American tobacco, rum, lumber, flour, and cotton goods valued at over \$250,000. Because the African trade was so unpredictable, the *Mary Carver* most likely carried all of these items along with a wide variety of manufactured and metal goods. Contemporary trade records list everything from brass kettles and pans to looking glasses, Manchester red bonny chintz, flasks, hats, red leather trunks, drums fit for boys of six or seven, fish hooks, locks, and of course guns and ammunition. Experienced merchants preferred to vary their cargoes as widely as possible, and loaded their vessels carefully so that any item could be readily unloaded.¹² Eben Farwell most likely did his best to prepare for the voyage, but his arrogance and overconfidence, traits that were clearly visible in the records of his previous voyages, legal trials, and in the ambitious design of his grand new house, worked against him in the dangerous world of West African trade.

¹⁰ Eben Farwell and Children Probate File, Kennebec County Probate Court, Augusta, Maine. The *Mary Carver* was 70' 6 1/2" in length, 19' 7" in breadth and 8' 4" in depth. She had one deck, two masts, a square stern, and billethead but no galleries. Survey of Federal Archives, *Ship Enrollments of the District of Plymouth Massachusetts 1789-1838* (Boston: National Archives Project, 1939); Farwell, Abbott, and Wilson, 366.

¹¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 15 April 1841, 126-127.

¹² Brooks, 297-312.

Colonial Affairs

When the *Mary Carver* arrived in West Africa she sailed into the middle of a tense political climate in which colonial governments, foreign missionaries, merchants, African-American colonists, and numerous African peoples were struggling to coexist. Together, these tensions and the American Colonization Society's financial problems made life in the colonies difficult and uncertain. In addition to these local and internal conflicts, a new danger arose that placed the future of the Liberian colonies in jeopardy. During the course of 1841, British encroachment and growing disregard for Liberian colonial authority and territorial claims threatened to destroy Liberia.

At Cape Palmas, the Maryland colonists faced immediate threats from the neighboring Grebo people and the resident Protestant missionaries. The colonists resented the Grebo and treated them poorly. Governor Russwurm lamented the danger that this hostility placed the colony in:

I am sorry to perceive in the colonists generally a strong prejudice and hatred of the natives. If indulged in the ends must inevitably be a war of extermination of our party, this sentiment prevails among the farmers whose situation is the most exposed. They are the most ignorant, and though the majority can neither read nor write, wish to set themselves up as interpreters of the law. In every palaver with the natives they desire an appeal to arms.¹³

The only solution Russwurm could envision was to convince the Grebo to leave the cape, but the Grebo did not want to move and the colony lacked the resources or the power to force them to go. Russwurm hoped that matters would not escalate before he could find a solution.

Russwurm also had the ongoing problems with the missionaries to deal with. In 1841, Rev. John L. Wilson antagonized the governor by giving all of his employees the title of assistant missionary, thereby claiming that the entire mission was exempt from militia service. And Dr. Savage had followed Wilson's lead and instituted the same policy at Mt. Vaughan.¹⁴ Ultimately, Wilson's obstinate refusal to compromise on this issue forced the MSCS to declare that only white missionaries qualified for such exemptions. The society did not intend to foster division between its colony and the missions, to the contrary, it hoped to encourage unity by

¹³ John Brown Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 22 September 1841, MSCSP, Letterbooks 1838-1843.

¹⁴ Campbell, 136.

insisting that black missionaries were colonists; the mission was, after all, located in colonial territory and very much a part of life in the colony. The colonial government could not tolerate this growing challenge to its authority and still expect to maintain control, enforce its jurisdiction, and protect its sovereignty. But the missionaries did not agree. As the friction between the colonists and the missionaries escalated, Wilson began to consider leaving the cape.¹⁵

At Monrovia, Thomas Buchanan and the Liberian colonists were also struggling to survive and prosper. When the British navy drove off the slavers at New Sestros and Gallinas, Buchanan had proposed that Liberia purchase some, if not all, of that territory. Such an acquisition would not only secure valuable territory for the colony, but it would also discourage the slavers from returning. The ACS concurred and implored its members to support the plan, printing an appeal in its annual report: "New Cesters lies within the limits of coast that ought to belong to our colony, and it is indispensable that we should treat with the natives for it and several other points, in order that we may have an unbroken line of coast of about three hundred miles, to make a fair experiment of what can be done by a republican government on the shores of Africa." The ACS worried that it may never get another opportunity to purchase this territory. The destruction of the slave factories had created a unique opportunity for colonial expansion that was not likely to be repeated, and the society feared that if it did not take advantage of this opportunity someone else would. It warned its members that "this great extent of unoccupied territory furnishes eligible points for traders to establish factories for slaves, or merchandize, which must seriously interfere with the government and general prosperity of our colony."¹⁶ But although the idea of colonization was fairly popular in the United States, the ACS was not, and donations to the society dwindled. The ACS failed to raise enough funds for the purchase and the slave trade ultimately revived at both places, leaving both territories vulnerable to British occupation.¹⁷

¹⁵ MSCS, "Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Maryland State Colonization Society," January 1842, 11-15; Hall, 204-208; Latrobe, 60-62.

¹⁶ American Colonization Society, *The 25th Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States* (1842), 6-7.

¹⁷ Staudenraus, 239.

The ACS was caught in a cycle of financial difficulties. Liberia needed to grow in order to survive, and it needed capital to invest in trade in order to generate income to support that growth. In order to sustain growth and territorial expansion, the colony needed a steady stream of emigrants to help generate income and settle territory. But emigrants were typically poor and depended on the society to pay for their passage and to support them for several months while they adjusted to life in the colony. The ACS could not afford to purchase its own vessel to transport emigrants, rather it was forced to charter vessels at a premium, and to outfit emigrant voyages on credit. As a result, the society accumulated large debts which damaged its credibility and further discouraged potential supporters from making donations.

The shortage of private contributions led the ACS to pin its hopes on the federal government. President Van Buren's last message to Congress, advocating a law banning Americans from trading with slave factories, encouraged these hopes. The society strongly supported Van Buren's proposal, arguing that "the character of our nation demands it," and that Americans' honor, happiness, and international reputation depended upon it.¹⁸ There was no realistic chance that Congress would pass a law interfering with Americans' right to trade in Africa, but it was an opportunity to use the slave trade issue to keep the colonization debate alive. In March of 1841, the ACS found another opportunity to promote a stronger relationship with the government.

On March 9th, 1841, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its decision in the case: *U.S. vs. The Libellants and Claimants of the Schooner Amistad*. Two years earlier, a small group of Africans had been illegally shipped from West Africa to Cuba and sold to Spanish slave dealers. The dealers had been transporting these Africans from Havana to sugar plantations on the other side of the island when some of them revolted and took control of the schooner, killing two men before eventually landing at Montauk, Long Island. The U.S. Coast Guard had spotted the ship, arrested the surviving Africans, and towed the *Amistad* to New London, Connecticut

¹⁸ "The British Niger Expedition, British Policy, President's Message," *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 15 January 1841, 24.

where U.S. District Judge Andrew Judson had ordered the prisoners be tried for murder, mutiny, and piracy.¹⁹

The case rested on the question of whether or not the *Amistad* captives were actually slaves. U.S. law declared the transatlantic slave trade to be piracy but allowed the domestic slave trade and transportation of existing slaves. If the *Amistad* was found to have been part of the illegal transatlantic slave trade then the captives could not be found guilty of the charges against them. Since they had never reached those sugar plantations in Cuba, Judson ruled that the captives were not slaves and ordered that they be sent back to Africa. The Supreme Court upheld Judson's decision and ordered the captives released, but the court did not order the U.S. government to facilitate their return to Africa.

The U.S. government had already accepted responsibility for returning Africans redeemed from slavers that were captured by the navy, back to Africa. It had an established infrastructure for returning these "recaptured" Africans, managed by an agent, Thomas Buchanan, waiting to receive them in Liberia; but the *Amistad* Africans had liberated themselves. The United States had wanted to return the captives to the Spanish authorities in Cuba, and after losing its case in court, the government did not feel obliged to pay for their return to Africa. The ACS saw this situation as an opportunity to foster its relationship with the government and encouraged the administration to treat these Africans as recaptures.

The day after the Supreme Court handed down its decision, Samuel Wilkeson, the chairman of the ACS executive committee, wrote to President Harrison's secretary of the navy, George Badger.²⁰ Wilkeson quoted the 1819 law authorizing the president to take charge of all Africans illegally introduced in to this country. He argued that the *Amistad* captives would be wretched if they remained in the United States, and that the law should be interpreted liberally, as President Madison had done, to define them as recaptures. "I respectfully

¹⁹ Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad : The Saga of a Slave Revolt and Its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

²⁰ Staudenraus, 237-239. Judge Wilkeson was a wealthy real estate promoter from Buffalo, New York. He served as both president of the board and chairman of the executive committee and as such he held enormous power over the society. He was a tough businessman and used his skills, as Staudenraus describes it, "with the zeal of a military dictator" to reform the business practices of the struggling society. During his tenure, Wilkeson managed to turn the society around financially, paying off old debts and using tough tactics to persuade auxiliaries to remit larger sums. He had less success however when he used these same overbearing tactics on government officials.

suggest,” he wrote, “whether the humane intentions of the framers of the law referred to, would not embrace the case of these people, and cause the Government to restore them to Africa.”²¹ After all, Wilkeson reasoned, the Whigs claimed to be the true heirs to Jeffersonian democracy and both Jefferson and Madison had been among the strongest early proponents of government support for colonization.

If Wilkeson could persuade Harrison's administration to classify the captives as recaptures and send them to Liberia, the colony would receive some additional immigrants and material resources from the federal government, but more importantly, the decision would set an advantageous precedent. Wilkeson reminded Badger that Liberia had established the settlement of New Georgia where recaptures were making “rapid progress in civilization,” and he pointed out that, as U.S. agent, Buchanan received a salary of \$1,500 a year from the Navy Department. He concluded by writing:

The late administration sent to Africa, through the American Colonization Society, a number of Africans illegally introduced into Florida, and furnished arms, ammunition, boats &c for the settlement. The American Colonization Society is the medium through which the Government have heretofore sent out and supported their recaptured negroes, and should it be resolved to send to Liberia those of the “Amistad” that society can forward them immediately.²²

Wilkeson took a strong tack and his letter read more like a demand to repatriate the *Amistad* Africans than a request or offer of assistance. The ACS was clearly anxious to take advantage of the opportunity and the publicity attached to the case. But his efforts were in vain. The administration chose not to take responsibility for the Africans and ultimately private funds paid to send them to Sierra Leone instead.

With the disappointment of the *Amistad* affair and the lack of significant support from either the American government or the public, the ACS grew increasingly worried about Liberia's future. The society feared that Liberia's time to acquire more territory was running out, and the colonizationists were running out of options. Buchanan managed to negotiate the purchase of two small tracts of land on either side of Sinoe, including twenty-five miles of coastline to the north and about fifteen miles to the south, but he still depended on the

²¹ Samuel Wilkeson to George Badger, 10 March 1841, Correspondence of the Secretary of the Navy relating to African Colonization, NARA, M205, roll 2, Letters Received 1826-1841.

²² Ibid.

society to provide the necessary funds to complete the purchase. Buchanan reported that the southern tract, known as Blue Barre, was one of the most desirable places on the coast and the ACS once again importuned its members to contribute towards the purchase. The society published this appeal in its annual report:

The purchase of these two parcels of territory is but a beginning of what must be done, and that speedily. The permanent prosperity of Liberia cannot be set down as the most certain of contingent events, until we have an undisputed claim to the whole line of coast between Cape Mount and Cape Palmas, a distance of about 300 miles. Every individual must be convinced that we ought to strain every nerve to gain possession of this continuous coast. What is wanted now is MONEY to purchase this territory, so absolutely necessary to the unity and compactness of our colony, and its permanent peace and security.²³

But despite such pleas for assistance, donations remained meager and the society continued to struggle.

In September, Liberia and the ACS suffered yet another blow when Thomas Buchanan died from fever and overwork. Buchanan had suffered from poor health during much of his time in Africa. He had complained of being too ill for the job and had wanted to be relieved, but the ACS had no serious candidates to replace him and he was too valuable to let go. For a month before his death, Buchanan had alternated between rest and work, and even continued to travel, but he never fully recovered from his illness and the energy he expended on work only weakened his condition further. He died September 3rd at Bassa Cove.²⁴

Following Buchanan's death, Lieut. Governor John J. Roberts immediately assumed the position of acting governor. The ACS supported Roberts, describing him as: "a colonist of more than ordinary intelligence and energy of character." The society noted, "he stands high among the citizens of Liberia, and we have great confidence in his capacity to manage the duties of Chief Executive of the Commonwealth."²⁵ But at its annual meeting the following January, the ACS board passed a motion officially appointing Roberts as governor only "for the time

²³ American Colonization Society, *The 25th Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*, 7-8.

²⁴ *African Repository*, 15 December 1841, 369-374.

²⁵ American Colonization Society, *The 25th Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*, 3.

being.”²⁶ The board was not quite ready to put its complete support behind a colonist as leader.

Meanwhile, Roberts wasted no time getting to work. He had been a part of the colonial government for some time and was familiar with the job. Buchanan had made the slave trade his priority, but Roberts focused his attention on the colony's problems with the British. British traders were refusing to comply with Liberian import tariffs and port of entry restrictions established in 1839, in effect denying the colonial government's legitimacy.²⁷ As slave trading declined in the area, legitimate trade increased and made the question of Liberian authority to levy tariffs all the more significant.

On October 6th, Roberts received a letter from the senior British officer on the coast, Capt. Joseph Denman, inquiring about the case of a British trader named Dring.²⁸ Liberia claimed the exclusive right to trade with the natives at Bassa Cove and had passed laws requiring all foreign traders to submit to its jurisdiction. Dring had ignored the colonial laws and traded directly with the natives. Before his death, Buchanan had attempted to enforce the law by seizing Dring's property. When Roberts took over, he fined Dring for violating colonial law. Denman's letter of inquiry was the beginning of a British challenge to Liberia's claim of jurisdiction over Bassa Cove and ultimately to Liberians' right to regulate trade along any part of the coast.

There was little that the Liberians could do about the situation as long as the British navy was protecting Dring. Roberts could not understand why the British government, which professed such an interest in the improvement and welfare of Africa, insisted on undermining Liberia. He implored Denman to consider the colony's point of view, writing that while some British subjects may be trying to “set at defiance all colonial authority,” surely the British government did not support such a thing.²⁹ But Britain placed the commercial interests of its own subjects above the philanthropic concerns of the Liberian colonization project. Denman rejected Roberts' argument, explaining: “The friendly disposition of Great Britain to the cause

²⁶ Ibid., 22.

²⁷ George William Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1941), 127.

²⁸ Joseph Denman to Governor of Monrovia, 6 October 1841, H.R. 283, 115.

²⁹ Joseph J. Roberts to Joseph Denman, 6 October 1841, H.R. 283, 116.

of Africa must unquestionably extend to Liberia, a colony from which results of the most beneficial nature may be expected, if its labor and resources are properly applied, and it may be assured that every British officer on this station is very desirous for its prosperity; but, at the same time, it is our imperative duty to protect the interests of British subjects, where it appears they have been in any manner infringed."³⁰ Britain would be friendly to the Liberians only as long as the colonists did not interfere with British interests. The Dring case was just one of many examples where the British put their own interests, both commercial and political, above schemes to civilize Africa and suppress the slave trade.

Roberts reported his concerns about British disregard for colonial authority to the ACS. He informed the society that since Buchanan's death, life in the colony generally continued in the same, undisturbed condition, with one exception. He explained: "The only apprehension that we labor under at the present is – the interference of British Traders with our commerce and the active part taken by them to cut off our communications of trade with the natives and to confine our operations within a very small compass; to do this they are calling to their aid the assistance of British officers by making to them complaints and misrepresentations of the policy pursued by the authorities of the Colony."³¹ The society's failure to secure financial support from private or public sources in the United States left Liberians with few options. The colony needed to develop a profitable interest in the growing coastal trade in order to survive. British merchants' obstinacy was a double threat: not only did they refuse to pay customs duties into the colonial treasury, but they also drove out competitors by claiming exclusive rights to particular territory and by drastically undercutting market prices. And because these British merchants had the support of the British navy, there was little that Liberians or American merchants could do but appeal to the U.S. government for support.

As the year wore on, the problem between the British and the Liberians worsened. The British navy denied any Liberian jurisdiction over Bassa Cove. When Roberts discussed the matter with Lieutenant Seagram of *HMS Termagant*, Seagram claimed that British traders

³⁰ Joseph Denman to Governor of Monrovia, 6 October 1841, H.R. 283, 116-117.

³¹ Joseph J. Roberts to ACS, 7 October 1841, excerpted in: "Despatches from Liberia," *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 1 January 1842; and H.R. 283, 114-115, 134-135.

owned Bassa Cove. And when Roberts asked for proof of this claim, Seagram replied rather vaguely that the British had traded there from “time immemorial.” This response alarmed Roberts, who interpreted it as a challenge to Liberia’s rights to all of its territory along the coast. “If the principle holds good,” he wrote to the ACS managers, “that, because they have traded at such and such places, they have priority of claim, they will soon take from us Monrovia, Marshall, Edina, Bassa Cove, and Sinoe.”³² Concerned, Roberts asked:

Why the United States Government will allow the English to monopolize this trade, I know not; and this they will certainly do, unless a vigorous effort is made to prevent it, both on the part of the society [ACS] and the American Government. I wish I could so represent the importance of this matter as to convince you of the necessity of immediate action on the subject.³³

The ACS did not need to be convinced, but the U.S. government and the American people were another matter.

U.S. Foreign & Naval Policy

The U.S. government was concerned about British interference with American interests for various reasons in 1841, but any potential British plot to monopolize trade in West Africa ranked far below more pressing concerns such as the northeastern boundary conflict, Texas, abolition, the slave trade, and the right of search. When William Henry Harrison and the Whigs assumed power in 1841, they made resolving these various diplomatic disputes with Britain a priority. Harrison’s decision to appoint Daniel Webster secretary of state encouraged hopes for a peaceful solution. Webster, a former senator from Massachusetts, had strong personal and business connections in England. Americans and Britons alike were optimistic that the changes in their respective governments would help smooth the way to a peaceful resolution of the difficulties between the two nations.³⁴

New leadership in both the United States and Britain generated new optimism for improved relations, in part because the previous administrations had been worn down by frustration and personal animosity, and people generally believed that the change created an

³² Joseph J. Roberts to ACS, 16 December 1841, H.R. 283, 135-136.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Carroll, 243-245; Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843*, 87-117.

opportunity for a fresh start. The final weeks before Robert Peel's Conservative government replaced William Lamb's Whigs exemplified this problem. Before stepping down as head of the British Foreign Office, Lord Palmerston wrote several long letters to the American minister in London, Andrew Stevenson, answering several outstanding complaints, in which the United States had accused the British navy of illegally interfering with American merchant vessels. In his last days in office, Palmerston defended the Royal navy, rejected the American complaints, and boldly asserted new rights for Britain, revealing his true feelings on the subject, angering Stevenson, and generally escalating the tensions between the two countries.³⁵

Palmerston defended the British officers who had detained and seized the American vessels *Douglas* and *Iago*, and explained that the case of the merchantman *Hero* was still under review. He was still bitter about the United States' denunciation of the Paine-Tucker agreement, and he tried using that pact to justify British actions and to impugn the United States. In his answer to the *Douglas* complaint, Palmerston defended Lieutenant Seagram's decision to detain the vessel, on the grounds that the Paine-Tucker agreement had been in effect. According to Palmerston, Seagram had been "apprized by the commanding officer of Her Majesty's ships on that coast of an agreement entered into by that officer with Commander Paine, of the United States navy, for searching and detaining ships found trading in slaves under the United States flag; and Lieutenant Seagram having, on the 21st of October, 1839, met with the ship 'Douglas,' carrying the flag of the Union, he boarded her, and made inquiries as to the voyage for which she was bound."³⁶ Palmerston likewise defended Britain's seizure of *Iago*. "With respect to the justification which the British officers had for detaining these American vessels," he wrote, "a formal agreement was entered into on the 11th March, 1840" by officers Tucker and Paine.³⁷ Palmerston reasoned that the Paine-Tucker agreement had given Britain the authority to search and detain these vessels, and therefore that the United States had no valid cause for complaint.

³⁵ Lord Palmerston to Andrew Stevenson, 5, 17, 27 August 1841, H.R. 283, 731-740; Peterson, 113-114.

³⁶ Lord Palmerston to Andrew Stevenson, 5 August 1841, H.R. 283, 731-735.

³⁷ Lord Palmerston to Andrew Stevenson, 5 August 1841, H.R. 283, 734-735.

Palmerston attempted to dismiss American concerns by reassuring Stevenson that Britain had ceased the practice of detaining American vessels under the Paine-Tucker agreement. After learning of the U.S. repudiation of that agreement, the admiralty had ordered all of Her Majesty's cruisers "not again to detain or meddle with the United States vessels engaged in the slave trade." These orders, he remarked, "have been sent by Her Majesty's Government with great pain and regret."³⁸ Therefore, he again concluded that the United States had no cause for complaint. But Palmerston's argument was careless. *Douglas* and *Iago* had both been captured in 1839, long before Paine and Tucker made their agreement in March of 1840.

Palmerston went on to blame the Americans for the British navy's lengthy detention of *Douglas*. Lieutenant Seagram had opened *Douglas*'s hatches and searched her hold, and had determined that she was fitted out for the slave trade with what appeared to be a slave deck and other slaving equipment. According to Palmerston, Seagram had reported that "under these circumstances he should have sent the 'Douglas' to the United States, to be delivered up to the authorities of that country." But Seagram had been forced to detain *Douglas* because he had received orders to delay sending any additional vessels to the United States until the outcomes of the *Eagle* and *Clara* cases were known.³⁹ But again Palmerston's explanation was less than convincing. *Termagant* had captured *Douglas* on October 21st, more than two months after U.S. Attorney Butler had decided that *Eagle* and *Clara* were not American vessels, and the British minister in Washington, Henry Fox, had been informed of Butler's decision on August 14th.⁴⁰ The British had intentionally delivered these vessels to the United States to provoke a reaction and they were actively interested in the outcome. Fully aware of the issues at hand, delay in the transmission of information could not excuse capturing and detaining *Douglas* for more than a week. And Palmerston's reply still ignored the fundamental problem of Britain's continued practice of stopping and searching vessels flying the American flag. As far as the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Lord Palmerston to Andrew Stevenson, 5 August 1841, H.R. 283, 731-733.

⁴⁰ Aaron Vail to Henry Fox, with enclosures, 14 August 1839, H.R. 283, 578-580.

United States was concerned, Seagram should never have been searching *Douglas* in the first place.

Rather than address the specific details of the Americans' indemnity claims, Palmerston manipulated the facts in these cases to serve his own agenda. He was not interested in the details of individual claims, instead he tried to use these examples to argue the British government's case against, what he interpreted as, flawed American policy. Palmerston argued that since *Iago*, for example, was clearly not an American vessel, that British actions had been justified. He claimed that if the commissioners to the mixed court at Sierra Leone had investigated the case, "sufficient proof would have been afforded that the vessel was in reality Spanish, and not American property, and that consequently she was liable to condemnation."⁴¹ But once again, Palmerston was careless with the facts. The mixed court may have been persuaded by such proof in 1840, but *Iago* had been captured in February of 1839. Not only did Palmerston bypass the logic of time again, but he completely ignored the American interpretation of the law. The United States considered it irrelevant whether or not *Iago* may have been condemned; to their minds the important point was that she had not been condemned. The mixed court had denied jurisdiction over the vessel and had released her. As far as the United States was concerned, Britain should have been well aware of the court's position in 1839 and was therefore wrong to have captured *Iago* in the first place, and as such. The United States believed that Britain should apologize and pay the indemnity claim.⁴²

At the last moment, just before leaving office, Palmerston announced a new doctrine, asserting what he termed the "right of visit."⁴³ His earlier letters had prepared the way, the sloppy arguments only partially masking his true feelings. The details of those cases were unimportant, he felt, because the British navy had the right to verify the identity of any vessel it encountered. Palmerston had had enough of this game in which criminals were hiding behind the law, wrapped in false flags, and he threw down a challenge to the United States. He

⁴¹ Lord Palmerston to Andrew Stevenson, 5 August 1841, H.R. 283, 734-735.

⁴² John Tyler, "Extract from the message of President Tyler at the commencement of the 2d session 27th Congress," H.R. 283, 730-731.

⁴³ Lord Palmerston to Andrew Stevenson, 27 August 1841, H.R. 283, 739-740.

admitted that Britain did not claim the right to search American merchantmen at sea during peacetime, but he asserted:

There is an essential and fundamental difference between searching a vessel and examining her papers to see whether she is legally provided with documents entitling her to the protection of any country, and especially of the country whose flag she may have hoisted at the time. For though, by common parlance, the word 'flag' is used to express the test of nationality, and though, according to that acceptance of the word, Her Majesty's Government admit that British cruisers are not entitled, in time of peace, to search merchant vessels sailing under the American flag, yet Her Majesty's Government do not mean thereby to say that a merchantman can exempt himself from search by merely hoisting a piece of bunting with the United States emblems and colors upon it; that which Her Majesty's Government mean is, that the rights of the United States flag exempt a vessel from search, when that vessel is provided with papers entitling her to wear that flag, and proving her to be United States property, and navigated according to law.⁴⁴

Palmerston sent this final reply to Stevenson, asserting the new doctrine of the right of visit, and then promptly left office.

Not surprisingly, the United States received with "painful surprise and regret," the news that "those proceedings of Her Majesty's cruisers have not only been approved and justified, and the injuries which ensued to remain unredressed, but that a right is now asserted by Her Majesty's Government over the vessels and flag of the United States, involving high questions of national honor and interest, of public law, and individual rights."⁴⁵ Palmerston's reference to the American flag as a piece of bunting was particularly provocative, and Stevenson thoroughly rejected his assertions in a letter addressed to the new British foreign minister, Lord Aberdeen.

Stevenson denied any difference between the right of search and the right of visit, calling it "wholly fictitious." And, he argued, even if the distinction was sound, such a power could not be lawfully exercised during peacetime. To support this argument, Stevenson turned to the principle of public (international) law. He wrote, "Although piracy is admitted to be an offence against the public law, and therefore punishable in every country and by every nation, no matter where committed, it must yet be borne in mind that all piracies are not offences

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Andrew Stevenson to Lord Aberdeen, 10 September 1841, H.R. 283, 740-745.

against the law of nations.” Some piracy, Stevenson admitted, was punishable under international law, but not all types. He continued:

Piracy, therefore, by international law, and that which may be made so by the municipal law of particular States, are essentially of a different character, and to be treated accordingly. Hence it is that offences declared to be piracy by the municipal laws of any State can only be tried and punished by the country within whose jurisdiction, or on board of whose ships on the ocean, the offence may have been committed. Now, the slave trade is not cognizable under the laws of nations. Although prohibited by most nations, and declared to be piracy by their laws, and especially by the statutes of Britain and the United States, it is yet not an offence against the public law, and its interdiction cannot be enforced by the ordinary right of visitation, detention, or search, in the manner that it might be if it was piracy by the law of nations.⁴⁶

As secretary of state, John Quincy Adams had argued that the logical solution to this dispute was for all nations to follow the United States’ example and declare the slave trade piracy, and the United States continued to insist that until the slave trade became an act of piracy under international law, that no such right of search or visit existed to police that trade.⁴⁷

Taking over Palmerston’s position as foreign secretary, Lord Aberdeen responded to Stevenson by defending his predecessor’s assertion, repeating the distinction between the rights of search and visit. Aberdeen argued that the extensive abuse of the American flag in the slave trade “constitutes that reasonable ground of suspicion which the law of nations requires in such a case.”⁴⁸ And he asserted that because the United States had recognized the abuse of its flag, that “the admitted fact of this abuse creates the right of inquiry.”⁴⁹ Aberdeen claimed that the common, indeed possibly universal practice, “of all navies of the world, to ascertain by visit the real nationality of merchant vessels met with on the high seas, if there be good reason to apprehend their illegal character,” implied that the right of visit was indeed sanctioned by the public law.

But Aberdeen was not primarily interested in the U.S. appeal to international law; he was more annoyed by the idea that the Americans seemed to be trying to pass themselves off as exceptional. To Aberdeen, the United States appeared to be shirking its moral duty to

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ John Quincy Adams to Stratford Canning, 31 March, 24 June 1823, H.R. 283, 367-368, 372-376.

⁴⁸ Lord Aberdeen to Andrew Stevenson, 13 October 1841, H.R. 283, 746-749.

⁴⁹ It should be noted that while the Americans did admit that abuses of their flag were probable, they did not admit to knowing the extent of this abuse, information which was not generally known then and can only be estimated today.

cooperate with the international effort to suppress the slave trade. He thought that American concerns for their national honor, rights, and interests were ridiculous and overblown in light of the circumstances. He wrote that it remained for the Americans alone to judge “what may be due to a just regard for their national dignity and national interests,” but in his opinion, “rights which have been mutually conceded to each other by the Governments of Great Britain and France can scarcely be incompatible with the honor and independence of any State upon the face of the earth.”⁵⁰ If the mutual right of search did not damage the honor of such nations as Britain and France, Aberdeen believed that Americans certainly should have no cause for complaint.

Aberdeen also asserted Britain’s right to enforce its own laws. He facetiously asked if the United States was suggesting that British officers should be prevented from pursuing their own subjects who might be engaged in piracy simply because the criminals hid behind an American flag. Certainly, he suggested, the United States would not try to force Britain to violate its own treaty obligations to other nations. “Still less would Mr. Stevenson pretend to claim immunity for piratical adventurers who should endeavor to shelter their lawless proceedings under the ensign of the United States,” he added.⁵¹

It was clear from these exchanges that the two nations were at an impasse. Stevenson sent one final reply before ending his diplomatic service in London and returning to the United States. Acknowledging that the enmity of this correspondence had increased, he assured Aberdeen that he wanted to conduct negotiations in a manner “best calculated to preserve peace.”⁵² But the remark implied that peace might not be preserved. Stevenson went on to make impertinent remarks impugning Britain’s supposed common sense and moral integrity. He asked Aberdeen, “Why should not Hayti (who has lately been induced to prohibit the slave trade) authorize her cruisers to follow the example of Her Majesty’s Government?” In fact, Stevenson continued, Haiti had recently passed a law asserting such a right, only to be bullied into changing it by the British government, which had argued that “no nation had the right in

⁵⁰ Lord Aberdeen to Andrew Stevenson, 13 October 1841, H.R. 283, 746-749.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Andrew Stevenson to Lord Aberdeen, 21 October 1841, H.R. 283, 749-755.

time of peace to enforce the provisions of their laws and treaties against States who were not parties to them, and, consequently not bound by them."⁵³ Americans had long resented what they saw as British hypocrisy, and now, in his last days as minister in London, Stevenson expressed these feelings with clear satisfaction. He may or may not have had his facts exactly right, but this argument was no longer about facts. His point, that the United States would not be bullied, was clear. If Britain was going to assert rights over Americans, then it should first accept that other nations, like Haiti, could assert those same rights over Britons.

The John Tyler Administration

As they left office, Palmerston and Stevenson escalated tensions between the Britain and the United States over the right of search. It was up to the new administrations in Washington and London to find some way of preserving peace between the two countries. Both Aberdeen and the new American secretary of state, Daniel Webster, made improving relations between their two nations a priority. But before Webster had barely begun, President Harrison died and the political troubles that followed threatened to cut Webster's time at the State Department prematurely short.

William Henry Harrison died in April, having served only one month as President of the United States. His successor, John Tyler, was plagued by the novelty of the situation, being the first vice president to be called to assume the office of president, and by partisan politics and party infighting. At first, Tyler kept Harrison's cabinet members in place, but his relations with these advisers quickly deteriorated. In September, when Tyler vetoed the controversial bank bill for the second time, the entire cabinet, except for Webster, resigned. According to Sean Wilentz, Daniel Webster stayed because he could not bear to walk away from the position of secretary of state, especially after having failed to win election to executive office himself.⁵⁴ And Webster had already begun working on the British problem; he had initiated a propaganda campaign in Maine, secretly paying a local newspaper editor to plant articles

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy : Jefferson to Lincoln*(New York: Norton, 2005), 525. Wilentz suggests that Tyler vetoed the bill, at least in part, because he wanted to get rid of the cabinet and expected that they would react to his veto by resigning.

advocating a compromise on the northeastern boundary issue, and he did not want to give up the opportunity for great diplomatic success.⁵⁵ The political upheaval and infighting in Washington interfered with the business of governing, but Webster's continued tenure as head of the State Department helped keep plans to resolve the problem of British relations on track.

President Tyler made another cabinet decision that would also have significant impact on the right of search issue and on the ultimate decision to form an Africa squadron. At first it seemed like a strange choice when Tyler appointed his old friend from Virginia's eastern shore, Abel Parker Upshur, to be the new secretary of the navy. Upshur was a respected judge in Virginia but he had no real experience in naval affairs. A conservative who had left the Democratic Party after the 1832 nullification crisis, Upshur had helped organize the Virginia Whig party in opposition to what he saw as Jacksonian despotism.⁵⁶ He had supported Harrison for president in 1840 because of his friendship with Tyler and his dislike for Van Buren.⁵⁷ Upshur was reluctant to give up the security of his appointment to the Virginia court for a position in an administration that faced such a difficult political future, but Tyler had few political friends and in the end Upshur remained one of them and accepted the post.⁵⁸ It turned out to be a fortuitous choice, and although Upshur only remained at the Navy Department for less than two years, he made a significant impact on the department and on administration policy during that time.

Abel P. Upshur and the Navy Department

When Upshur arrived at the Navy Department in October of 1841 he was overwhelmed by a backlog of work. He spent the first month just clearing up old business and dealing with seemingly endless patronage requests. He tried to distribute the appointments evenly across the states according to population, and he mostly chose candidates based on merit. He complained about the time that he was forced to spend on petty matters, but he trudged

⁵⁵ Webster paid Maine newspaper owner and politician F.O.J. Smith to help sway public opinion in favor of a compromise on the northeastern boundary issue. Thomas L. Gaffney, "Maine's Mr. Smith : A Study of the Career of Francis O.J. Smith, Politician and Entrepreneur" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maine, 1984); Merk and Walker.

⁵⁶ Merk and Walker.

⁵⁷ Claude Hampton Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur, Conservative Virginian, 1790-1844* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1964), 92-93.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

through and by November he was able to move on to more substantive matters. This initial experience helped to convince Upshur that the department needed to be reformed and he began consulting friends, officers, and department files on the subject. He concluded that not only did the department need internal reorganization, but that the navy itself needed to be reformed and modernized.⁵⁹

At the end of the year, Upshur issued a lengthy report that called for reform, reorganization, modernization, and expansion of the navy.⁶⁰ It was a radical proposal that advocated a broad and far reaching slate of changes. The first part called for reorganizing the Navy Department to reduce existing inefficiencies that wasted a great deal of time, energy, and resources. Upshur wrote that "in truth," the Navy Department was "not organized at all."⁶¹ Although the entrenched bureaucracy opposed change, it was relatively easy for Upshur to win congressional support for his plan to implement logical and cost-saving reforms within the department. But the second part of his program, which called for enlarging and modernizing the navy, and investment in new technology, was expensive and much more difficult to realize.

Upshur argued that the United States needed to enlarge its navy because the country was vulnerable to attack, especially from the British. Europeans had been expanding their navies but the United States had not. At the same time, the American population, territory, and commerce had all grown considerably, placing an even greater burden on the country's outdated fleet. Upshur warned that the U.S. navy's defensive capabilities had not kept pace with the nation it was expected to defend or the threat it was expected to meet; if the government did not remedy this situation, the United States could face serious consequences.⁶²

Building on Jackson's policy, Upshur envisioned a new navy that would primarily be a force for American commercial expansion. In the past, protecting commerce had merely been a way to keep the navy employed during peacetime, but Upshur wanted to build up the navy

⁵⁹ Ibid., 118-119.

⁶⁰ Abel P. Upshur, "Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 4 December 1841," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe* 27 Cong., 2 sess., no. (1841): 16-22.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur, Conservative Virginian, 1790-1844*, 120-121.

for the explicit purpose of protecting and expanding commerce, the benefits of which, he argued, would justify the expense. He wanted to change the perception of the navy as a military force that was a drain on the treasury, and create a new image of the service as a positive force for the American economy. He argued that commercial expansion benefited all Americans and all sections of the country; with the navy's help farmers would find new markets for their produce, and manufacturers would find new markets for their products.⁶³

Congress and the press praised Upshur's report. It was bold, it had vision, and it contained several good proposals that were long overdue. Both the House and Senate naval committees supported his proposals, and a majority of congressmen agreed with Upshur's ideas in principle, but many were concerned about the costs. His major expansion project was particularly expensive, and they protested that his proposal to build a navy equal to half the strength of the British navy would use up the federal government's entire budget. Congressmen were more receptive to his proposal for improved defenses.⁶⁴

Southerners, in particular, felt threatened by new technology that European navies were adopting. As Thomas Hietala points out, "Isolation from Europe could no longer protect the United States, for technological innovations in naval armaments had narrowed the Atlantic Ocean."⁶⁵ Tense relations with Britain worried southerners, especially as the British navy had new steam and shallow draft vessels that could easily penetrate southern territory if war were to break out. If the anti-slavery British navy attacked the South, it could easily use these new vessels to sail up southern rivers, penetrate into the interior, and incite slave revolts. The growing number of black British troops stationed in the West Indies also worried American southerners. Anxious to increase U.S. naval defenses, especially in the South, Congress authorized the formation of a Home squadron and new coastal defenses during its first session in the summer of 1841.⁶⁶ Upshur warned Congress that "a war between the United States and any considerable maritime power would not be conducted at this day as it would have been

⁶³ Ibid., 76-77, 96-97; Upshur.

⁶⁴ Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 58-65. Even those who disagreed with particular recommendations that Upshur made in his report agreed with the general principle that the country needed an improved navy to protect its commerce and defend its coastline. See: "Our Navy," *Southern Literary Messenger*, January 1842, 89-97.

⁶⁵ Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 14.

⁶⁶ Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur, Conservative Virginian, 1790-1844*, 129-130.

even twenty years ago.”⁶⁷ The new Home squadron was only a beginning, and Upshur believed that more needed to be done.

The need for a stronger navy seemed even more pressing when a mutiny broke out on board the American brig *Creole* in October. *Creole* had sailed from Hampton Roads, Virginia for New Orleans with a cargo of tobacco, 135 slaves, and six white passengers. Just before she reached the port of Abaco in the Bahamas, nineteen of the slaves mutinied; two men were killed, one white slave owner and one black slave. The mutineers ordered the crew to sail to Nassau, which was British territory. The British attorney general at Nassau decided that the British Emancipation Act of 1833 applied to any slaves entering British territory and so he only held the nineteen slaves accused of mutiny and murder, but freed the rest.⁶⁸

When the *Creole* arrived at New Orleans on December 2nd, southerners demanded the British compensate them for the lost slaves. The incident seemed to confirm their fears that Britain intended to interfere with slavery in the South and anti-British feelings increased throughout the region. The *Creole* case differed from the *Amistad* because the captives in question were clearly already slaves, and therefore under American law it was perfectly legal to transport them along coastal trading routes. If Britain offered freedom to mutineers, they would be encouraging a rash of slave revolts in American territory. A diplomatic resolution to this dispute was obviously necessary, and the perceived threat to American control of coastal waters also encouraged support for naval expansion.

Southerners were not the only Americans concerned about the *Creole* case. Northerners, especially in Maine, were sensitive to any dispute with Britain. Mainers were particularly interested in relations with Britain because of the ongoing dispute over the state's boundary with Canada. The *Kennebec Journal*, a partisan Whig newspaper, published numerous articles about the *Creole* affair. Referring to both the *Amistad* and *Creole* cases, the paper lamented that “this slave business is likely to be a troublesome affair all around. New difficulties are occurring every day.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 58. Also see: Sprout and Sprout, 116-118.

⁶⁸ Hietala, 14; Upshur: 16-22.

⁶⁹ *Kennebec Journal*, 7 January 1842.

In the months following the *Creole* mutiny, the Maine Antislavery Society newspaper, the *Liberty Standard*, increased its commentary on the slave trade. The paper applauded the British action and worried about the southern reaction. To anti-slavery activists, the timing of Upshur's proposals, coming just a month later, made it seem like naval expansion was part of a southern plot to protect slavery and the *Liberty Standard* encouraged this conspiracy theory.⁷⁰ The paper derided Upshur's proposal as a plan to "quadruple the navy in the interest of slavery, and chiefly at the expense of the North."⁷¹ Slave owners and abolitionists alike used the *Creole* incident to connect Upshur's reform proposals to the slavery issue, but slavery was only one reason behind Upshur's plans for naval reform and expansion.

Upshur was the first department secretary and the first high-level government official since James Monroe, to take an active interest in West Africa. He argued that West Africa was an area of significant interest to the United States, and he gave three reasons why the navy should take a greater interest in that region: the slave trade, the Liberian colonies, and the growing value of American commerce along that coast.⁷² When Tyler came into office, *Dolphin* and *Grampus* were cruising off the coast of West Africa for the second time. Upshur argued that the United States needed a larger force in West Africa to protect American commerce and to help suppress American involvement in the slave trade, declaring that it was "impossible to dispense with a squadron on that coast." He explained, "In addition to the interesting duty of suppressing the slave trade, which could not be otherwise effected, the lawful commerce of our citizens with all parts of the coast, is rapidly increasing, and already employs a very large capital." He also mentioned the squadron's "great importance to our colonists" on the coast, something neither Jackson nor Van Buren had given attention to.⁷³

Upshur disliked the abstract idea of slavery but that concern remained secondary to his desire for personal wealth and success. Like many Virginian slaveowners who condemned slavery, Upshur cared most about his own financial well-being and class power. He believed

⁷⁰ Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty : A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843*, 79.

⁷¹ Edward O. Schriver, *Go Free: The Antislavery Impulse in Maine, 1833-1855*(Orono: University of Maine Press, 1970), 4-10.

⁷² Upshur.

⁷³ Austin Willey, *The History of the Antislavery Cause in State and Nation*(Portland, Me.: B. Thruston, 1886), 184-185.

that slavery retarded economic growth and he looked forward to its disappearance, but only in a way that would not sharply reduce the value of land, property, or other investments that his class of eastern Virginia landowners held. Upshur hated abolitionists for advocating a plan that would precipitate the collapse of slave-based economies by sharply reducing land prices and bankrupting plantation owners like him. As a result, he supported Liberian colonization and opposed the slave trade. But most importantly, he advocated an Africa squadron because he believed in the growing significance of American trade in West Africa.⁷⁴ Upshur believed that the United States should protect American commercial interests in West Africa from foreign competitors by increasing its naval presence on that coast. He argued: "This trade is an object of so much importance, and is contended for in so strong a spirit of rivalry by traders of different countries, that the presence of national vessels is absolutely necessary to protect them in their just rights, and to prevent those outrages, unfriendly to the harmony of nations, to which men are often driven by thirst of gain."⁷⁵ Upshur's advice was not radical, but it was new and it recommended a significant expansion of U.S. foreign policy.

Upshur was the first government leader to suggest that American commerce in West Africa needed and deserved government protection. Previous administrations had spoken about the need for the navy to protect American commerce abroad, but never in West Africa. Some had criticized the slave trade and called for the navy to enforce the 1819 law, but no one had suggested that a squadron should be stationed on the West African coast to protect commerce. Before Upshur's report, few Americans seemed to think that there was much American commerce in West Africa to protect. People spoke about the potential for trade, or even the rising rate of trade in that region, but Upshur was the first high official to advocate that the trade warranted protection, and he wanted to send more ships to Africa to protect those interests.

⁷⁴ Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur, Conservative Virginian, 1790-1844*, 69-77; Upshur.

⁷⁵ Upshur.

John Tyler and West Africa

President Tyler supported Upshur's proposal for an Africa squadron and reported to Congress that American commercial interests in West Africa had experienced "considerable increase," and had "become an object of much importance," but he was more concerned with denying Britain the right of search and defending American merchantmen from British abuse than he was with fostering commercial expansion in West Africa. Tyler agreed that the navy needed to be reformed and expanded, but he did not fully share Upshur's vision of a new peacetime role for the service.⁷⁶

Like Congress, Tyler found it easier to support Upshur's proposal to expand the navy's capacity to defend the United States. He remonstrated to Congress that "inducements of the weightiest character exist for the adoption of this course of policy," arguing that "our extended and otherwise exposed maritime frontier, calls for protection." Tyler insisted that "it is due not only to the honor, but to the security of the people of the United States, that no nation should be permitted to invade our waters at pleasure, and subject our towns and villages to conflagration and pillage."⁷⁷ The most likely invaders, of course, would be the British, who had already subjected American towns and villages to conflagration and pillage twice before.

For Tyler and Webster, practical solutions to pressing diplomatic problems took priority over visionary reforms and the country's problems with Britain dominated their foreign policy agenda in 1841. The optimism that had followed Harrison's election had faded. The promising Paine-Tucker agreement had been formally cancelled, Palmerston had rejected all of the Americans' complaints and indemnity claims, Britain had asserted the new doctrine of the right of visit, and now the *Creole* affair threatened to set a dangerous precedent that could encourage mutiny and slave revolts. By the end of the year, relations between the two governments had deteriorated considerably.

⁷⁶ John Tyler, "Message of the President, December 1841," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe* 27 Cong., 2 sess., no. (1841).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Tyler made his views on the right of search clear: Americans were innocent until proven guilty. They could not be searched by anyone without just cause, and they could not be searched by the British without the consent of the U.S. government. He strongly objected to Britain acting as a maritime police for all nations: "American citizens prosecuting a lawful commerce in the African seas, under the flag of their country, are not responsible for the abuse or unlawful use of that flag by others; nor can they rightfully, on account of any such alleged abuses, be interrupted, molested or detained while on the ocean; and if thus molested or detained, while pursuing honest voyages, in the usual way, and violating no law themselves, they are unquestionably entitled to indemnity."⁷⁸ Tyler acknowledged that some foreigners probably hid behind the U.S. flag. It was "but too probable," he admitted, "that the American flag is grossly abused by the abandoned and profligate of other nations," but he doubted that many Americans were involved in these deceptions. He promised that the United States would "relax no effort to prevent its citizens, if there be any so disposed, from prosecuting a traffic so revolting to the feelings of humanity," but as the government was making little effort, there was little effort to relax. If Upshur had his way, more would be done.

In general, Tyler supported Upshur's proposal to protect American commerce, especially from British interference and abuse. He explained that the government "seeks to do no more than to protect the fair and honest trader from molestation and injury; but while the enterprising mariner, engaged in the pursuit of an honorable trade, is entitled to its protection, it will visit with condign punishment others of an opposite character."⁷⁹ Tyler made it clear to Congress and to the American people that the government sought to do *no more* than protect honest traders from the British navy, the obvious source of that molestation and injury. And at the same time, he reassured Americans that the government was not actively pursuing a program for the purpose of suppressing the slave trade. If the navy were to encounter dishonest traders, they would punish those criminals, but such action would only be a secondary benefit, not the primary purpose of the navy's mission.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

At the end of 1841, Britain was still pressuring the United States to concede the right of search. In December, representatives of five European powers: Austria, Hungary, Prussia, Russia, and Britain, met in London to negotiate an agreement to prohibit all trade in slaves. The resulting treaty, signed on December 20th, banned the slave trade among all subjects of those five kingdoms and declared that trade piracy. One line in the treaty, clearly directed at the United States, read: "Their Majesty's further declare, that any vessel which may attempt to carry on the slave trade shall, by the fact alone, lose all right to the protection of their flag."⁸⁰ The treaty extended the mutual right of search to all of its signatory nations, and as a result, Britain extended its power to police the seas. But unlike earlier British agreements with Portugal and Spain, this treaty had little practical application. These four kingdoms had little involvement in the slave trade, and were not expected to participate significantly in policing the trade. The primary purpose of the Quintuple Treaty, as it became known, was to increase pressure on the United States to concede the right of search to Britain.⁸¹

Initially, a few Americans considered the possibility of joining the treaty. The new American minister in London, Edward Everett, tried to convince Webster to support the idea.⁸² But Tyler opposed it, and there was little chance that the Senate would ratify such a treaty. While the Europeans were meeting in London, the twenty-seventh Congress convened its second session. Political circumstances had changed when the legislators returned to the capitol in December. Tyler's bank veto had caused permanent damage between the administration and Congress, the cabinet had resigned and been replaced, and the *Creole* affair had begun. Congress received Upshur's report and Tyler's message supporting it, but it was unclear how legislators would react. Tyler recognized Americans' reluctance to spend a lot of money on the navy and he promised to implement naval expansion and reforms with economy, but he also remarked that "parsimony alone would suggest the withholding of the necessary means, for the protection of our domestic firesides from invasion, and our national honor from disgrace." "I take upon myself," he wrote, "without a moment of hesitancy, all

⁸⁰ The Quintuple Treaty signed at London, 20 December 1841, H.R. 283, 756-761.

⁸¹ Fehrenbacher and McAfee, 166-167; Mitton, 60-61.

⁸² Mitton, 81-82.

the responsibility of recommending the increase and prompt equipment of that gallant Navy, which has lighted up every sea with its victories, and spread an imperishable glory over the country."⁸³ He did not make any explicit connections between this increase and the slave trade, the abuse of the American flag, or the right of visit, but he did imply that the United States needed a stronger navy to meet the general threat that Britain posed to Americans.

Just how such an improved navy would be used to meet this threat remained to be seen. The *Congressional Globe* published Tyler's message at the beginning of its appendix, marking the start of the December session.⁸⁴ In the pages that immediately followed, the *Globe* also published the recent diplomatic correspondence between U.S. minister Andrew Stevenson and Lord Palmerston, in which Britain rejected the American indemnity claims and asserted the right of visit.⁸⁵ The inclusion of these letters alongside the president's message made it clear to readers that the need for naval expansion was directly connected to the country's ongoing difficulties with Britain.

Conclusion

By the end of 1841, the Tyler administration, especially Secretary Upshur, was a little more experienced and frustrated by the political difficulties it faced in Washington. Relations with Britain were worse, American interests in West Africa were more exposed and vulnerable to British abuse, and the navy had no budget to maintain a presence in the region. Upshur had submitted his report and convinced President Tyler to support it; his next challenge would be to convince Congress and the American people to pay for the expense of an Africa squadron. In order to persuade the people that American commerce in West Africa deserved naval protection, and to get Congress to fund a squadron, Upshur needed to demonstrate an immediate threat. In 1842, when the *Mary Carver* failed to return from her voyage to the West African coast, Upshur got his chance.

⁸³ Tyler.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ "Documents Accompanying the President's Annual Message: Correspondence Relating to the Detention of American Vessels on the African Coast by British Armed Cruisers," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe* 27 Cong., 2 sess., no. (1841).

Although it appeared that Tyler's administration had accomplished little towards settling the diplomatic disputes with Britain in 1841, and indeed, tensions had increased on both sides, several pieces of the solution had been put into place. The appointments of Daniel Webster and Abel Upshur to the cabinet, and their respective plans for resolving these various issues, laid the necessary groundwork for a diplomatic solution in 1842.

CHAPTER 6

THE TREATY

1842 began with renewed hope for improved relations between the United States and Britain. British Prime Minister Robert Peel and Foreign Minister Lord Aberdeen offered to negotiate a treaty with the United States to resolve the ongoing diplomatic disputes between the two nations, and the Tyler administration eagerly accepted their offer. The British representative, Lord Ashburton, quickly sailed for Washington, where he and Secretary of State Daniel Webster spent several months negotiating questions involving the northeastern boundary, the *Creole* mutiny, and the West African problem, among others. During these negotiations, the Americans suggested that both governments pledge to maintain naval squadrons on the coast of West Africa, and the resulting article proved to be one of the treaty's most controversial elements. When the Senate received the treaty in August, Congress had just passed a hotly debated naval appropriations bill and the squadron provision prompted opponents of naval expansion to revive that debate.¹

By this time, Secretary Upshur had been advocating an Africa squadron for nearly a year, but Americans remained unconvinced that the country needed such a force. Westerners opposed naval expansion and preferred to spend public monies on internal improvements. Abolitionists derided the proposed squadron as part of a government plot to protect slavery at northerners' expense. And perhaps most importantly, since the treaty reduced tensions with Britain, it had the paradoxical effect of reducing the apparent need for an Africa squadron.

When analyzing the purpose of the Africa squadron is it necessary to examine the reasons why, and the conditions under which, it was created. Historians have dealt with the creation of the Africa squadron in a very uneven and fragmented manner. Many studies ignore the question of how or why the squadron was created and simply present it as a matter of fact,

¹ President Tyler later stated that he had suggested the squadron provision. Crapol, 113.

an approach that suggests the inevitable progress of events.² Those that do examine the squadron's creation generally focus too narrowly on the treaty negotiations and the immediate diplomatic context of 1842.³

The creation of the U.S. Africa squadron is a much more important and complex story than historians have acknowledged.⁴ In order to fully understand the squadron's purpose and evaluate its success or failure, we must first study its creation. This chapter asks the obvious, but as of yet unanswered question: why did the United States offer to create an Africa squadron in 1842? Clearly, the offer was intended to resolve the conflicts between Britain and the United States off the coast of West Africa, but the question of why the United States made

² Naval historian John Schroeder gives no explanation at all of the squadron's creation in his study of "the commercial and diplomatic role of the American navy" from 1829 to 1862. He makes only a vague reference to the squadron operating under the terms of the treaty, but gives no description or explanation of the treaty or the formation of the squadron, despite including an entire chapter on Upshur's tenure as secretary of the navy. Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 73. Donald Canney says almost nothing about the treaty or its negotiations. While he does discuss some of the previous diplomatic cases from Van Buren's administration, his comments about the treaty are extremely brief. The only explanation that he offers for the squadron's sudden creation is that the United States succumbed to British pressure, but he offers no direct evidence to support this claim. Rather, Canney merely suggests that the squadron was created because Britain forced the United States to come to the negotiating table with serious intent. Canney, 29-42. Likewise, Warren Howard writes that "to satisfy the British, the United States agreed to station a force of naval vessels" on the African coast. Howard, *American Slavers and the Federal Law, 1837-1862*, 40. The creation of the U.S. Africa squadron did placate the British, but that was not the primary reason for creating the squadron, nor does it explain why the United States chose to create the squadron.

³ Most historical explanations for the squadron's creation involve some vague reference to the right of search issue, but offer no clear explanation of how the two were supposed to be connected, and they do not explain why the United States suddenly offered to create a squadron in 1842 when the right of search had been a contentious issue for several years. Alan Booth rightly states that the commissioning of the Africa squadron "was an event with a considerable history," but his discussion of that history is brief and incomplete and does not explain the squadron's creation. Instead, Booth simply implies that the squadron was formed to solve the right of search problem, although he never explicitly states this. Booth, 79, 86-88. Also see: Harmon, "Suppress and Protect the United States Navy, the African Slave Trade, and Maritime Commerce, 1794-1862", 76-79. Donald Fehrenbacher suggests that there were some hopes of exchanging concessions respecting the right of search for British renunciation of impressment, but he does not clearly identify who held these hopes and in fact states that the squadron was created because neither the United States nor Britain was willing to give any ground. A "system of joint patrol," (which of course necessitated the creation of a squadron) he concludes, was "the only suitable alternative." Fehrenbacher and McAfee, 168-169. This is far from a satisfactory explanation of why the United States offered to create a squadron. The United States did not offer to create an Africa squadron because Britain refused to renounce impressment in 1842. Finally, despite writing a diplomatic study of the treaty, Howard Jones writes very little about article eight or the U.S. reasons for creating the squadron. He writes that Webster "apparently followed the Navy Department's advice" but then cites John Paine as the source while ignoring Upshur. Paine (and Bell's) report may have helped Webster in shaping the details of the agreement, but they were not responsible for the underlying policy or the administration's decision to offer to create a squadron. Jones does include a chapter on the subject of slavery, presumably to deal with the background relevant to those aspects of the treaty, but this chapter focuses almost exclusively on the *Creole* case and only addresses British abuses of American merchantmen in a very brief and limited way that does not explain the later creation of the squadron. Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843*, 69-86, 142.

⁴ One could argue that Webster admitted that the right of search, or the refusal of either side to compromise on this issue, led to articles eight and nine and the creation of the squadron. Indeed, Webster said as much himself in his letters to Tyler and Everett in early 1843. But Webster's letter must be read carefully. His intention in writing these letters was to prevent a repudiation of the treaty and the peace that he had achieved with Ashburton. The explanations that he gave in these letters were the official, agreed upon diplomatic explanations for these articles and their purpose. Webster was writing for very particular audiences in the American and British governments and he chose his words with deliberate care. They are in some ways true, but they are far from a fair representation of the whole truth and are more valuable as evidence of Webster's strong desire to achieve peace with Britain than they are of his or any American's desire to suppress the slave trade. The treaty article was about the right of search, and Webster was about the treaty and the peace it created, but the squadron was about more than just the treaty. Daniel Webster to John Tyler, n.d. February 1843, H.R. 283, 780-781; Daniel Webster to Edward Everett, 28 March 1843, H.R. 283, 788-796.

the offer is important and requires a more detailed answer. The idea of an Africa squadron was a subject of serious debate in American politics, especially as it touched on such sensitive issues as naval expansion and slavery, and the administration had to consider domestic politics as well as the diplomatic implications when suggesting the idea.

This chapter traces developments related to the Africa squadron, the navy, and the Webster-Ashburton treaty throughout 1842, and argues that the Tyler administration's offer to create an Africa squadron was a significant event. Not only did the offer please the British, and facilitate a peaceful settlement of the West African issue, but it also helped to advance the administration's own policy agenda: including its desire to create an Africa squadron and expand the navy's peacetime responsibilities. By adding another naval squadron, and assigning the navy additional territory to patrol, the administration reinforced a conception of the navy as a major force for protecting American foreign interests during peacetime.

This chapter describes the political and diplomatic events surrounding the treaty and the squadron from the time that Britain suggested making a treaty until Webster and Ashburton concluded their negotiations. The first section describes the increasing competition that the Liberian colonies faced from European rivals for control of territory in West Africa, the attack on the *Mary Carver*, and the increasing number of pleas coming from Americans in West Africa for support from the U.S. navy. The second section describes the American Colonization Society's efforts to persuade the U.S. government to support its African colonies and to create an Africa squadron. Section three addresses Webster's research into the subject of an Africa squadron and the creation of the two treaty articles that addressed Africa, the slave trade, and the squadron. The fourth section follows Congress and its debates over the treaty, the squadron, and naval funding in general. And the final section looks at the navy's actions in West Africa during 1842, before the United States created its Africa squadron.

Incorporating the squadron proposal within the treaty helped to secure additional justification and support for an existing administration proposal. This often ignored background, challenges the assumption that the squadron was created in response to the treaty for the sole purpose of suppressing the slave trade. The Tyler administration wanted to create

a squadron in 1841, and the Van Buren administration had suggested the need for such a squadron even earlier than that, but suppressing the slave trade had not been primary motive for either administration. The treaty was an important component in the creation of the Africa squadron, but it was not the first or only part of the story, nor was it the last.

With the support of southerners, the Senate ratified the treaty and the administration took one step closer to making the Africa squadron a reality. But until Congress appropriated the funds to support the squadron, its future remained in doubt. Upshur worried that if the United States did not send a squadron to West Africa, British infringement of American rights, and threats to American commercial interests, would increase. Concerned about losing the chance to create the squadron, and about the possibility of leaving American commerce vulnerable and unprotected in West Africa, Upshur needed to find a way persuade Congress and the American people to support the squadron.

Treaty Talks

When the Whigs took control of the White House, Edward Everett, the former Massachusetts governor, replaced Andrew Stevenson as U.S. envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary in London. When Everett arrived in London, in December of 1841, he found the British government's reply to Stevenson's last letter waiting for him. Everett considered the marked change in tone of Aberdeen's note, compared with Palmerston's last letter, to be a positive sign. And a few days later, Aberdeen invited Everett to meet him at the Foreign Office, where he announced Britain's intention to send a special envoy to Washington.⁵ The British government was offering to negotiate a treaty to resolve the outstanding issues between the two countries, and Aberdeen hoped that the Americans would interpret the assignment of a special minister as a sign of Britain's good will. Aberdeen chose Alexander Baring, Lord Ashburton, for the mission to America.⁶ Webster received the news in late January and wrote a hurried reply relaying his government's enthusiasm for the proposal.⁷ The process moved

⁵ Lord Aberdeen to Edward Everett, 20 December 1841, H.R. 283, 738-787; Edward Everett to Daniel Webster, 28 December 1841, H.R. 283, 781-782; Edward Everett to Daniel Webster, 31 December 1841, H.R. 283, 782-783.

⁶ Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843*, 95.

⁷ Daniel Webster to Edward Everett, 29 January 1842, H.R. 283, 787-788.

ahead quickly; Ashburton wanted to leave England before Parliament had a chance to sabotage his mission, and he wanted to conclude the treaty before Congress adjourned its current session.⁸ Ashburton sailed for the United States in February.

Liberia

The troubles between the United States and Britain could not be solved soon enough for the Liberians. Liberia continued to face threats from Europeans, and the colonists continued to hope that the United States would intervene on their behalf. Both the French and the British were making incursions into Liberian territory, and threatening to take control of land claimed by Liberia, directly challenging Liberia's claims to sovereignty and jurisdiction along the coast.

In February, as Governor Roberts returned to Monrovia from a trip down the coast, he heard cannon fire in the distance. When he stopped at the town of Jarroway to investigate, Roberts found three French men-of-war at anchor. "As we neared the shore," he reported, "we discovered a French flag flying on the heights, near one of the large towns." The French, Roberts learned, had just purchased the territory from the locals, and had fired their guns to mark the occasion. Locals informed him that the French government intended to make establishments along the coast in order to prevent British merchantmen from monopolizing the trade. The news surprised and upset Roberts, this European rivalry threatened to ruin Liberia. Roberts had been visiting a number of African villages in the region trying to purchase additional land for Liberia, but the people always asked for more than the Liberians could afford to pay. So far, he had only been able to negotiate the purchase of one small tract at Grand Sess for five hundred dollars. European interest in the area was driving up land prices and spoiling Roberts' hopes for negotiating better deals.⁹

⁸ Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty : A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843*, 102.

⁹ Joseph J. Roberts to ACS, 9 June 1842, H.R. 283, 136-145.

imperative on me, according to the orders under which I am acting, to employ Her Majesty's brig under my command in protecting him and his property, as well as any other Englishmen who may choose to trade there."¹⁰ If the Liberians tried to prevent Murray from trading at Bassa Cove, or to enforce any of their laws regulating trade, Seagram threatened to use force against them.

When Roberts learned of this new dispute he appealed to Seagram to let the British government and the ACS resolve it. Suspicious of Murray's intentions, he suggested that the factory was a pretense for illicit activity because the "trade at that place is of little importance." And he warned Seagram that "should Mr. Murray persist in violating our laws, and [if] you are determined to protect him, you leave us no alternative."¹¹ Liberia, Roberts protested, would not back down; he hoped that Murray could be persuaded to put off his plans until they received direction from Britain and America. Worried about increasing British and French encroachment, Roberts advised the ACS that this matter deserved serious attention: "The English and French are no doubt making efforts to procure territory on this coast, and why the Americans are so indifferent on this subject I know not."¹² Powerless against the might of the British navy, Liberians' only hope was that Americans would "wake up" and offer their support before, as Roberts put it, it was "too late."

While Roberts worried about European encroachment, Russwurm had to contend with conflicts between the competing factions at Cape Palmas. Like the Liberians, the Cape Palmas colonists looked to the United States for help securing their government's authority against those who challenged its legitimacy and threatened its territory.

The arrival of Catholic missionaries at Cape Palmas in early 1842 exacerbated tensions between the missionaries and the colonial government at the cape. The first Catholic missionaries in Liberia, Dr. Edward Barron and Father John Kelley, chose to settle at Cape Palmas for practical reasons.¹³ They ACS had refused their request to establish a mission in

¹⁰ H. F. Seagram to Louis Sheridan, 6 March 1842, H.R. 283, 120.

¹¹ Joseph J. Roberts to H. F. Seagram, 12 March 1842, H.R. 283, 122-123.

¹² Joseph J. Roberts to ACS, 9 June 1842, H.R. 283, 136-145.

¹³ John Kelly, "The Mission to Liberia: Diary of the Rev. John Kelly," *Historical Records and Studies* 14, no. (1920): 120-121.

Liberia, so they had applied to the MSCS. The Maryland in Liberia constitution guaranteed freedom of religion and obliged the colonial government to treat all missionaries equally.¹⁴

The Maryland colony was a logical, if not ideal, place to begin the first Catholic mission in Liberia. During their brief visit to Monrovia, the priests could not find a single Catholic; at least there were a few at Cape Palmas.¹⁵

Wilson and the other Protestant missionaries at Cape Palmas felt threatened by the Catholics' arrival. When Roberts met the new missionaries at the cape in February, he observed that, "the other missionaries were in a state of excitement." The Protestants considered the Catholics "formidable rivals" because, as Roberts thought, "their forms and ceremonies, in fact their whole system of religion, are so well adapted to the feelings and natural dispositions of the natives, that they will fall into it immediately."¹⁶ It turned out to be the last straw for Wilson, who decided to leave the cape shortly after the Catholics arrived. "Owing to the unsettled state of the relations of the mission to the colony, and the consequent uncertain prospects of the mission," he began to reduce the number of students and the size of his operation at Fair Hope. When three new missionaries, the Reverend William Walker, his wife, and the Reverend Benjamin Griswold, arrived to reinforce Fair Hope, Wilson took the first opportunity to travel eastward "in search of a more eligible site for a central and principle station."¹⁷

Actually, Father Kelly was mistaken; there was one Catholic living at Monrovia – Theodore Canot. Since his retreat from New Sestros, Canot had been building a new legitimate trading factory at Cape Mount, and living in Monrovia in the interim. The Monrovia welcomed the reformed slaver, whose prospects looked good. But Canot quickly became frustrated with the British and angry with Seagram in particular. When Canot had first picked out the location at Cape Mount, Seagram had accompanied him and had even raised the Union Jack. But since then, the British had offered him little real support, and Canot began to

¹⁴ John Latrobe to Patrick Kelly, 28 September 1841, *Maryland Colonization Journal*, September 1842, 242-245.

¹⁵ For a history of Catholic missions in West Africa see: Bane, *The Catholic Story of Liberia*; Bane, *Catholic Pioneers in West Africa*; Bane, *The Popes and Western Africa; an Outline of Mission History, 1460's-1960's*.

¹⁶ Joseph J. Roberts to ACS, 9 June 1842, H.R. 283, 136-145.

¹⁷ Kelly: 150. "Mission to the Grebos, In Western Africa," *The Missionary Herald*, January 1843, 4-5.

suspect Seagram of deceiving him.¹⁸ Canot was struggling to turn a legitimate profit and asked the British to put one hundred recaptured Africans to work as agricultural apprentices on his farm, a common system of free labor used in the British Empire at the time. But the British government rejected his request and ultimately refused to affirm Seagram's promise to protect Canot. When he received this news, Canot struck the Union Jack, raised his own flag, and pledged allegiance to the neighboring African ruler Fanta-Toro.¹⁹

One vessel that did stop to trade at Canot's new factory that spring was the *Mary Carver*. Eben Farwell had left Vassalboro and sailed the schooner to Africa during the winter of 1841-42. Once on the coast, he visited the different American colonies and various trading factories and villages along the coast. In March, he was at Canot's factory loading a cargo of wine consigned to the Catholic missionaries at Cape Palmas.²⁰

From Monrovia, Farwell sailed the *Mary Carver* to Cape Palmas where he delivered the wine to the Catholic mission and spent some time enjoying the society at Harper. Dr. Samuel McGill, the colonial doctor, later recalled that "Farwell was loved and respected at the American Colonies... he spoke of his family, his little boys, and his solicitude for them."²¹ Farwell certainly made an impression on the residents of Cape Palmas during his visit that April, but it was not all universal esteem and love. On Sunday April 10th, Farwell observed Father Kelly preach to the Grebo at King's Town. Annoyed by the bad example Farwell set that afternoon, the priest wrote in his journal that the young American "neither uncovered nor knelt whenever the savages obeyed the call to kneel to adore the God of H. and Earth, at the close!" Farwell's lack of piety riled the priest who closed his journal entry with the frustrated exclamation: "Example of Christians!"²²

This was not Eben Farwell's first voyage to West Africa. He had sailed *Transit* to that coast in 1838. He was young, but he had some experience and plenty of confidence. As he shared his plans with others at the cape they warned him to be careful. McGill claimed that

¹⁸ Joseph J. Roberts to ACS, 31 August 1842, H.R. 283, 146-150.

¹⁹ Canot and Mayer, 426-427.

²⁰ Kelly: 135.

²¹ *Kennebec Journal*, 23 September 1842.

²² Kelly: 132, 135.

Farwell “was repeatedly cautioned against trusting himself on shore, where the year before a vessel had been seized and her crew, or the greater portion of them murdered.”²³ And at a meeting in Kelly’s rooms, an old veteran of the coastal trade, Captain Britton of New York, warned Farwell not to trust Kroomen or shore natives. Britton described the Africans as deceitful, thievish, and particularly ferocious south of Cape Palmas.²⁴ Colonial officials offered to loan Farwell weapons to defend his schooner but he declined, saying, “I have not injured the natives, and do not fear them.”²⁵

Having only arrived two months earlier, the Catholic missionaries were in the market for building materials and just before leaving the cape, Farwell sold seven thousand feet of lumber to the mission. Kelly had hired a local carpenter to supervise the building project and authorized him to make the purchase. A few days later, on April 25th, the missionaries began measuring and piling the boards. As they worked their way through five thousand feet they found that four hundred were split or otherwise defective. Kelly “resolved henceforth to trust neither Catholic nor Yankee.” He blamed the carpenter for neglecting to inspect the lumber and Farwell for taking advantage of the situation. He exonerated himself, noting in his journal that “sickness even now prevented our inspection personally. \$40 loss.”²⁶ Meanwhile, the *Mary Carver* sailed down the coast and anchored at the African village of Little Berriby, approximately ninety miles leeward from Cape Palmas.

Farwell trusted the people of Little Berriby.²⁷ He visited their villages onshore, trading for camwood and other local produce, while his small crew remained on board the schooner. But Farwell’s trust in the people of Little Berriby was misplaced, and while he was on shore they knocked him down and bound him. The women and children tortured him for hours, sticking thorns into his flesh, while a group of men went on board the schooner and surprised

²³ *Kennebec Journal*, 23 September 1842.

²⁴ Kelly: 135.

²⁵ *Kennebec Journal*, 23 September 1842.

²⁶ Kelly: 132-135.

²⁷ Little Berriby was comprised of five or six families of Fishmen that belonged to a larger group of four or five villages strung along the coast. The residents of Berriby were probably either part of the Kwa Krou associated with Liberia or the Mande-fou Krou of Bas Cavally. Although each group stems from a different subfamily of the Niger-Congo languages they are culturally similar.

the mate Robert McFarland and the four sailors.²⁸ After killing Farwell and his crew, the attackers ran the schooner ashore and plundered her.²⁹ The voyage of the *Mary Carver* came to an abrupt and violent end.

News of the attack spread quickly, first to the surrounding villages and then to a nearby mission. The Protestant Episcopal mission at Cape Palmas had recently established an outlying station at Tabou where the Reverend Launcelot Byrd Minor was living. Minor was known for his disinterested benevolence and self-sacrificing nature, he was athletic and loved adventure. He enjoyed reading travel narratives, and Mungo Park's adventures in Africa were among his favorites, so it was no surprise that he had decided to become a missionary. As he explained to his mother:

After a calm and prayerful consideration of the subject, it is my firm conviction that Africa is the field of labor allotted me by God. To Africa I am willing, nay, anxious, to go.³⁰

Once in Africa, Minor had served as pastor at the Mt. Vaughan church, but longed for a more exciting post in a remote station. In order to reach the heathen Africans with his Christian message, he felt that he needed to live among them: "I must throw myself among them; I must become as one of them; they must feel, as they would say, that I am their 'God man'." ³¹ In the fall of 1841, when the missionaries began to reorganize and focus their efforts outside of the colony, Minor got his chance and established a station near the Tabou River.³² He reported that "the inhabitants of that region, Taboo, who call themselves Plabo, had more than once expressed to Dr. Savage, during several visits to that place, a strong desire for a school, and the opening appearing favorable and opportune, the brethren advised that I should visit and examine the spot." ³³ When the people of Tabou readily agreed to his proposal, he immediately moved into a local native hut and started work. Minor struggled to build the new station through the end of 1841. By 1842, he was enjoying a small amount of success. He had

²⁸ Reports suggest that the sailors were dark skinned but it is unclear who they were and if they were African-Americans or local Africans. There is some evidence implicating Africans employed by Farwell in the attack, but it is unknown if they were on board at the time.

²⁹ Bridge, 75-76; Hening, 182-186; Kelly: 135-136.

³⁰ Hening, 122-125, 130-131.

³¹ Ibid., 154.

³² Ibid., 81-82.

³³ Ibid., 168.

completed construction of a house and garden, had collected a small following of pupils and congregants, and was settling in.³⁴

So it was that on April 25th, 1842, Minor was the closest American to the village of Little Berriby where the *Mary Carver* was attacked. Hearing reports of the assault from the locals, Minor immediately wrote to the secretary of the navy to relay the news:

Sir, The subject of this letter will, I hope, sufficiently account for my boldness in addressing you, and occupying time, of which every moment must be precious. Yesterday, within thirty miles of the place from which I now write, a bloody tragedy was enacted; and as it was American blood that was spilt, I feel it an imperative duty to lay the matter before you; the more, that I am the only white man near the spot, left alive to tell the horrid tale.³⁵

Although his house was nearly thirty miles from Little Berriby, and his life had not been threatened in the attack, it served Minor's interests to imply that he was also in danger. And his decision to write specifically to the Navy Department made it clear that he wanted the United States to respond to the attack on the *Mary Carver* with naval force.

Minor deliberately tried to dramatize the attack on the *Mary Carver*, but his account is still the most reliable. He was in close proximity and recorded the most direct testimony immediately after the attack. According to Minor's informants, Farwell had left some goods with a native called Young Cracow, to be used for the purchase of camwood. Minor wrote, "Having occasion to be absent for a short time, and on his return not finding the wood ready, [Farwell] proposed that a canoe should be given him in part payment, to which Cracow, after some hesitation agreed."³⁶ Farwell received the canoe in lieu of six hundred pounds of camwood, what Minor considered to be a large price. While the captain was "enticed" to go ashore and "amused with a pretence of trade," Cracow sent several canoes loaded with camwood to the schooner. Minor described what happened next:

The mate, suspecting no harm, allowed all hands to come on board, and while engaged in weighing the wood, was suddenly set upon. He, one seaman, and the cook were the first who fell. One seaman, a very old man, was thrown overboard, and the only remaining hand, having taken refuge in the rigging, was induced by fair promises, to surrender, and instantly butchered.

Building up the drama, the missionary came to the climax of the story:

³⁴ Ibid., 171.

³⁵ Launcelot B. Minor to Abel P. Upshur, 25 April 1842, reprinted in Hening, 182-186.

³⁶ Ibid.

At a preconcerted signal, the captain, till then unconscious of what had been going on, was seized, bound hand and foot, and cruelly beaten. The women struck him so severely with their rice-pestles that his skull was fractured just above the eye, causing it to protrude from the socket in a manner horrible to behold. He begged for time to pray. It was refused. He was then taken out to sea in a canoe, and thrown overboard, bound as he was. Still, the unhappy man struggled for his life with all the energy of desperation, and succeeded in tearing, with his teeth, the cords with which his hands were bound, and even seized a paddle to defend himself, but a blow on the head sent him to the bottom.³⁷

Knowing something about Farwell's aggressive temper, it is easy to imagine him fighting for his life. But it is also quite possible that Minor invented the story of Farwell begging for time to pray in the face of brutal savages. As Father Kelly noticed, Eben Farwell was not the most devout Christian. But regardless, this portrait of heathen savages refusing a poor Christian the chance to pray in his last moments before they brutally tortured him to death was a powerful image for Minor's audience back in the United States.

To protect the image of Eben Farwell as an innocent, God-fearing American, Minor disparaged Africans as barbarous heathen. He claimed that this attack was not an isolated incident, but rather that it was part of a larger pattern of African savagery:

Accustomed as the natives are to blacken the character of those they have injured, in the present case, they have nothing to allege against their victim. They do not even pretend to have disagreed with him in any manner. They glory in what they have done. It is said that this is the fourth vessel cut off at that place, (I know certainly of two, one Brazilian and one American,) within the last eight months. The kroomen and trademen, serving on board at the time, participated largely, both in the murders and in the plunder.³⁸

Minor's remark that this was the fourth vessel to be attacked was especially significant. Despite making such a detailed report, Minor never offered any details about any other incident. But the absence of details or evidence did not prevent the rumors of other attacks from gaining credibility; simply linking them to the *Mary Carver* lent credence to this portrayal of Africans as dangerous savages.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

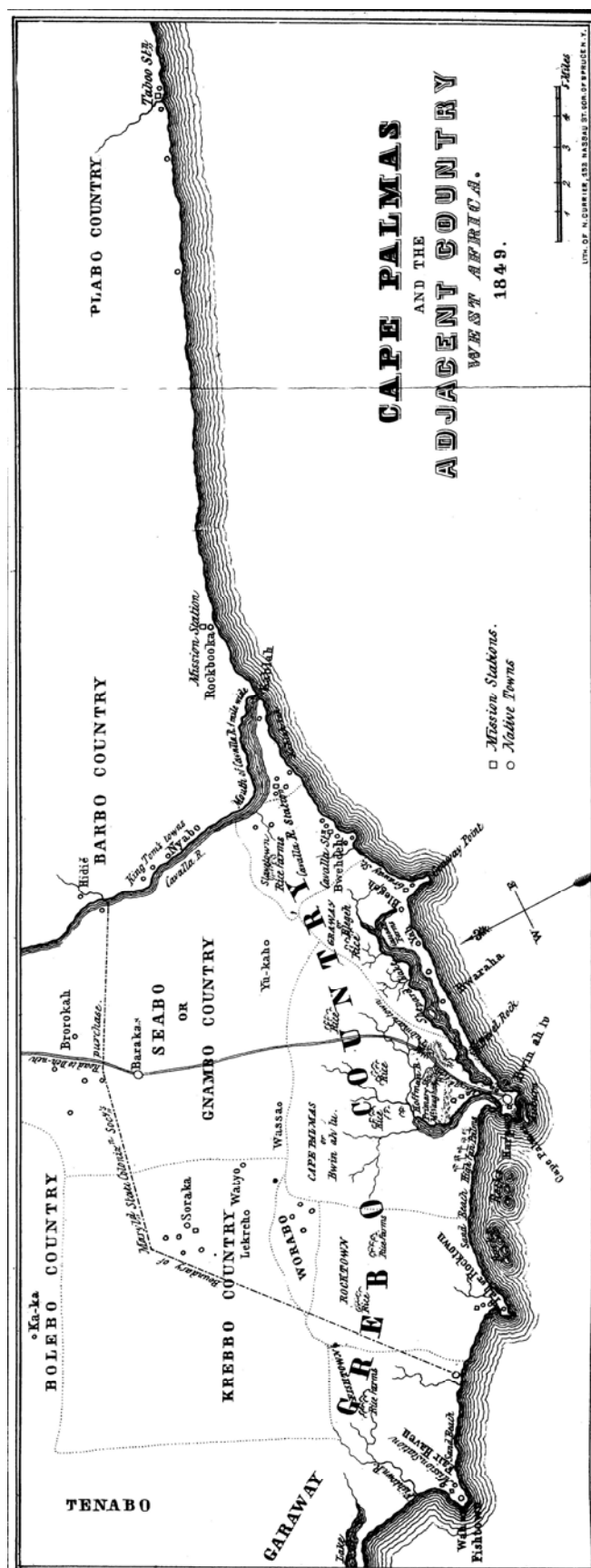


Figure 4. Map of Cape Palmas, 1849.

Minor predicted that these savages would continue to prey on innocent Americans, and expressed fear for his own safety. According to Minor, this attack had inspired others to take a Dutch ship anchored nearby. Minor had thwarted the plot by warning the captain, and now he worried that the conspirators might “take a bloody revenge” on him for interfering. He advised Upshur that failure to respond would have dire consequences for Americans trading in West Africa:

It would ill become me, a minister of the Gospel, to recommend any unnecessary effusion of blood, but forbearance, in the present case, would not be mercy. It would be evident to every one acquainted with the African character, that a severe example is now absolutely necessary, to secure anything like respect and security to our countrymen trading on the coast. Should this outrage be overlooked, the effect not only there, but all along the coast, would be pernicious in the highest degree.³⁹

Stressing the growing danger, Minor advised harsh punishment and cautioned against liberal sympathies, which he called “mistaken kindness.” Minor claimed to have an intimate knowledge of the real African character, gained from living among them, where they were free to be themselves. According to the missionary, Africans who lived amongst whites had adopted the habits of civilized society and were unrepresentative of their race, and those who worked on board ships and submitted to the will of masters had “every motive to practice those arts of deception for which they are so distinguished.” Under such circumstances, he argued, the more “mischievous features of their character are rarely seen.” In contrast, he had observed Africans in their own villages, “where their heart, throwing aside its disguise, appears in all its native hideousness.” As a result of this expertise, he concluded that “nothing but the fear of punishment, promptly and sharply administered, will restrain their lawless violence; outrage will follow outrage, and deriving courage from impunity, each case will outdo its predecessor.”⁴⁰

Minor had recent naval actions in mind when he wrote this letter. Not only did he have the audacity to offer his unsolicited opinions directly to the secretary of the navy, but he went on to suggest a specific plan of attack. He recommended severe punishment, explaining that:

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

by severity, is not meant the mere burning of the town. That is nothing. Were Little Bereby to-day reduced to ashes, one-tenth of the plunder obtained from the schooner would be sufficient to restore it to a better condition than ever.

Instead, referring to the navy's recent actions in Sumatra, Minor suggested that "the course pursued at Qualla Batto affords an example of what might be done here, with advantage." He even went so far as to advise Upshur on military strategy and tactical conditions at Little Berriby. He wrote: "The anchorage and landing at Bereby are both good, and the town, being neither large nor strong, might be easily surrounded in the night, and destroyed in an hour: but great secrecy will be necessary in approaching the coast, for should the inhabitants have but an hour's notice, not one will be found, and news passes along the coast with amazing celerity."⁴¹ Minor was confident that his advice would be well received, but it would be months before his letter, or any other account of the attack, would reach the United States. In the meantime, life along the coast grew increasingly dangerous.

Colonists at Cape Palmas were shocked and distressed when news of the attack reached them on May 2nd. They instantly remembered Eben Farwell with new affection. When Father Kelly recounted his meetings with Farwell, he forgot his anger at being cheated by the ill-mannered captain. Colonists and missionaries began whitewashing Farwell's character, but no one seemed genuinely grieved by his death. Instead, they thought mainly of how it affected their own interests. Kelly wrote in his journal, "Alas! We cannot offer the prayers of the church for him, not being of the communion or household of the faith."⁴² There may have been shock and outrage at the news of the attack, but there were few tears shed, or prayers offered, for Eben Farwell in Africa.

When Russwurm reported the news of the attack to the MSCS in his next dispatch, he called it "an event of so exciting a nature, that I cannot pass it over unnoticed." Like Minor, he compared this attack to other unspecified cases, and used the opportunity to appeal for assistance from the U.S. navy. Russwurm identified the *Mary Carver* as "the second vessel captured by them within a year," and worried that "if the U States Govt. take no measure to punish them, other natives will think they may murder Americans, & plunder their vessels with

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Kelly: 135-136.

impunity.” He believed that neighboring villages had known about the plot in advance, and he expected the navy to respond. Like Minor, Russwurm called for severe naval retribution that would require an ongoing naval presence, because the “mere burning [of] a few villages will be nothing in [these Africans’] estimation.” And he hoped that his colony would have the chance to “be of some service to such gentlemen as may be ordered out by the Navy Department,” a connection that the colony would certainly profit from.⁴³

Although the attack on the *Mary Carver* had occurred nearly one hundred miles from Cape Palmas, anticipating an American response and future trouble, Russwurm took the opportunity to request a supply of arms. Writing to the MSCS, he suggested:

As the scene of action in the *Mary Carver*’s palaver is so near us, would it not be a suitable opportunity to petition the Hon. Secretary of the Navy for one hundred good US muskets; 2 light brass field pieces mounted & some fixed ammunition—in fact any stores the Govt felt disposed to grant. We have never shared in the donations to the Monrovia colony.⁴⁴

Russwurm worried that a conflict at Little Berriby or Tabou might encourage the Grebo living at Cape Palmas to attack the Maryland colony. And despite the colony’s strained relationship with the missions, if Africans attacked Minor or other missionaries, the missions would likely turn to the colony for help. Russwurm saw that the apparent threat to Americans on the coast could be used as an opportunity to build up the colonial arsenal, and he took advantage of that opportunity.

Washington & West Africa

It would be months before the MSCS received Russwurm’s letter, or any news of the *Mary Carver*. But always concerned about threats to the colonies, the MSCS continued to advocate an increased U.S. naval presence in West Africa in the pages of its journal. The system of trade along the coast, the *Maryland Colonization Journal* explained, required a naval presence. The MSCS claimed that Africans did not have any real capital and that they were too profligate to accumulate any, therefore American and European traders commonly advanced goods to Africans on credit in order to facilitate trade. British merchants relied heavily on the

⁴³ John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 24 May 1842, MSCSP, Letterbooks 1838-1843.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

British navy to enforce repayment and negotiate trade agreements with the local people. In order to compete with the British, the MSCS argued, American merchants needed similar assistance from the U.S. navy.⁴⁵

The *Maryland Colonization Journal* asserted that Americans must copy the British system of naval protection in order to be competitive in West African commerce. It argued that Americans would benefit from expansion of this trade, by creating new and larger markets for surplus American produce. "The advantages of this commerce to the United States," the *Journal* argued, "would arise principally from its affording an outlet or market for the productions of our soil, rather than from any present necessity we labour under of obtaining the African produce in return; although for this, there probably will be an unceasing and increasing demand." In particular, the *Journal* suggested that there were large, untapped markets in West Africa for American tobacco and cotton that American merchants could develop, provided they had adequate naval support.⁴⁶

The MSCS was more openly critical of U.S. policy concerning West Africa than the ACS. During the Webster-Ashburton treaty negotiations, the *Journal* sharply criticized U.S. policy and the navy's capacity to police the slave trade. It knew that the United States did not intend to police the slave trade. The navy did not have the necessary vessels to spare or the money to pay for such a huge endeavor, and the ships that the navy did have were completely unfit for the job. *Dolphin* and *Grampus*, the *Journal* pointed out, had been sent out to the coast with provisions for only four months, hardly long enough to accomplish anything, let alone sailing with ordinary merchantmen or slavers. "It is well known to every person at all conversant with the operation of our government," the *Journal* continued:

that no effectual force will be sent. In fact it cannot be done by our nation. The spare vessels in all the nations of the civilized world, with mutual Right of Search, are required for this important work.⁴⁷

The MSCS did not suggest that these obstacles excused the United States from addressing the problem of the slave trade or from the need to form an Africa squadron.

⁴⁵ *Maryland Colonization Journal*, April 1842, 162-166.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

Rather, it argued that the U.S. policy of ignoring or trivializing these problems had added to Americans' difficulties in West Africa. The U.S. government's lack of action, its stubborn refusal to send more than sporadic, token forces, and its unwillingness to reach some mutual search agreement had frustrated and antagonized the British. U.S. policy, the *Journal* argued, had caused the British to alter their course of action in West Africa. If Americans continued to ignore the prostitution of their flag and refused to increase their naval force on the coast, the *Journal* warned that:

Annoyances to our merchantmen will more frequently occur – we shall no longer receive the cordial protection of the British cruisers, which has ever been rendered to American vessels, and without which the whole coast would be lined with robbers and pirates – measures would be taken gradually to exclude us from the native trade by commercial treaties with the chiefs and other means heretofore adverted to, and but a few years would elapse before we should cease to care what fate awaited vessels with the American flag on that coast. It would seldom protect American bottoms. Our present profitable, but small and unprotected commerce, would be at an end.⁴⁸

The MSCS knew that it was foolish to suggest that the United States police the slave trade, because there were too many political and practical obstacles in the way. The only reasonable course of action was to advocate a change in U.S. policy making West Africa a region of greater importance than it had been, and to establish some sort of regular naval presence that might improve conditions for Americans in that part of the world.

Secretary Upshur was not indifferent to these concerns. He was concerned about the navy's presence in West Africa and was busy deciding how much support to afford the Liberian colonies. *Dolphin* and *Grampus* had returned from their second cruise to Africa in the summer of 1841 and Upshur recommended sending an even larger force to West Africa in 1842, but naval appropriations for 1842 had yet to come up for debate in Congress.⁴⁹ With no budget, Upshur could not think of sending a squadron to West Africa, and could only manage to send one vessel to Africa in 1842. As the administration's newspaper, the *Madisonian*, explained:

We find it stated in several of the newspapers, that the Secretary of the Navy is preparing to despatch a *squadron* to the coast of Africa, under the command of Commodore Ramsay. This is not true. The Sec. is very desirous that a strong and efficient squadron should be constantly on that coast, but he is

⁴⁸ Ibid., 171-172.

⁴⁹ "An Act making appropriations for the naval service for the year one thousand eight hundred and forty-one," 26 Cong., 2 sess., 3 March 1841, *Statutes at Large: List of the Public Acts of Congress*, (Vol. 5) 419-420.

unable, at present, to carry out his purposes, for want of ships and *money*. In the meantime, he is doing all that he *can* do, by sending to that station such part of the force of the several squadrons on other stations as can, from time to time, be spared from that duty. The *Vandalia* is part of the *home* squadron, now under the command of Commodore Stewart, and is the *only* vessel that the Department can send to the African coast.⁵⁰

In March, Upshur ordered USS *Vandalia*, commanded by Commodore William Ramsay, to visit Africa. She was a medium-sized sloop-of-war, 614 tons, armed with twenty guns, and she carried a complement of 150 sailors and marines. *Vandalia* was fourteen years old and had been on the stocks for over two years when she was put back into service and assigned to the Home squadron in 1842. She sailed for Africa on Friday, May 13th.⁵¹

The Tyler administration's interest in West Africa encouraged the colonization societies to hope for some assistance from the federal government, and the ACS decided to hold a large convention in Washington D.C. to promote its cause among government officials. Organizers intended the convention to serve as a forum for "deliberation on the best means of arousing the national mind," and to formulate a plan for appealing to state and federal governments for support.⁵² The society already boasted a number of well-known political figures among its list of officers. The leader of the Whig party, Sen. Henry Clay, was the current ACS president, and the society's fifty-seven vice presidents included: Webster, Upshur, and Virginia's Sen. William C. Rives, who was the current chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Each of these men was in a position to help direct government support to the ACS and Liberia, and the society planned this convention to take advantage of these opportunities. Securing government support for a U.S. naval squadron in West Africa was a major theme of the three-day event.

Congressman Joseph R. Underwood from Kentucky presided over the convention's opening session in the Hall of the House of Representatives on the evening of May 4th. There could not have been a more opportune arrangement; the location made it extraordinarily convenient for legislators to attend, and the society reported that "a number of distinguished

⁵⁰ From the *Madisonian*, reprinted in the *Kennebec Journal*, 1 April 1842.

⁵¹ "Naval Intelligence," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 21 May 1842.

⁵² American Colonization Society, *The 26th Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States* (1843), 18.

members of both Houses of Congress, citizens and strangers from various States” participated in the four-day event.⁵³ Rev. Ralph Gurley opened the meeting with a speech reminding the audience that the society’s founders had never imagined that private efforts alone could accomplish their goal, and he called on the society to renew its efforts to secure government aid.⁵⁴

Gurley lamented that the U.S. government’s policy of supporting colonization, begun in the days of Madison and Monroe, had waned. He presented a resolution calling for a national policy supporting colonization that would unite Americans, alleviate the problems of the colored people, and help to overthrow the slave trade. An Africa squadron was an essential part of Gurley’s proposal. He envisioned that “the whole country will sustain the Government in the maintenance of such naval force, and the application of such means on the African coast, as may be necessary to guard our commerce (already becoming of great value) on that coast, fulfill all the humane provisions of the law for the benefit of recaptured Africans, and effectually suppress the African slave trade.”⁵⁵ But this was an unrealistic dream; the whole country was not likely to sustain the maintenance of a naval force in West Africa. Upshur had already faced objections from Congress to similar proposals that he had made just months earlier. Still, Gurley and the ACS hoped to persuade Congress to support a squadron.

After Gurley finished presenting the convention resolutions, Francis Scott Key took the floor and introduced Dr. James Hall. Key held up Hall as the foremost expert on Liberia: highlighting his experience in Africa, his leadership at Cape Palmas, and his knowledge of the native peoples. He told the audience of Hall’s first-hand knowledge of African trade, and assured listeners of the doctor’s sound judgment and sagacity. Since returning from Cape Palmas, Hall had been employed as a general agent for the MSCS in the United States, and he played a large role at the convention. His speech on the state of the colonies, Africans, and the coast in general was the highlight of the event. And like many others there, Hall also

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Proceedings of the convention of the friends of African colonization, held in the Capitol, Washington city, 4 May 1842, H.R. 283, 17-38.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

advocated that the United States form an Africa squadron to protect the nation's interests in West Africa.⁵⁶

Sen. James T. Moorehead of Kentucky gave a long speech at the convention, questioning the proper course for the government to pursue. Moorehead did not believe that Liberia needed direct assistance, but he argued that American laws against the slave trade should be rigidly enforced for the sake of consistency and national honor. He agreed that the best way to combat the slave trade was to supplant it by promoting the growth of legitimate trade, and he spoke about British efforts to control that trade. He argued that "it would well become the Government of the United States to direct its earnest attention" to the subject, and advocated forming an Africa squadron, which he said would provide numerous benefits to the American people.⁵⁷

Sen. William C. Rives' presence in the audience excited hope and optimism among the crowd because many believed that Rives, as a close supporter of Tyler and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, could be a powerful ally in their quest for government support. On the second evening of the convention, Rives made a short speech about colonization. He seemed to concur with Moorehead, and made allusions to a measure that might be introduced in the Senate, but his remarks were conservative and disappointed some ACS members who had wanted Rives to show more enthusiastic support.⁵⁸

On the surface, the convention was a success. Organizers were satisfied with the participation, the plan to lobby state and federal governments was in place, and memorials had been drawn up and distributed accordingly. But the effect of this effort was minimal. The ACS had hoped to make Congress more sympathetic to its cause, and perhaps to influence the ongoing naval appropriations debate, but despite their access to sympathetic politicians, colonizationists had little influence on policy or legislation. Growing frustrated, Hall complained that the government did not act to protect its own interests. News that the French

⁵⁶ *Maryland Colonization Journal*, April 1842, 161-172.

⁵⁷ Proceedings of the convention of the friends of African colonization, held in the Capitol, Washington city, 4 May 1842, H.R. 283, 17-38.

⁵⁸ Proceedings of the convention of the friends of African colonization, held in the Capitol, Washington city, 5 May 1842, H.R. 283, 38- 41.

had used their navy to purchase three points along the coast near Liberia had just arrived. “If we have nothing to apprehend from the French,” Hall wrote, the French actions showed “that they apprehend much from the English.” He asked: “Will our government ever be blind to their own interest, and continue longer to neglect our African colonies?”⁵⁹

The convention demonstrated that a few sympathetic politicians supported creating an Africa squadron to protect Americans from European threats and to help foster legitimate American trade in opposition to the slave trade, but the majority of congressmen remained unconvinced that Americans had significant interests in West Africa worth protecting. Hall impatiently questioned when the United States was going to wake up to its interests in West Africa, but in fact, the process had already begun. Upshur was the first high-ranking government official to recognize American interests in the region. And now with treaty negotiations about to begin, Webster began to research the subject as well. Expecting the transatlantic slave trade to be a major issue during treaty negotiations, Webster wrote to Charles Bell and John Paine, the two commanding officers most recently returned from the coast, with a list of questions about West Africa, explaining that he wanted the “most accurate knowledge attainable.”⁶⁰

Treaty Talks

Secretary Webster asked Captain Bell and Lieutenant Paine for a detailed report describing all aspects of the slave trade. He specifically asked about the extent of the trade along the West African coast, and for details of the coastline itself. He asked for information about the “belt along the shore within which cruisers may be usefully employed.” He wanted to know how slave ships typically went about their business from start to finish, and he asked for descriptions of the slaving stations and barracoons. Webster also wanted descriptions of the equipment and preparations necessary for a slaving voyage. And he asked the officers for their recommendations; he specifically wanted their opinions about the utility of joint-cruising. He asked where they thought slave ships could most easily be captured, and for their

⁵⁹ James Hall to Francis Scott Key, 6 June 1842, H.R. 283, 78.

⁶⁰ Daniel Webster to Charles Bell and John Paine, 30 April 1842, H.R. 283, 768-769.

recommendations on the size and make-up of an Africa squadron. He asked for their opinions about the size of the force and duration of the mission that would be necessary to “put an entire end to the traffic in slaves.” Webster closed his letter by inviting the officers to add any additional observations on the slave trade that they might have to offer.⁶¹

Paine responded to Webster’s letter immediately. He had been embarrassed and upset by Paulding’s rebuke of his agreement with Captain Tucker, and he was eager to vindicate himself. Paine sent Webster copies of documents relating to that agreement, explaining that it had been based entirely on logic and common sense. He closed his letter by writing that:

Any expression of my opinion of Mr. Paulding’s letter to me would have been improper, and would still be indecorous. I shall be grateful to be informed if you think any explanation or defence necessary. I have never believed so.⁶²

Webster was not really interested in Paine’s cause, Paulding was gone and Webster was too busy dealing with the British to worry about such small matters.

Bell and Paine submitted their full report to Webster a week later. They emphasized the important role that British, French, and American colonies played in suppressing the slave trade. They identified several slave stations along the coast and estimated that a squadron of at least fifteen vessels would be needed to suppress the trade. They also raised the problematic issue of British merchants and naval officers interfering with American traders. Bell and Paine suggested that guarding the interests of legitimate American traders should be part of the U.S. effort to combat the slave trade, something Webster had not inquired about.⁶³

Webster was not particularly interested in the slave trade for its own sake; his main concern was to negotiate a successful treaty, resolving the outstanding difficulties with Britain. The most important issues were the northeastern boundary dispute, the slave trade, and the right of search. A squadron of the size that Bell and Paine recommended was practically impossible, considering the current size of the U.S. navy, Congress’s reluctance to appropriate funds for the navy, and Americans’ general belief that few American citizens were directly involved in the slave trade. But a somewhat smaller squadron could be of service to the United

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² John S. Paine to Daniel Webster, with enclosures, 2 May 1842, H.R. 283, 765-768.

⁶³ Charles Bell and John S. Paine to Daniel Webster, 10 May 1842, H.R. 283, 769-773.

States in a number of ways. And if the proposal for such a squadron was included in the treaty, Congress would be under added pressure to fund it. A small Africa squadron could protect Americans from British abuse, help improve relations with Britain, and diffuse the right of search conflict. With such a squadron, Upshur would be able to implement his naval policy and foster the expansion of American trade in West Africa. And this squadron would also benefit American colonists and missionaries, help to deter the slave trade, prevent abuse of the American flag, and bring honor to the nation. And so, at Tyler's suggestion, Webster proposed to Ashburton that both countries agree to maintain at least a small naval squadron on the coast of West Africa.⁶⁴ Since the British already employed a squadron on the coast, the Tyler administration was in fact offering to form a U.S. Africa squadron. Ashburton jumped at the offer.

Historians have called the U.S. proposal to form an Africa squadron a joint-cruising plan, and to some degree it was, but the prevailing historical description is misleading.⁶⁵ Howard Jones writes that the U.S. scheme called for the two nations to "assign pairs of cruisers to patrol the West African coast," offering the Paine-Tucker agreement as a model and precedent.⁶⁶ But Jones grossly overstates the degree of cooperation that the Americans envisioned. The United States did not propose a true joint-cruising scheme. The Tyler administration offered to create a U.S. Africa squadron that could work together with the British West Africa squadron only if an urgent need for cooperation arose. The final treaty language read:

The said squadrons to be independent of each other, but the two Governments stipulating, nevertheless, to give such orders to the officers commanding their respective forces, as shall enable them most effectually to act in concert and cooperation, upon mutual consultation, as exigencies may arise, for the attainment of the true object of this article.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur, Conservative Virginian, 1790-1844*, 150; Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty : A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843*, 142-143.

⁶⁵ For example Fehrenbacher writes that the Bell-Paine report was the basis for article eight: Fehrenbacher and McAfee, 169.

⁶⁶ Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty : A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843*, 142.

⁶⁷ The text of the treaty is reprinted in: Miller, ed., 363-370.

The treaty called for organizing both squadrons so that they could cooperate efficiently if, and when, the need arose, but it did not suggest that they should regularly cruise together.⁶⁸

The Paine-Tucker agreement had called for cooperation, not joint-cruising. It had granted the British navy the specific right to detain vessels flying the U.S. flag. It read that Commander Tucker and Lieutenant Paine:

Hereby request each other, and agree to, detain all vessels, under American colors, found to be fully equipped for, and engaged in, the slave trade; that if proved to be American property, they shall be handed over to the United States' schooner Grampus, or any other American cruiser; and that, if proved to be Spanish, Portuguese, Brazilian, or English property, to any of Her Britannic Majesty's cruisers employed on the west coast of Africa, for the suppression of the Slave Trade, so far as their respective laws and treaties will permit.⁶⁹

Secretary Paulding had rejected this agreement because it blatantly contradicted the U.S. policy denying Britain the right to search or detain vessels flying the American flag. Article eight of the treaty did not grant such a right; it was designed to eliminate the need for such a concession and created a squadron to prevent the British from trying to take such a right without consent. The Paine-Tucker agreement was not a model for the practice of joint-cruising or for article eight of the Webster-Ashburton treaty.

Historians have not really questioned why the United States proposed creating an Africa squadron during these treaty negotiations. Donald Canney simply states that the only possible solution to the right of search problem was to ignore it, and that article eight was produced instead. But Canney does not explain how or why this happened; he does not even mention whose idea it was.⁷⁰ The failure of historians to sufficiently explain why the United States offered to create an Africa squadron of its own in 1842 has directly contributed to their misunderstanding of the purpose for which that squadron was created, and consequently to the distorted interpretation of that squadron's failure.

⁶⁸ This distinction may seem overly-wrought to some readers, but it is important to remember that diplomatic language, especially that which is formalized in treaties, is usually chosen very carefully and often carries with it very subtle meanings.

⁶⁹ Paine-Tucker agreement, 11 March 1840, H.R. 283, 656-657.

⁷⁰ Canney, 31. For a current explanation of this question see: Mitton, 99. Mitton argues that the U.S. proposal for a joint-cruising plan originated with U.S. Minister to Prussia Henry Wheaton, who suggested the idea in a letter to Webster written in January of 1842. But this explanation does not tell the full story nor does it include the perspective of U.S. leaders in Washington. Joint-cruising had seemed the obvious solution to Lieutenant Paine and others in 1840 and both the Navy and State Departments had been aware of Paine's experiment at the time. Wheaton's suggestion may have helped to persuade the Tyler administration to support joint-cruising, but the idea was not his alone.

There were several reasons why the Tyler administration offered to form an Africa squadron. Americans generally believed that the British presented a threat to their interests in the Atlantic. Congress had already authorized creation of a Home squadron to bolster the nation's coastal defenses, but American interests further afield remained vulnerable. Americans believed that the British continued to illegally detain and molest American merchant vessels sailing along the coast of West Africa, and they increasingly came to believe that an Africa squadron was necessary to stop this abuse and the threat it posed to their rights to free navigation of the seas.

By 1842, the Tyler administration had grown convinced of the need for an expanded American naval presence in West Africa. In addition to the threat of British abuse, Secretary Upshur had investigated American interests on that coast and had come to believe that they warranted regular protection from the navy. American trade, missions, and colonies in West Africa had grown substantially in the past ten years and they all showed potential for continued growth provided that they were protected from the threat of encroaching Europeans who were plotting to monopolize trade along the coast. Bell and Paine's report had helped to convince Webster of the need for a squadron. And all three men, Tyler, Upshur, and Webster, supported colonization. The Tyler administration wanted to send more cruisers to Africa to protect American interests from British abuse, but Congress had thus far refused to support the expense of a new squadron. Tying the plan for an Africa squadron to the treaty put increased pressure on Congress to support it.

In the final treaty, articles eight and nine addressed West African issues including the squadron and the slave trade. Article eight required both the United States and Britain to maintain a separate naval squadron with a minimum of eighty guns on the coast of Africa. Article nine declared that the demand for slaves was an encouragement to slave traders and obligated the two countries to urge other powers to close their slave markets.⁷¹ The British accepted these articles as the best possible alternative to mutual search, a right that the United States would not concede. Putting a positive face on the compromise, Ashburton

⁷¹ Miller, ed., 363-370.

claimed that it would double the size of the naval presence on the coast.⁷² This was an obvious exaggeration considering that the British already maintained a force of far more than eighty guns on the coast. At best the addition of a few American cruisers would modestly increase the naval presence. But the agreement was a diplomatic success that promised improved relations.

Neither of these two treaty articles could reasonably be expected to have any significant impact on the slave trade. The navy had repeatedly estimated that a much larger force would be required to suppress the trade. But considering the prevailing belief that few Americans were directly involved in the slave trade, approval for a small force was all that Webster could reasonably hope to get from Congress. Even if the administration had wanted to create a force for the purpose of suppressing the slave trade, Congress would not have supported it.⁷³ But Webster and the administration did have the chance to accomplish the goal of improving relations with Britain. By sending a squadron to Africa, the administration could achieve two policy goals: it could help maintain peace with Britain by appearing to satisfy the British demand for the United States to enforce its own laws against the slave trade, and simultaneously create a new Africa squadron to protect American interests and prevent further abuses of American rights off the coast of West Africa, and that was a significant accomplishment. Webster and Ashburton concluded their negotiations and signed the treaty on August 9, 1842.

Congress & the Navy

Congress had opened its current session in December and was still sitting when Tyler submitted the treaty to the Senate on August 11th. It had been a contentious session and congressmen had spent much of the first three months arguing about the naval appropriations bill; Upshur's proposals to enlarge and reform the navy had sparked a heated controversy. Although both the House and Senate naval committees had approved his proposals, their

⁷² Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty : A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843*, 142.

⁷³ Warren Howard also argues that the government was reluctant to operate a squadron that represented a larger proportion of its overall navy than Britain's squadron did. Howard, *American Slavers and the Federal Law, 1837-1862*, 17-18.

endorsements carried little weight, and the bill languished. In April, Upshur complained that his department was running out of money and that his drafts were being refused. The bill finally came up for debate in May.⁷⁴

Since the opening of treaty negotiations had alleviated the immediate threat of war with Britain, both Whigs and Democrats questioned the need for naval expansion. Some congressmen argued that considering the current federal deficit and poor economic forecasts, the government could not afford to build and maintain a large peacetime navy. Others cited the department's notorious inefficiency, or fears that a large military establishment would threaten the nation's republican ideals. Westerners preferred to use the government's limited resources to construct roads and other internal improvements. Opponents of naval expansion simply argued that the navy had sufficient resources and was already large enough.⁷⁵

Debate over naval appropriations continued through the summer until Congress finally passed a bill on August 4th. The appropriation of \$6,374,733 was an increase of only \$447,396 over the previous year. Congress increased the budget for naval yards and hospitals by \$94,035, and raised the budget for repairs by \$400,000. It also added a new appropriation of \$10,543 for enforcing the laws against the slave trade and removing recaptured Africans to Africa. In contrast, it allotted \$20,000 for the preservation of items collected by the recently returned exploring expedition.⁷⁶ A comparison between these two items demonstrates the low level of congressional commitment to suppressing the slave trade. Overall, Congress only increased the department's budget marginally and Upshur was disappointed.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur, Conservative Virginian, 1790-1844*, 138-139.

⁷⁵ In the middle of this debate Congress received the memorial produced by the ACS convention. They referred it to the House Commerce Committee and it did not come up again until the following session. American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, 7-16; For a description of the naval appropriations debates see: Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur, Conservative Virginian, 1790-1844*, 138-147.

⁷⁶ "An Act making appropriations for the naval service for the year one thousand eight hundred and forty-two." 27 Cong., 2 sess., 4 August 1842, *Statutes at Large: List of the Public Acts of Congress*, (Vol. 5), 500-502. These figures are based only on the bill passed August 4, 1842. The Naval Historical Center Library lists the department's budget for 1842 at \$6,632,000. Department of the Navy, Office of the Comptroller, "Statement 8, Expenditures of the Navy, 1794 through 30 June 1960," *Financial Report, Fiscal Year 1960* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1960): 43-44; Naval Historical Center U.S. Navy Department, "Budget of the U.S. Navy, 1794 - 2004," (Department of the Navy, 2006). <http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/budget.htm>. Claude Hall puts the figure at \$6,588,894: Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur, Conservative Virginian, 1790-1844*, 145. John Schroeder gives the 1842 budget at "over \$6,588,894" and reports that the navy actually spent \$8,397,000 in fiscal year 1842. This includes previously unexpended funds still available to the department. Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 64-67. The government's fiscal year was the same as the calendar year in 1842. In 1843 the fiscal year was changed to begin on July 1st.

⁷⁷ Schroeder points out that the department did "very well in a time of financial stringency, sectional tension and partisan resentment." Schroeder states that the total amount appropriated to the Navy Department in 1842 was the

The Senate received the treaty just a week later. Initial reactions were mixed, but overall, Americans thought that it vindicated the nation's honor and Tyler recommended that the Senate approve it.⁷⁸ He chose to interpret article eight as a British renunciation of the right of search, writing that it removed "all pretext on the part of others for violating the immunities of the American flag upon the seas." He pointed out that the treaty made no changes to international law, explaining that "it provides simply that each of the two Governments shall maintain on the coast of Africa a sufficient squadron to enforce, separately and respectively, the laws, rights, and obligations of the two countries, for the suppression of the slave trade."⁷⁹ Article eight conceded no rights to Britain; it simply pledged the United States to maintain a modest squadron off West Africa to enforce its own laws independently of any other nation.

Tyler also tried to justify the Africa squadron by declaring that American commerce in West Africa was extensive, and suggesting that a squadron would help protect American merchantmen from British interference. He advised the Senate:

Our commerce along the western coast of Africa is extensive, and supposed to be increasing. There is reason to think that, in many cases, those engaged in it have met with interruptions and annoyances, caused by jealousy and instigation of rivals engaged in the same trade. Many complaints on this subject have reached the Government. A respectable naval force on the coast is the natural resort to security against further occurrences of this kind.⁸⁰

According to the president, a squadron would defend the honor of the American flag and protect U.S. citizens from British abuse.

Now that relations between the United States and Britain were settled and the threat of war had been alleviated, the American people began to lose interest in the subject of West African trade. The prospect of peace had temporarily halted the stream of merchantmen's complaints against the British navy, making it appear that there was no longer much need for a naval force. But paradoxically, if the United States did not send some force to West Africa the

largest ever and notes that the naval budget amounted to about 33% of the total federal spending for the year. Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 64-65. This apparent increase resulted largely from extras: monies leftover from the previous year and specific amounts granted to particular projects. In fact, the department had much the same resources to pay for salaries and supplies and other basic expenses as it had had the previous year.

⁷⁸ Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843*, chapter 9 passim.

⁷⁹ "Extract from the message of the President of the United States to the Senate, submitting to the consideration of that body the treaty concluded between the United States and Great Britain," 11 August 1842, H.R. 283, 762-763.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

old problems would inevitably resume. The president needed to convince Congress and the American people to support an Africa squadron in order to maintain good relations with Britain. And since that squadron would have apparently little to do after it stopped the British from harassing Americans, he needed to offer another justification for its expense.

Article eight threatened to renew the controversy over naval appropriations in Congress. Sen. Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri led a fierce attack against the treaty in both the Senate and the press, focusing his criticism on article eight, the *Creole*, and anything related to slavery. He disliked the squadron in particular and tried to kill that provision. But Benton could not overcome the influence of powerful southerners, including William C. Rives, who supported the treaty. When John C. Calhoun gave a speech announcing his support the debate was all but over. Southerners wanted peace more than anything else, and after four days of debate the Senate approved the treaty with the unexpected margin of thirty-nine to nine.⁸¹ But the fight over the Africa squadron was still not over; ratifying the treaty was only the first step. Upshur still needed congressional support to fund the squadron.

Western farmers and congressmen were not the Africa squadron's only opponents, anti-slavery activists were also skeptical of the proposed squadron. The Maine Antislavery Society had already criticized Upshur's original plan to enlarge the navy, calling it an unnecessary expense that promoted a dangerous tendency towards militarism and accusing the administration of trying to use naval expansion to protect slavery. Now the *Liberty Standard* questioned whether or not the treaty provisions for combating the slave trade would actually be carried out. The paper concluded that article nine demonstrated utter hypocrisy because the U.S. government obviously had no intention of combating slave markets in the United States.⁸² Article nine read:

The Parties to this Treaty agree that they will unite in all becoming representations and remonstrances, with any and all Powers within whose dominions such [slave] markets are allowed to exist; and that they will urge upon all such Powers the propriety and duty of closing such markets effectually at once and forever.⁸³

⁸¹ Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty : A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843*, 162-165. Jones suggests that Benton was trying to form a political alliance between the West and the South.

⁸² Schriver, 53; Willey, 185. *Liberty Standard*, 28 September 1842.

⁸³ Miller, ed., 363-370.

The *Standard* imagined a comic scenario, in which the United States would urge itself to close its slave markets. “The Secretary of State,” it suggested, “will ‘urge’ in the most forcible language that Mr. Webster take immediate measures for their suppression and John Tyler will lecture the President roundly because he is directly implicated in a system which sustains the ‘markets.’” The paper concluded that articles eight and nine, and the U.S. government’s policy on slavery, were ridiculous: “What folly, what glaring hypocrisy!” it exclaimed. The United States, the *Standard* pointed out, had no reasonable hope of appealing to Spain to close its slave markets. One word from the Americans and the Spanish would “turn round upon them and honestly and justly tell them to ‘pluck the more from their own eye’ before they attempt with unclean hands to take the ‘beam’ from theirs.” Maine anti-slavery men seriously doubted that the government had any intention of carrying out either treaty provision and consequently they did not support the Africa squadron.⁸⁴

The anti-slavery society’s criticism raised an important point. The primary purpose of articles eight and nine, as far as the United States was concerned, was obviously not to combat the slave trade. Rather, these two articles, like the treaty overall, were intended to improve relations with Britain and to resolve outstanding issues with that country. By agreeing to treaty language that characterized the squadron as a force to combat the slave trade, the United States placated Britain. But as the *Liberty Standard* understood, the treaty language obviously contradicted American policy and the United States did not sincerely intend to combat the trade, at least not by employing naval cruisers to capture slavers. Anti-slavery men resented the government’s misleading tactics and attacked the squadron as the most obvious manifestation of that disingenuous policy. And they did not have to wait long for evidence to confirm their suspicions. The first hints of how the Tyler administration would use the navy in West Africa were about to be revealed, as *Vandalia*, the first naval vessel dispatched to the African coast since Van Buren had left office, sailed across the Atlantic.

⁸⁴ *Liberty Standard*, 14 September 1842.

USS *Vandalia*

The United States had not had any naval presence off West Africa during the treaty negotiations or the debates in Congress. By the time the Senate finished debating and ratified the treaty, it had been more than a year since *Dolphin* and *Grampus* had left that coast and returned to the United States. Although Upshur had assigned *Vandalia* to take their place, she had yet to arrive in Africa. Liberians and Americans on the African coast missed the navy's presence. They worried about their safety and their future in Africa, about the implications of the *Mary Carver* attack, and about the British, who continued to threaten Liberia's colonial authority. When Josiah Oake, the new commander of the British navy's Sierra Leone station, arrived in Liberia in early July and began asking about the particulars of the Dring and Murray cases, Liberians grew even more anxious to see an American naval cruiser on their shores. American missionaries, merchants, and Liberian colonists desperately needed the U.S. navy to give them credibility and protection in West Africa.

Liberians continued to argue with the British navy over the jurisdiction of Bassa Cove. The British claimed that because they had been trading at that place for a long time, prior to any Liberian claim, they had the right to trade freely there without interference. Louis Sheridan, the colonial agent at Bassa Cove, aggressively denied this claim, suggesting that any British traders who may have established such claims were slave traders, and that respecting such claims directly contradicted the British navy's supposed purpose on that coast. "You will agree," Sheridan replied to Captain Oake, "that you do not mean exactly all you say; forasmuch as I presume the object of Captain Oake, of Her Britannic Majesty's navy, being placed on this station is to prevent that very kind of trading 'they have long been accustomed to' – and I do most sincerely wish him therein every possible degree of success."⁸⁵ But Oake was not satisfied with this answer and he demanded that the Liberians compensate Dring for interfering with his right to trade freely. Oake expected the Liberians to back down, but he did not understand their position. Governor Roberts refused Oake's demand for compensation,

⁸⁵ Josiah Oake to The Liberian Agent resident at Bassa Cove, 2 July 1842, H.R. 283, 123; Louis Sheridan to Josiah Oake, 4 July 1842, H.R. 283, 124-127.

making a fruitless attempt to explain the treaties that formed the basis of the colony's claim to jurisdiction over Bassa Cove. Surprised by the Liberians' stand, Oake forwarded the documents to his superior officer, Captain Foote.⁸⁶

Worried about this growing conflict with the British as well as their contentious relations with the neighboring African peoples, the Liberians watched the horizon impatiently for *Vandalia's* arrival. Roberts wrote:

We are anxiously expecting her, and shall most assuredly avail ourselves of all the advantages which the visit of this vessel may afford for concluding treaties and conventions with the native tribes. We are aware, sir, that we owe much to the gallant and generous conduct of the officers of the American navy.⁸⁷

The *Liberia Herald* echoed the governor's optimism, writing: "We trust this is the beginning of better days for us, and that our case will be a realization of the old adage that justice although slow is yet certain."⁸⁸ News of the ACS convention and anticipation of *Vandalia's* arrival gave Liberians cause to hope for a better future that included increased support from the United States and its navy. Roberts told the colonial legislature that Liberians "may hope and have great reason to expect, from recent movements in the United States, with regard to colonization that the day is not distant when the society will be able to meet every reasonable wish of the people."⁸⁹

Vandalia finally arrived on the African coast in early August, stopping first at Sierra Leone, where Ramsay learned of the attack on the *Mary Carver*. He quickly set sail for Monrovia, and although *Vandalia* only remained at the colony for a week and a half, the brief visit encouraged Roberts' hopes. He described the officers who frequently visited the shore as very kind and "well disposed towards the colony." And he optimistically reported that "Captain Ramsay seems to take a great interest in our prosperity, and offered to assist us in any way consistent with his orders."⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Josiah Oake to Joseph J. Roberts, 6, 9, 12 July 1842, Joseph J. Roberts to Josiah Oake, 7, 11, 12 July 1842, H.R. 283, 127-133.

⁸⁷ Joseph J. Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 11 August 1842, *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, November 1842, 364-366.

⁸⁸ *Liberia Herald*, 31 August 1842.

⁸⁹ Governor Roberts' Message to the Legislature of the Colony, 9 January 1843, H.R. 283, 151-159.

⁹⁰ Joseph J. Roberts to ACS, 31 August 1842, H.R. 283, 146-150.

Roberts took the opportunity of *Vandalia's* arrival to discuss colonial affairs with Ramsay, in particular the colony's relations with its neighbors and its need to secure the territory along the coast. Ramsay appeared to be very supportive and carelessly encouraged Roberts' hopes, promising to write to Secretary Upshur and recommend increased support for the colony. Roberts reported to the ACS that Ramsay "proposes to recommend that we be furnished with two or three small armed vessels, (to be equipped and sailed at the expense of the United States,) to protect our commerce, and to give a standing and importance that will enable us more effectually to extend the limits and influence of the colony, and to carry out the great object of the Colonization Society; to establish on the west coast of Africa a permanent government of colored people, to civilize and Christianize a heathen country."⁹¹ Ramsay talked a lot, but he actually did more to harm the colonies than to help them. Perhaps he had been referring to the proposed squadron when he mentioned two or three armed cruisers, but whatever he said, he left Roberts with a severely exaggerated idea of what help the U.S. navy might be willing to offer Liberia in the foreseeable future.

Ramsay had an opportunity to provide some meaningful assistance to the colony by helping Roberts to purchase land at Cape Mount, but he failed to follow through. Roberts worried that the British might try to make a claim to that territory and he wanted to purchase it for the colony before Britain had the chance. He knew that by arriving in an American man-of-war he could impress the locals and increase his chances of making a successful purchase. But despite promising to help, Ramsay was anxious to sail for Little Berriby to deal with the *Mary Carver* case, and he was not willing to spare the time for a voyage to Cape Mount.⁹²

After leaving Monrovia, *Vandalia* sailed to Cape Palmas. Oddly, she was not flying her colors when she anchored at the cape in early September. Ramsay was unwell and did not go ashore. Instead, he invited Governor Russwurm and the missionaries to visit him on board ship. Ramsay explained to Russwurm, "I have not hoisted my colors for the reason that I have some intention to go to Baraby, and do not therefore wish it to be known that I am on this coast."

⁹¹ Ibid. Among other things, Ramsay suggested that the United States should make a commercial treaty with the colony.

⁹² Joseph J. Roberts to ACS, 31 August 1842, H.R. 283, 146-150.

Before he raised the flag, Ramsay wanted Russwurm's assurance that the people of Cape Palmas would not spread the alarm to the people of Little Berriby. It was a rather naive strategy considering that the entire countryside had been expecting *Vandalia* for weeks and signal fires had been lit all along the coast to convey the news of her arrival.⁹³

Russwurm was pleased that Ramsay wanted to discuss the Little Berriby business and offered his advice. But after listening politely, Ramsay surprised the governor, announcing bluntly that his plans were fixed. Russwurm disagreed with Ramsay's plan, but kept his feelings to himself.⁹⁴ When the American brig *Atalanta* arrived at the cape on September 5th, Ramsay arranged a scheme with her captain to surprise and punish the people of Little Berriby. *Atalanta* sailed to Little Berriby with an officer and six marines disguised as ordinary sailors. They planned to use the pretense of trade to lure some of the suspects on board and take them prisoner. The plot was very similar to the one that Cracow had reportedly used to trap the *Mary Carver*.⁹⁵

Meanwhile, Ramsay attempted to settle a dispute between the missionaries and Grebo at the cape. The missionaries had been waiting for *Vandalia*'s arrival since July when the local Grebo had robbed the stores at Fair Hope, carrying off \$350 worth of cloth, brass, and copper.⁹⁶ Instead of reporting the theft to the colonial authorities, the missionaries waited for *Vandalia* to arrive and appealed to Ramsay for redress. Ramsay obliged them and assigned Lieut. John L. Ring to resolve the issue. On September 8th, Lieutenant Ring went ashore and proceeded directly to Fair Hope, snubbing Russwurm and the colony. He summoned Dr. Savage, Rev. Launcelot Minor, and King Freeman to a meeting at the mission house.⁹⁷ The proceedings were anything but fair. Russwurm reported that "in the palaver, Lieut. Ring would not allow King Freeman to speak a word, but told him that his people had robbed Mr. Griswold,

⁹³ William Ramsay to John B. Russwurm, 2 September 1842, MSCSP, Letterbooks 1838-1843.

⁹⁴ John B. Russwurm to James Hall, 26 September 1842, MSCSP, Letterbooks 1838-1843.

⁹⁵ Kelly: 144-147.

⁹⁶ Ibid.: 143-144, 149; Martin, 146.

⁹⁷ Minor made periodic visits to Fair Hope while building his mission at Taboo and was in Cape Palmas at the time of *Vandalia*'s arrival.

and he must therefore make them pay him 2 bullocks for a skeleton which was stolen, and sell rice enough to repay the property minus.”⁹⁸ Freeman had no choice but to agree.

Ramsay had little direct interest in the robbery case; he was preoccupied with his illness and the *Mary Carver* business. It had already been several days since the *Atalanta* had left and Ramsay was anxious to sail for Little Berriby to meet her, so on the morning of September 11th *Vandalia* abruptly left the cape.⁹⁹ That night, *Vandalia* sailed within a couple of miles of what Ramsay thought might be Little Berriby, but he had engaged an incompetent guide and could not be sure. Lost, he sailed to nearby Grand Berriby in search of *Atalanta*. The *Vandalia* spent “a week of trial and vexation” sailing the coast looking for Little Berriby and *Atalanta* in heavy seas. Finally, low on firewood, Ramsay decided to return to Cape Palmas, hoping to find *Atalanta* there waiting for him.¹⁰⁰

When *Vandalia* returned to Cape Palmas on September 19th, Ramsay explained his difficulties to Russwurm. He hoped to hear some news of *Atalanta* and asked the governor to please send him some firewood. Russwurm was still upset about Ramsay’s interference in the mission robbery case and did not reply. A day passed and Ramsay was still waiting for Russwurm to send him some firewood. There was still no news of *Atalanta* and Ramsay was worried. He had decided to resume the search but *Vandalia* needed firewood first. Frustrated, Ramsay wrote to Russwurm again demanding the wood immediately. Russwurm curtly replied that the colonial cutter was presently engaged and that he would have to wait. Russwurm was in no mood to go out of his way to help Ramsay after the way he had been treated.¹⁰¹

After a little while, Ramsay gave up on his plans to punish Little Berriby. The missionaries continued to complain to him about the Grebo and so with little else to occupy him, he sent Ring ashore to hold a second palaver. *Vandalia*’s physician, Dr. Green, accompanied Ring and on his way to the meeting Green stopped to chat with Russwurm. When Russwurm asked what right the officers had to meddle in this palaver, the doctor replied that

⁹⁸ John B. Russwurm to James Hall, 26 September 1842, MSCSP, Letterbooks 1838-1843.

⁹⁹ Unsigned note written on behalf of William Ramsay to John B. Russwurm, 10 September 1842, MSCSP, Letterbooks 1838-1843.

¹⁰⁰ William Ramsay to John B. Russwurm, 19 September 1842, MSCSP, Letterbooks 1838-1843.

¹⁰¹ William Ramsay to John B. Russwurm, 19, 20 September 1842, John B. Russwurm to William Ramsay, 24, 26 September 1842, MSCSP, Letterbooks 1838-1843.

Griswold was an American citizen and that they were bound to protect citizens and their property. Russwurm then asked if the navy always pursued this course in cases where local governments were weak, such as in South America, and Green said yes.¹⁰² The colonists' plans to draw strength and prestige from the navy's presence seemed to collapse with the doctor's frank admission.

At the palaver, Ring reprimanded Freeman for failing to pay the assessed penalty and threatened to burn the Grebo town. Upset, Freeman walked out. That evening, *Vandalia* took two Grebo men employed on board hostage. Russwurm grew increasingly angry. The missionaries were a disruptive influence that undermined his authority and threatened to provoke a war. Upset by the usurpation of his authority, he sent Ramsay copies of the colony's constitution and laws. He tried to make the point that the colony had a system of laws in effect and that the navy should respect those laws.¹⁰³ But when Russwurm tried to argue his case, Ramsay simply replied that Mr. Griswold was an American citizen, and that he was bound to protect citizens and their property.¹⁰⁴ Ramsay's interference exacerbated tensions between the missionaries, colonists, and Grebo at the cape, and was likely to leave everyone more vulnerable. The Grebo started carrying large knives and cutlasses and made a show of cleaning their guns. Many people stayed indoors, fearing that violence was imminent. Nearly everyone blamed the Protestant missionaries for these troubles. As Father Kelly noted, the colonists were saying that "Muskets are too light for such gentlemen – they seem to prefer the cannon." Colonists firmly believed that the missionaries hated "the colored man and show it more here than in America."¹⁰⁵

When Ring next came on shore, Russwurm noted that his men carried cutlasses and muskets hidden under a tarpaulin. Realizing that the situation had escalated, Ring decided to compromise and agreed to accept a payment that was equivalent to what Freeman had

¹⁰² John B. Russwurm to James Hall, 26 September 1842, MSCSP, Letterbooks 1838-1843.

¹⁰³ John B. Russwurm to William Ramsay, 24 September 1842, MSCSP, Letterbooks 1838-1843.

¹⁰⁴ John B. Russwurm to William Ramsay, 26 September 1842, John B. Russwurm to James Hall, 26 September 1842, MSCSP, Letterbooks 1838-1843.

¹⁰⁵ Kelly: 149-150.

originally offered.¹⁰⁶ *Vandalia* held Freeman's brother hostage on board as security for the payment. It seemed as though violence had been avoided but Russwurm was not satisfied. He complained that "the *Vandalia*'s attempt is a miserable failure." He accused Ramsay of meddling in colonial affairs in order to save face after his failure to chastise the people of Little Berriby, and claimed that Dr. Green had confessed that the officers had felt obligated to make an example of Freeman in order "to prevent the natives from laughing at them."¹⁰⁷ Although violence had been avoided, Ramsay's interference had further damaged relations between the three factions at the cape.¹⁰⁸

Vandalia left Cape Palmas and sailed for the United States on the 14th of October. After only two months on the coast, Ramsay had done nothing to help the colonies, aid American commerce, improve relations with the British, or combat the slave trade. Instead, his lack of action only frustrated and disappointed American traders and colonists, and damaged the U.S. navy's reputation on the coast. Despite all of this, colonists and Americans in West Africa still hoped that the United States would station a squadron in West Africa and they continued to press Americans back home to send them more naval support.

Conclusion

Relations between the United States and Britain had been tenuous at the beginning of 1842, but by the autumn the two governments had concluded a treaty designed to resolve a number of outstanding disputes, reduce tensions, prevent future conflict, and generally improve their relations. Articles eight and nine of that treaty were designed to address specific problems off the coast of West Africa. The British wanted American cooperation with their effort to suppress the slave trade, and the Americans wanted to protect their rights on the open seas and their interests on the African coast from further abuse by the British.

The Senate ratified the Webster-Ashburton treaty, but Americans and their representatives in Congress remained skeptical of the treaty's provision for an Africa squadron.

¹⁰⁶ John B. Russwurm to James Hall, 26 September 1842, MSCSP, Letterbooks 1838-1843.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Campbell, 139; Hall, *On Afric's Shore : A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834-1857*, 215-218; Martin, 146-150.

This provision renewed the debate over U.S. policy and the proper scope, scale, and use of the navy during peacetime. Opponents questioned the need for an Africa squadron, the expense, and the general principle of naval expansion. And the treaty itself had the paradoxical effect of appearing to reduce the British threat to American interests, and therefore lessening the supposed need for a squadron to protect those interests.

Anti-slavery activists disagreed with the basic policy of supporting colonies and legitimate trade as a means of combating the slave trade, and they objected to the disingenuous language in the treaty. They observed that the treaty contradicted prevailing American beliefs and policy regarding the slave trade and surmised that an Africa squadron would have little to do with directly suppressing the slave trade. Therefore, anti-slavery activists strongly objected to the formation of an Africa squadron until U.S. policies on cooperating with the British, the right of search, and slavery in general were changed to give it a real chance of suppressing the slave trade.

Many more Americans objected to the squadron because they held conservative views about government and believed in a minimalist peacetime navy. Since the treaty had improved relations with Britain, there no longer seemed to be a pressing need to protect American rights in West Africa, and Upshur had yet to convince most Americans that the value of American commerce in the region merited protection. Instead, most Americans continued to focus narrowly on their own direct interests and preferred that the government spend the peoples' money on internal improvements. As a result, even though the treaty obligated the United States to maintain a small Africa squadron, the creation of that squadron remained in doubt.

In the weeks following the ratification of the treaty, Secretary Upshur and President Tyler worked to convince Congress and the American people to support the new Africa squadron, and more importantly, to adequately fund it. But their justifications for that squadron were unconvincing and ineffective. Fortunately for Upshur, reports of the attack on the *Mary Carver*, including Minor's provocative letter, were about to reach the United States. Minor and the other informants had already transformed Eben Farwell from a scoundrel into a symbol for American rights, honor, and free trade. When he received the news, Upshur

immediately saw an opportunity to use the *Mary Carver* story to turn the tide of public and congressional opinion in favor of the Africa squadron. And with the help of these reports, the ACS, and the precedents set by President Jackson, he set out to take full advantage of that opportunity.

CHAPTER 7

THE MARY CARVER AFFAIR

The first news of the attack on the *Mary Carver* reached the United States in August of 1842, just days after the Senate ratified the Webster-Ashburton treaty. The reports and letters about the *Mary Carver* that trickled in sparked a flurry of newspaper articles across the country. While ostensibly unrelated, the coincidence of the treaty and the *Mary Carver* news created a convenient opportunity for the Tyler administration to promote the Africa squadron. The administration, the ACS, and other Americans with interests in West Africa used the *Mary Carver* story to their advantage by shaping it into a new justification for the Africa squadron.

Secretary Upshur and President Tyler used the *Mary Carver* attack to argue for the Africa squadron. The administration took the story, and following Minor's suggestions, remade its justification for the squadron. Instead of focusing on the threat that Britain posed to American interests in West Africa, a threat they still believed to be paramount, Tyler and Upshur focused on the threat of savage Africans, exemplified by the *Mary Carver*'s attackers. They also began placing a greater emphasis on the importance of American commerce in West Africa. Americans, as Minor pointed out, had supported naval missions to such places as Quallah Battoo to defend American honor and to win retribution for piratical attacks against Americans. Tyler and Upshur strategically portrayed the *Mary Carver* as an example of a pattern of similar piratical attacks against Americans in West Africa. With help from merchants, missionaries, and colonizationists, they worked to persuade Americans and their representatives in Congress to support a squadron on these grounds.

When the twenty-seventh Congress met for its third session in December of 1842, it returned to the question of naval appropriations for the second time in less than a year. Congressmen had Upshur and Tyler's annual messages to consult; both of which employed this new justification for the Africa squadron, emphasizing the threat that Africans posed to

American interests. This new justification helped to increase public support for the squadron, forcing Congress to reluctantly authorize a small appropriation for it. For Upshur, the appropriation was only a partial victory; Congress had dedicated funds for an Africa squadron, but it had also reduced the overall appropriation for the navy.

This chapter describes the flow of information about the *Mary Carver* attack from Africa back to the United States and argues that Upshur, Tyler, and other interested Americans used the attack to create a new justification for the Africa squadron by depicting Africans as savages and pirates. The first section describes the first news reports to reach the United States and pays special attention to the reaction to those reports in Eben Farwell's home state of Maine; it shows that Farwell's hometown newspapers reported the news of his death in exactly the same manner as other papers across the country. The second section describes a coincidental revival of colonization activity in Maine at the same time news of the *Mary Carver* attack reached the state. It looks at how the local press handled these two related subjects and examines the role that the colonization movement played in the *Mary Carver* affair and the campaign for the Africa squadron. The third section of this chapter looks at the Tyler administration's response to the *Mary Carver* news, its revised strategy for promoting the Africa squadron, and the subsequent debate in Congress over naval appropriations.

Finally, this chapter concludes with a description of the squadron that Upshur ultimately formed in the spring of 1843, and the plans that he made for that squadron. It pays particular attention to the orders that Upshur issued to the new squadron and argues these orders were consistent with the public statements that he had been making about the squadron since first proposing it in 1841. In effect, as this chapter argues, these orders and the administration's various statements about the squadron during the previous eighteen months present a much clearer and more detailed description of the U.S. Africa squadron's purpose than the few brief lines in the Webster-Ashburton treaty that historians have previously relied upon. And the reactions in Congress and in the press to news of the *Mary Carver* attack, and to the government's actions, further demonstrate that the American people clearly intended their new squadron to fulfill the mission that Upshur described in these orders, not to simply

suppress the slave trade by capturing slavers as historians have suggested. The orders that Upshur issued spelled out the squadron's purpose and priorities in detail; he made it clear that the squadron's purpose was to protect American commerce first, and to enforce laws against the slave trade second.

The press followed the government's decisions about the Africa squadron closely. As Upshur and the squadron commander, Matthew Perry, prepared the new squadron for its mission, interested Americans took every opportunity to make their views heard. They wrote to and visited with Upshur, Perry, and other government officials, asking that the squadron be used to aid American commerce, colonies, and missions in West Africa. Upshur and Perry made no secret about the squadron or its mission to protect American commerce, and the latest news from West Africa seemed to confirm the need for such a mission. This chapter argues that the Tyler administration used the *Mary Carver* story to justify the need for an Africa squadron. By demonizing Africans as savages and pirates, Upshur and others convinced Americans to support sending a squadron to avenge the *Mary Carver*. Upshur never made any secret about his plans for the squadron, he had wanted to use it to protect and expand American commerce in West Africa and that is what it would do. Only now, the squadron would have to be concerned about protecting Americans from Africans as well as Europeans.

News of the *Mary Carver* Reaches the United States

The news of attack against the *Mary Carver* first reached the United States in August of 1842, when two different American merchantmen returned from West Africa. Captain Lawlin of the brig *Grecian* gave the first report when he arrived at Philadelphia on August 16th, and Captain Champion of the schooner *Harriet* did the same when he arrived at Baltimore at about the same time. Hearing rumors, newspapers in port cities along the eastern seaboard hurried to insert brief notices of the attack in their Saturday editions. Confused about the details, these newspapers merely reported that the *Mary Carver* had been captured by natives and: "the captain and crew murdered in the most cruel manner, on account of some dispute

between the captain and natives.”¹ The *Liberator* printed a few lines but gave no details.² The *Daily National Intelligencer* simply copied the brief account.³ Religious papers, still unaware of Minor’s letter, made no connection between the attack and the vulnerability of the Africa missions.⁴ The *Catholic Telegraph* printed just two perfunctory lines: “the schooner Mary Carver, from Boston, was captured, and the crew murdered, by the natives of Beribba, Africa. Plunder was the object.”⁵

These cryptic notices aroused readers’ curiosity and papers continued to print articles as new information came to light. The reports and letters from Africa that *Grecian* and *Harriet* delivered added many details, although not all true, to the story, and sparked a flurry of articles that spread across the country as newspapers copied freely from one another. As new informants and letters arrived, new details appeared in print, keeping the story alive in the press for months. The *Baltimore Sun* was the first paper to print a detailed account of the *Mary Carver* attack, based on an interview with *Harriet*’s mate John Watson. According to Watson, who had evidently learned the story from second or third-hand sources on the African coast, the *Mary Carver* had been at the village of Little Berriby, which was “inhabited by natives of a very savage character,” on April 20th. Watson denied that there had been any dispute between Farwell and the natives, and instead told a story of treacherous savages. Watson’s account lacked the detail of Minor’s letter, but it was just as dramatic. He told how Farwell had been “induced to come ashore to see some camwood, which they proposed to sell him.” And that: “On reaching the shore he was treacherously seized and delivered over to the tender mercies of the women and children.” In Watson’s version, the people of Little Berriby stripped Eben Farwell, tied him to a tree, and pelted him with stones.⁶

In Watson’s story Farwell begged to live, not to pray as Minor had described. The *Sun* reported that Farwell had “begged his life at their hands on account of his absent wife and child, but the ruthless savages had no ears for his entreaties.” Farwell was not nearly as heroic

¹ “Atrocious Murder,” *Boston Daily Atlas*, 20 August 1842; *New York Spectator*, 20 August 1842.

² *Liberator*, 26 August 1842.

³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, 24 August 1842.

⁴ *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, 27 August 1842.

⁵ *Catholic Telegraph*, 22 October 1842.

⁶ *Baltimore Sun* article as reprinted in: “Schooner Mary Carver,” *New York Spectator*, 24 August 1842. For a copy of Minor’s letter see: Hening, 182-186.

in Watson's account as in Minor's. Like Minor, Watson told how the captain had been taken out in a canoe and thrown overboard into the Atlantic. But Minor had written that Farwell had struggled for his life, successfully gnawing through the ropes that bound him, and then seizing a canoe paddle to fight off his attackers. Only when his assailants struck him over the head, according to Minor, did Farwell sink below the surface. Watson mentioned none of this. Instead, he described how the attackers had tied a stone around Eben's neck, took him out in the canoe, "and deliberately flung him overboard, when he sank to rise no more." Watson was not a lone white man living near the scene of the crime hoping for government support. Indeed, whereas Minor emphasized Farwell's heroics, the *Sun* reminded readers that "a more extensive tragedy" was taking place on board the schooner.⁷

Newspapers across the country reprinted the *Sun's* report. The *Boston Daily Atlas* called the attack a massacre. The *New York Herald* likened the incident to past attacks on American merchantmen, commenting that "our government sent a man-of-war half round the world to chastise some savages, who had attacked American vessels and destroyed their crews," and asked, "what will be done in this case?" Like Minor, the *Herald* pointed to the similarities between this attack and past incidents. By asking what would be done, but not offering an answer, the paper implied that Americans should expect a naval response similar to recent actions in Quallah Battoo and other places around the world. Newspapers from one town to the next copied the *Sun's* article and within a few weeks Watson's account spread to such far off papers as the *Wisconsin Whig* and the *Southport, Wisconsin Telegraph*, none of which called for restraint or forgiveness.⁸

News of the *Mary Carver* Reaches Maine

News of the attack on the *Mary Carver* spread to Maine in much the same way that it spread across the rest of the country. The *Bangor Daily Whig* published one of the first reports

⁷ "Schooner Mary Carver," *New York Spectator*, 24 August 1842.

⁸ "Massacre of the Crew of the Schooner Mary Carver," *Boston Daily Atlas*, 25 August 1842; "More of the African Murders," *New York Herald*, 25 August 1842; *Boston Courier* added no editorial, but it did accurately identify the two officers, Farwell and sailing master Robert McFarland, as residents of Maine. *Boston Courier*, 25, 29 August 1842; "Captain and Crew Murdered," *Platteville Wisconsin Whig*, 11 September 1842; "Murder in Africa," *Southport Wisconsin Telegraph*, 14 September 1842.

of the attack in the state. The brief notice read: "Letters received from Africa say the New York papers, state that Capt. Farwell and crew of the schooner Mary Carver of Boston have been murdered by the Cannibals of Beribee near Cape Palmers."⁹ The New York papers that the Bangor press took its information from were based on the account that Captain Lawlin had given in Philadelphia. In a second article entitled "Massacre of the crew of the Mary Carver!" the *Bangor Daily Whig* printed a more complete account of Lawlin's story:

Schooner Mary Carver, of Plymouth, from Boston, was taken by the natives at Little Beriba, Africa, and all hands most inhumanely murdered. It has been surmised that some provocation led to it, but after strict inquiry I found there was none given; and they did it, they say, for plunder. This can be depended upon, as I have had it from persons who were eye witnesses to it. They are a bad race, and deserve to be severely chastised. – Two years ago, while in command of the Atlanta, they arrested my men, and were I not well known as an old trader, they would probably have captured my vessel. They can be easily castigated; the landing is fair, having landed there often while trading with them a few years back.¹⁰

This version, while leaving out the bloody details, closely matched Minor's letter. Like Minor, Lawlin described a pattern in which Africans preyed upon American merchant vessels, and he too advocated that the United States severely punish the perpetrators of this attack.

Other Maine newspapers copied the gruesome details from the *Sun's* article. The *Maine Farmer and Mechanic's Advocate* of Waterville, just north of Vassalboro, reprinted Watson's account with an addendum that read:

Capt. Farwell's residence is in Vassalborough, in this county, where his afflicted father resides. His wife is the daughter of Joseph R. Abbot, Esq. of this town. His connections are highly respectable, and the shocking catastrophe has carried deep affliction to an extensive circle of relations & friends.¹¹

Although the paper acknowledged the local connection, it did not take any special interest in the story because of it.

Newspapers in Maine did not take any interest in the *Mary Carver* as a local story. Luther Severance, owner and editor of the *Kennebec Journal*, the Whig newspaper in Augusta, knew the Farwell family. He had even testified as a character witness for Eben Farwell at his

⁹ *Bangor Daily Whig*, 23 August 1842.

¹⁰ *Bangor Daily Whig*, 13 October 1842.

¹¹ *The Maine Farmer and Mechanic's Advocate*, 27 August, 3 September 1842.

trial for murdering John Brown.¹² But the pages of Severance's newspaper did not reflect his familiarity with the Farwell family. Nor did the paper do anything to portray the *Mary Carver* or its connection to the Africa squadron as a local issue. The *Kennebec Journal* first reported news of the attack on August 26th, printing a notice that "letters had been received in this town, we understand, giving information that Capt. Farwell, of the schr. Mary Carver, and all his crew, have been murdered by the natives on the west coast of Africa." But the paper did not have the particulars of those letters and instead only copied the *Baltimore Sun* article. The only information or comment that the *Journal* offered was the correction that Farwell came from Vassalboro and a few details about the identity of his personal connections. The article ran on page three. Two weeks later, when the *Journal* reprinted Watson's detailed testimony, its editor did not even bother to correct the original's erroneous personal details and actually printed that Farwell came from Massachusetts.¹³

Details about the *Mary Carver* attack continued to trickle back to the United States during the autumn of 1842. Coincidentally, colonization promoters arrived in Maine at about the same time, sparking new interest in Liberia. From October through the end of the year, Maine papers printed reports of the *Mary Carver* alongside articles on colonization and naval affairs. On October 14, 1842, the *Kennebec Journal* published an optimistic report from the colonies, describing how "political differences had subsided, peace prevailed, and the colony was in prosperous condition." According to the article, the spirit of agriculture was growing amongst colonists and the missions were flourishing.¹⁴ In the same issue, the *Journal* reported Captain Lawlin's story of how he had narrowly escaped a fate similar to that of the *Mary Carver* just two years earlier.¹⁵ And yet a third article in that same issue of the *Journal* discussed the proposed Africa squadron outlined in the new Webster-Ashburton treaty. That one issue of the *Kennebec Journal* included separate articles on colonization, the *Mary Carver*, and the Africa squadron but the paper drew no connections between any of these three closely related subjects. And even when Laura Farwell published the probate notice of her husband's

¹² Blaine; "Important Trial."

¹³ *Kennebec Journal*, 26 August, 9 September 1842.

¹⁴ *Kennebec Journal*, 30 September, 14 October 1842.

¹⁵ *Kennebec Journal*, 14 October 1842.

death in the *Journal*, Luther Severance, editor, colonization supporter, Whig, and family friend, continued to ignore the opportunity to connect local interests to the national issues that filled the pages of his newspaper.¹⁶

With colonization making a surge in Maine, a shrewd political strategist might have seen an opportunity to use the story of the *Mary Carver* as propaganda to further a national cause, just as Webster had done to facilitate the boundary settlement, but no such person came forward. Instead, Maine politicians focused on national party politics and issues. As Maine politicians advanced within the ranks of political parties and the federal government, they used their power to secure additional party and government jobs for their fellow Mainers, not to advocate political positions or raise particular issues.¹⁷ Mainers never saw the *Mary Carver* affair as a matter of local concern or as an issue of any particular interest to them, and neither the press nor the politicians in Maine paid much attention to it.

Meanwhile, the Farwell family went about grieving for their loss and adjusting to their new circumstances. Eben Farwell's widow Laura was appointed administratrix of his estate. She collected a \$6,000 insurance settlement from the Boston Insurance Company for the loss of the *Mary Carver*'s cargo. She settled accounts with her brother-in-law James Dumeresq Farwell, an investor in the voyage, she paid off outstanding bills from C. J. Webber for construction of the house, and she settled affairs with her husband's former business partner Johnson Williams. Then, she turned her attention to her family, and focused on raising her two young sons and helping her two ageing fathers, William Farwell and Joseph Abbott.¹⁸ Whatever her feelings about the loss of her husband, Laura Farwell had plenty of responsibilities to keep her occupied, she looked forward, not back.

Colonization in Maine

Colonization had been a relatively popular idea in Kennebec County some years earlier. The ACS had collected donations from prominent residents as early as 1825. Early contributors

¹⁶ *Kennebec Journal*, 28 October 1842; Probate file of Eben Farwell and children, Kennebec County Probate Court, Augusta, Maine.

¹⁷ Ring.

¹⁸ Probate file of Eben Farwell and children, Kennebec County Probate Court, Augusta, Maine.

had included Nathaniel Gilman, one of Farwell's early business partners; and Judge James Bridge, Sen. Reuel Williams' mentor. Two other notable supporters had been the Reverend David Thurston of Winthrop, and the Reverend Thomas Adams of the Vassalboro Congregational Church. Adams worried about the spread of Islam in Africa and he warned Kennebec County congregants of the threat of the "Mahometan delusion."¹⁹ He was drawn to colonization, believing that Christian colonies would help to combat the threat of Islam in Africa, and had collected contributions from his Vassalboro congregation to support the cause.²⁰

Beginning in 1833, colonization began to loose support in the Kennebec region; notably, Thurston and Adams both switched their support to the anti-slavery cause. Another indication that locals' support for colonization was waning could be seen in the declining value of contributions to the ACS that Capt. Samuel Reddington collected from his Vassalboro neighbors, donations dropped from \$14 in 1835 to only \$1.50 in 1841.²¹ As the ACS established and developed its colony in Africa, Mainers grew to distrust the society as a slaveholders' scheme designed to reinforce slavery by removing free blacks from the United States and consequently they turned away from it.

Then suddenly, in 1842 the forgotten colonization movement experienced a revival in Maine, sparked by the appointment of the Reverend Frederick Freeman as rector at St. Mark's Church in Augusta. Famous for his book *Yaradee*, a colonizationist tome already in its third edition, Freeman reintroduced Mainers to colonization and organized the Union Colonization Society of Augusta, Hallowell, and Gardiner.²² *Kennebec Journal* editor Luther Severance helped promote interest in the cause by encouraging people to read Freeman's book and consider the colonization scheme.²³

¹⁹ Thomas Adams, *Sermon Delivered in Augusta September 11, 1828 : At the Annual Meeting of the Kennebec Conference of Churches*(Augusta, Me.: Printed by Eaton & Severance, 1828).

²⁰ *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, January 1826, 349; August 1829, 188; October 1830, 251; January 1832, 348; September 1832, 224.

²¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, December 1835, 374; March 1840, 80; August 1841, 237; September 1841, 272.

²² Frederick Freeman, *Yaradee : A Plea for Africa, in Familiar Conversations on the Subject of Slavery and Colonization*(Philadelphia: J. Whetham, 1836).

²³ *Kennebec Journal*, 7 October 1842.

The ACS took notice of this renewed interest and sent Rev. Ralph Gurley north on a speaking tour of New England.²⁴ In Maine, Gurley visited Augusta, Hallowell, Bath, and Brunswick.²⁵ In October, he addressed a full house at the Unitarian meeting house in Augusta. The *Kennebec Journal* applauded his performance, concluding that:

The plan of extending colonies along the west coast of Africa is certainly a magnificent one, and will be productive of vast results, if it can be carried fully into effect. It is only by colonizing and by commerce that civilization and the christian religion have ever made much progress.²⁶

The *Journal* argued that a chain of colonies would promote legitimate commerce and spread civilization as a positive force to counter the slave trade and African barbarism. It portrayed colonization as the only effective way to combat the slave trade, arguing that “we do not believe the [slave] trade can be stopped (even if the Government of the United States does its duty, which, by the way, it has never yet done) in any other way than by colonizing the African coast.”²⁷ As the *Journal* pointed out, the United States had demonstrated no interest in actively suppressing the slave trade, and although the Senate had ratified the Webster-Ashburton treaty with the squadron provision, the paper did not expect the government to change its policy towards the slave trade. But that did not really matter because, as the *Journal* argued, the only truly effective way to combat the slave trade was by establishing colonies and fostering civilization and legitimate trade in West Africa.

Following Gurley’s appearance in Augusta, the *Journal* began to actively encourage its readers to support the Liberian project, promising that the colonies would soon be able to develop the African trade into a highly profitable business for both Americans and colonists. For example, in one article Severance argued:

If these African colonies however, continue to thrive a while longer, and the trade of the vast interior to come down to the coasts and pass through the hands of the colonists, the chances of profitable trade will be so inviting that enterprising colored men in all parts of the world will be attracted there. Let a few make their fortunes, and others will eagerly follow, for the same motives of ambition and avarice which govern white men are readily infused into the

²⁴ American Colonization Society, *The 26th Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*, 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

²⁶ “Colonization in Africa,” *Kennebec Journal*, 7 October 1842.

²⁷ *Maine Farmer*, 25 September 1838.

sable race; and when an active commerce begins to diffuse its benefits, thousands will pass both ways every year on business.²⁸

During the autumn of 1842, Severance and the *Journal* actively supported Liberia and the development of American trade in West Africa, but he did so without making any use of the *Mary Carver*.

Gurley, on the other hand, took full advantage of the *Mary Carver* story to promote the ACS cause. During his visit to Augusta, Gurley called on Senator Williams, taking the opportunity to appeal for naval support for Liberia. With the upcoming congressional session expected to debate appropriations for the new Africa squadron this was an ideal opportunity for Gurley to continue the ACS campaign for increased government support. As the editor of the ACS journal, *African Repository*, Gurley had just published a dramatic article about the *Mary Carver*, tying it to the need for naval protection. He wrote, "this shocking occurrence shows in a strong light the necessity of some protection for American commerce on the coast of Africa"²⁹ Unfortunately for the ACS, although Williams was a member of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee and an acquaintance of the Farwell family, he remained preoccupied with the boundary dispute and did not take an interest in the *Mary Carver* affair or the Africa squadron.³⁰

The resurgence of colonization activity in Maine infuriated the local anti-slavery society. The warm reception that Mainers gave Gurley particularly annoyed them considering that anti-slavery speakers often suffered hostile treatment in the state.³¹ As agent for the Maine Liberty Party, the political wing of the Maine anti-slavery movement, Austin Willey met increasing resistance and even violence when he traveled around the state. Some towns even denied him a bed to sleep in. By the summer of 1842, animosity towards the anti-slavery cause had reached the point where Willey's opponents were using threats and violence to prevent him from speaking at all.³²

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, October 1842, 327.

³⁰ Gurley signed Williams's guest book on 7 October 1842. Guest book, Reuel Williams Collection, University of Maine-Orono.

³¹ Willey, 205. *Liberty Standard*, 26 October 1842.

³² Schriver, 50-51.

The *Liberty Standard*, the Maine Antislavery Society newspaper, was a persistent and vociferous critic of colonization. In contrast to the *Kennebec Journal*, the *Liberty Standard* described the Liberian colonies as “three or four little, pestilential, starving settlements of American negroes scattered along the Grain Coast, that have been kept in a kind of prolonged death-agony, for ten or twenty years, by the misplaced charities of a deluded American public.” It criticized the naval appropriation for removing recaptured Africans from the United States as an effort “to help the scheme of the slaveholders,” reasoning that any support given to Liberia was a waste and even a crime because it only prolonged the doomed colonists’ suffering. These anti-slavery men also rejected the claim that the colonies helped to develop commerce along the coast. Colonists were consumers, not producers, the *Liberty Standard* argued, who had “nearly eaten up the trade” in palm oil wherever they had settled. “Lazy, shiftless, improvident, profligate colonists,” the paper printed, had not brought civilization to West Africa, but they had corrupted Africans and “caused them to retrograde in industry and enterprise.”³³

Although the *Liberty Standard* critically examined the Webster-Ashburton treaty, Liberian colonization, West African missions, and the Africa squadron, it never mentioned the *Mary Carver*. The Maine Antislavery Society could not find a way to turn the *Mary Carver*’s story to its advantage. The only option would have been to defend the accused Africans and to attack the *Mary Carver*’s captain. Some of the society’s members, in particular Rev. Thomas Adams, must have known Eben Farwell and his connections. They would have known about the charges against him for cruelty, murder, and slave trading, but in the small world of Kennebec County it would have been a difficult decision to turn a political argument into a personal attack on one’s neighbor. And it would have been politically disastrous to attack the character of a man murdered in such a horrible manner, regardless of the truth. The *Liberty Standard* had little choice but to ignore the *Mary Carver* story when it condemned colonization and criticized the new Africa squadron.

³³ “Colonization,” *Liberty Standard*, 25 May 1842.

The ACS, on the other hand, seized upon the *Mary Carver* story and used the attack to its advantage. Colonizationists expected the United States to avenge the *Mary Carver*, and took the opportunity to tie Americans' national interests to Liberians' colonial interests. The *African Repository* suggested that the proposed Africa squadron avenge Captain Farwell's murder in the name of protecting American commerce:

Our letters confirm the account of the capture of the American schooner *Mary Carver* of Boston, by the natives of Beraby, and the murder of the entire crew. This shocking occurrence shows in a strong light the necessity of some protection for American commerce on the coast of Africa, increasing as that commerce is, in extent and value everyday; and such protection we are happy to perceive by the stipulations of the late treaty with England, will be probably afforded by our government.³⁴

In addition to editorials published in prominent colonization journals, colonizationists also used their political contacts to advocate for naval action. In August, MSCS director Dr. James Hall asked Francis Scott Key to discuss the matter with Secretary of the Navy Abel Upshur. Key obliged and reported back to Hall that Upshur "takes the matter up very earnestly, & is now preparing orders on the subject for immediate execution."³⁵ Upshur's positive response convinced colonizationists the navy would handle the problem.

Indeed, the Tyler administration had continued the practice of using the navy to avenge and punish attacks that so-called uncivilized people carried out against Americans around the globe. In 1841, the navy had avenged the murder of an American sailor by natives of Drummond Island, part of the Kingsmill Group (a chain of central Pacific islands.)³⁶ That same year, the navy also burned several towns on Upolu Island, Samoa in retaliation for the murder of another American.³⁷ This pattern of violent retribution gave colonizationists good reason to expect a similar response at Little Berriby, if only the navy could spare the necessary resources. But colonizationists wanted more than just a single act of vengeance against Little Berriby; they wanted an ongoing naval presence that would provide support and protection for Americans and colonists all along the coast. They used the *Mary Carver* story to promote an

³⁴ *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, October 1842, 327.

³⁵ Francis Scott Key to James Hall, 23 August 1842, MSCSP; Abel P. Upshur to John Latrobe, 31 December 1842, MSCSP.

³⁶ These islands are now known as the Gilbert Islands and are located along the equator, to the north east of Papua New Guinea, some 930 miles north of Fiji.

³⁷ Grimmett.

increased naval presence in West Africa, and they exaggerated the African threat in order to encourage support for a permanent squadron.

Upshur, Tyler, and the *Mary Carver*

When news of the attack on the *Mary Carver* reached Washington, Upshur immediately issued orders directing Commander Ramsay to obtain reparations from the attackers.³⁸ With the distance between Washington and West Africa, and the time required to deliver letters across the Atlantic, these orders served more to establish a record of the government's official position on the matter rather than as direct instructions for Ramsay to follow. Obviously, being on the coast, Ramsay would have heard the news long before Upshur did, and the secretary could safely assume that Ramsay had already taken some action.

More importantly, Upshur saw that he could use the *Mary Carver* story to promote the Africa squadron. He still needed to convince a reluctant Congress to fund the squadron, and remembering his earlier disappointments, Upshur anticipated a number of congressional objections to the squadron. So when it came time to submit his second annual report to the president in November, Upshur offered a new justification for the squadron. This time, instead of focusing on the British as the chief threat to American interests in West Africa, he used the attack on the *Mary Carver* to demonstrate a new threat to American interests, the threat of savage Africans.³⁹

Upshur argued the current vulnerability of American commerce necessitated a squadron and he used the *Mary Carver* to make his case. He reported to the president:

In consequence of the unprotected condition of our trade on that coast, several of our vessels have been captured by the natives, and their crews barbarously murdered. The last aggression of this sort was upon the schooner *Mary Carver*, Captain Farwell, in the district of Beribee, ninety miles south of Cape Palmas. Instructions have been given to Commander Ramsay to proceed to that point and demand such reparation as the circumstances of the case may require. This, however, will be at best but little satisfactory, since no chastisement which can be inflicted upon such savages can either do honor to our flag, or prevent other outrages of the like kind. Our commerce with Africa is rapidly increasing, and is well worthy of all the protection which it asks. This

³⁸ Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 73.

³⁹ Abel P. Upshur, "Report of the Secretary of the Navy, December 1842," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe* 27 Cong., 3 sess., no. (1842): 38-42.

protection is to be derived, not from any terror which can be inspired by the destruction of a few miserable villages on the sea beach, but from the presence of armed vessels, able to prevent, as well as punish, all violations of the rights and laws of fair trade.⁴⁰

Using language and reasoning that was strikingly similar to Minor's letter, Upshur claimed that the *Mary Carver* was just the latest example of Africans attacking American commerce and argued that the United States needed an Africa squadron.

Upshur's argument that American commerce in West Africa was vulnerable and required protection was not new. He had made the same argument in his report the previous year, and American merchants and colonizationists had been making this argument for years.⁴¹ The primary threat continued to come from Europeans, especially the British, but since the treaty had ostensibly improved diplomatic relations with Britain, it was no longer politically useful to claim that the British threatened American interests in West Africa because most Americans believed that the treaty had ameliorated the British threat. Upshur knew that British merchants, backed by the British navy, still threatened the survival and growth of American trade in West Africa, the treaty had not changed conditions on the coast, but he also knew that he could not persuade Americans to agree with him. Instead, he used the *Mary Carver* story to promote the idea that savage, piratical Africans threatened American interests.

This tactic resembled Jackson's characterization of the Quallah Battoo Malays as piratical savages, a comparison that Minor had explicitly made in his letter.⁴² With an established precedent for using naval force to punish savage natives who attacked Americans, Upshur stood on solid political footing. And like Minor, he referenced unnamed numerous incidents, suggesting an ongoing pattern of attacks against American shipping that supposedly demonstrated the need for an ongoing naval presence, rather than a mere single act of chastisement. It did not matter to most Americans that Upshur could only provide details relating to the *Mary Carver* incident. Although his depiction grossly exaggerated the threat that Africans posed and was supported by scant evidence, it was easy for Americans to believe because it fit their idea of Africa as a barbarous world in need of civilization.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Upshur, "Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 4 December 1841," 16-22.

⁴² Belohlavek, 152-162; Hening, 182-186.

Newspapers quickly grasped Upshur's point and summarized it for their readers. The *Kennebec Journal* printed an abridged version of Upshur's report that read, "On the coast of Africa we have no squadron, though the recent treaty with England renders it necessary that a squadron of at least 80 guns should be assigned to that service." The paper's summary touched briefly on the *Mary Carver* affair, explaining that the new squadron was "necessary in order to suppress the slave trade, and to afford the protection to our vessels from the African savages, of which the aggression upon the schr. *Mary Carver* shows that they stand in need."⁴³ The treaty obligated the country to form a squadron, and American merchant vessels needed a squadron to protect them from African savages. This new reasoning made it more difficult for Americans to object to the squadron and increased the pressure on Congress to fund it. Interestingly, Upshur was the one to make the connection between the *Mary Carver* and the squadron, and the *Journal* still failed to draw any notice to the local connection.

Although Upshur mentioned that a squadron would be necessary to suppress the slave trade, he did not suggest that the squadron's purpose was to suppress that trade. But the treaty and other political circumstances required him to address the issue. There were some Americans who supported the idea that the United States should take an active part in suppressing the slave trade, and had his report ignored the issue, Upshur would have left the squadron vulnerable to political attacks. But Upshur also knew that Congress had failed to legislate or fund a mission to suppress the slave trade for the past twenty years and it was not likely to approve a squadron for that purpose in 1843. Upshur overcame this difficulty by clearly stating the squadron's multiple purposes. He explained that it would be used to protect Americans and their interests, and noted any discouragement to the slave trade produced by the squadron would be a welcome benefit, but not a priority.⁴⁴ Protecting American commerce was the primary purpose of and justification for the Africa squadron. In a summary of Upshur's report, *Brother Jonathan* reiterated this point by deleting Upshur's brief reference to the slave trade and simply printing: "The aggression upon the schr. *Mary Carver* shows that we stand in

⁴³ *Kennebec Journal*, 30 December 1842.

⁴⁴ Upshur, "Report of the Secretary of the Navy, December 1842."

need of a strong force there to protect our commerce from the attacks of the African savages.”⁴⁵ Americans focused their attention on the *Mary Carver*, not on the slave trade.

Upshur also continued to argue that a strong navy would benefit the entire the country, not only commercial cities in the East. He wrote, “It is an object of great interest to me to make the navy subservient to the encouragement of American industry. This may be done, not only by the protection which it affords to American commerce, but also by means of the supplies which it requires.” Upshur argued that the wealth of a nation was measured by its peoples’ wealth, not by the gold in its treasury. Nine-tenths of naval appropriations, he said, would be paid back to the American people as the department used the government funds to purchase materials and labor from the people. He explained that any appropriated funds were:

Thus put into circulation, paying debts, supplying wants, and sustaining credit. Every dollar thus employed increases the tax-paying ability of the people to twice that amount: and this tax-paying ability is the true wealth of the nation.⁴⁶

But this argument did not persuade everyone. Westerners’ argued that limited government funds would be better spent building roads and bridges to the West and that their plans would also circulate money and provide jobs. But instead of directly addressing this argument, Upshur relied on appeals to national honor. The navy, he argued, represented the country abroad and with only the same few ships repeatedly visiting the same ports, some foreigners had begun to believe that those few ships constituted the entire U.S. fleet. And indeed, many Africans on the coast had never seen any U.S. naval vessel and doubted that Americans even had a real navy. Americans were left to decide which the better investment was: internal improvements, or the expansion of foreign commerce and the defense of their national honor.⁴⁷

President Tyler supported Upshur’s plans for the Africa squadron and he shared the same basic reasons for doing so. But unlike Upshur, Tyler did not specifically mention the *Mary Carver* in his annual message to Congress. Instead, he continued to emphasize the potential British threat to Americans’ right to sail the open seas unmolested. These two points of view

⁴⁵ *Brother Jonathan*, 17 December 1842.

⁴⁶ Upshur, “Report of the Secretary of the Navy, December 1842.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

were not entirely distinct but they were subtly different. Upshur wanted a squadron to protect American merchants from unfair British trading practices, which used the British navy to drive out competitors in an attempt to create trading monopolies that would forever shut Americans out of West African markets. Tyler wanted a squadron to prevent the British navy from renewing its abusive practice of unlawfully detaining and searching American merchant vessels, a practice that offended Americans' honor and threatened to subvert international law by allowing Britain extraordinary powers to police the seas. Although different, the two issues were not separate. Many Americans believed that the British navy stopped and searched American vessels in order to disrupt American commerce and give British traders an unfair advantage, thus furthering their plans to create a trade monopoly and take control of the Atlantic. Upshur and Tyler were each more concerned about different aspects of the same general problem: the threat to American rights and interests in West Africa.⁴⁸

Tyler continued to emphasize the British threat because he was more concerned with defending Americans' right to sail the Atlantic unmolested by the British navy. In his annual message to Congress, the president boldly declared that Britain had renounced the right of search. He wrote that as a result of the squadron specified in the treaty, "all pretence is removed for interference with our commerce, for any purpose whatever, by a foreign Government." He explained that by successfully refusing the right of search, the United States was "standing up for the freedom of the seas," and that the proposed Africa squadron would allow the government to fully maintain its ground on this issue, while also protecting the interests of American traders and upholding the nation's laws against the slave trade.⁴⁹

Tyler denied accusations that the government used its position on the right of search as an excuse for ignoring the slave trade. He wrote that "while, therefore, the United States have been standing up for the freedom of the seas, they have not thought proper to make that a pretext for avoiding a fulfillment of their treaty stipulations, or a ground for giving countenance to a trade reprobated by our laws." The United States had been the first nation

⁴⁸ John Tyler, "Message of the President of the United States," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 27 Cong., 3 Sess., December 1842, 29-33.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

to outlaw the slave trade, and the first to declare it piracy; if only the other great powers of the world would follow this example, Tyler argued, they could not fail to “sweep from the ocean the slave-trade, without the interpolation of any new principle into the maritime code.”⁵⁰ From his perspective, the slave trade could be effectively suppressed without sacrificing maritime rights. The U.S. position, he thought, was not only reasonable, but preferable. Britain’s insistence on sacrificing this right to free navigation of the seas suggested that it had ulterior motives for advocating such changes to international law.

Tyler reasoned that an Africa squadron was the logical and necessary means to protect these American principles. By creating a squadron, he wrote, we “afford suitable protection to the fair trader in those seas; thus fulfilling at the same time the dictates of a sound policy, and complying with the claims of justice and humanity.”⁵¹ For Tyler, resisting British efforts to impinge on American rights continued to be the greatest priority. Funding a squadron to actively expand the scope of American commerce and enforce the country’s laws against the slave trade remained necessary political justifications but secondary policy priorities. Tyler concluded his message on the subject by asking Congress for \$250,000 to fund the Africa squadron.

Tyler delivered his message to Congress on December 7th, 1842, and *Vandalia* arrived at Newport, Rhode Island on December 10th. One-third of her crew was sick after making a tediously slow fifty-seven-day crossing of the Atlantic. It was a miserable end to a long and unsuccessful mission. The unpleasant circumstances of her return, combined with the overall difficulties of her cruise, and the failures she experienced during her mission, did not bode well for the Africa squadron’s political future. Some squadron opponents used *Vandalia*’s lack of action to argue that the United States did not need an Africa squadron. As one newspaper reported:

The *Vandalia*, we learn, has examined that coast, from Gambia to Grand Bareby, without the *sight* of a Slaver, or hearing of a single instance of molestation of our flag, by British cruisers. Every effort was made to punish the tribes concerned in the destruction of the Ann Carver, by the dispatch first of a merchant vessel with a part of the *Vandalia*’s crew, and followed up by the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

presence of the ship, but the towns were abandoned, the people gone to the jungles, and beyond pursuit.⁵²

Vandalia's voyage seemed to demonstrate little need for a squadron. According to Tyler, Britain had repudiated the right of search, and now Ramsay reported that British cruisers had given up the practice of interfering with American vessels. And *Vandalia*'s failure to spot any slavers reinforced the belief that few Americans were directly involved in the trade. According to Ramsay's information, the only significant issue that remained unresolved was the need to avenge the *Mary Carver*. But that affair alone was not enough to justify a full squadron; in past cases, single warships had successfully chastised piratical savages.

Fortunately for Upshur and the Africa squadron, the *Atalanta* returned to the United States less than a week later. After its failed decoy mission to Little Berriby, the *Atalanta* had continued trading along the coast. When she arrived in Philadelphia in December, Captain Brown reported that he had been brutally attacked by Africans at Settra Kroo, a town on the coast between Monrovia and Cape Palmas. Brown told how he had been landing rice and lumber for a new Presbyterian mission when natives had suddenly attacked him. Seriously injured, he had only escaped with the help of some African friends.⁵³

Brown's story provided a second specific example of Africans attacking American merchants on the coast. And because these Africans lived some hundred miles from Little Berriby, it encouraged the impression that the problem of savage Africans was general to the coast, not specific to a particular village. The attack on Brown seemed to confirm the growing belief that savage Africans threatened Americans all along the coast. *Niles' National Register* described how "the natives are very troublesome, and the constant presence of some public vessel is required; though it is reported that the natives of Half Bereby, who heard the *Vandalia* was going to punish them, have declared they do not fear an American man of war, and 'should another unarmed vessel come along, we will take that too.'"⁵⁴ Brown's story appeared to support Upshur's justification for the squadron by confirming that the *Mary Carver*

⁵² "Naval," *The New World*, 17 December 1842.

⁵³ "Foreign Affairs," *Niles' National Register*, 17 December 1842, 242.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

exemplified a pattern of pervasive piracy along the coast. And to make matters worse, he was reporting that these savages were boasting of plans to attack the U.S. navy.

Although *Atalanta* and *Vandalia* arrived in the United States at approximately the same time, *Atalanta* had actually left West Africa much later and carried the latest news and correspondence from the coast. Brown delivered recent copies of the *Liberia Herald* which included the news following *Vandalia*'s departure. According to these latest issues of the *Herald*, American merchants on the coast had been disappointed by *Vandalia*'s failure to punish Little Berriby, and one of them, Captain Syms of the barque *Rhoderick Dhu*, had taken matters into his own hands. Syms had spoken with some Kroomen at Bassa, who had identified the *Mary Carver*'s attackers, and he had sailed for Little Berriby with a plan to capture them.⁵⁵

At Little Berriby, Syms had pretended to be interested in buying sails, implying that he had heard reports of the attack and hoped to make a profit by purchasing some of the *Mary Carver*'s plundered equipment at bargain prices. Syms reported that the village's head trade man had boarded the *Rhoderick Dhu* and offered him a variety of goods including: a big jib, rope, ivory, and camwood. Believing that these goods had belonged to the *Mary Carver*, Syms interpreted the offer as evidence of guilt. In the middle of the negotiations he ordered his crew to seize the Little Berriby man and put him in irons. Syms sent the prisoner's entourage of boys back to shore to tell the other villagers.⁵⁶

Syms had taken his prisoner to the British authorities at Cape Coast Castle. When the British refused to keep the prisoner in the fort, Syms offered to pay them for the expense of holding the prisoner until an American man-of-war arrived to take over the responsibility. Syms described his embarrassment when the British official laughed at this offer "and asked when that time would come." According to Syms, the officer had said that "he had been near fifteen years a resident and had never seen an American man-of-war at that place," and that "many other gentlemen said the same." Syms reluctantly admitted that in nine years of trading up and down the coast he had never seen an American man-of-war either. This embarrassment helped to convince Syms that the future of American trade along the coast

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ "From the *Liberia Herald*, Oct. 31, 1842," *African Repository*, February 1842, 62.

depended upon the reliable presence of the American navy. He explained his conclusions in a letter published in the *Liberia Herald* for all to see.⁵⁷

The case for an Africa squadron to protect American interests in West Africa was growing. Syms' letter explained the attacks on American merchantmen by suggesting that savage Africans had no respect for the United States because it did not appear to have a navy. The only way for Americans to command respect would be to show that they possessed a powerful navy like those of Britain and France. To do this, the United States would need to maintain a squadron of armed naval vessels that could show the flag up and down thousands of miles of African coastline. A single cruiser may be able to punish the people of Little Berriby, but it would not be able to convince Africans that the United States was a powerful nation and instil the respect or fear necessary to deter them from continuing to attack American merchantmen.

Syms argued that the U.S. navy ought to keep two or three cruisers continuously on the coast, otherwise Americans would remain at the mercy of British charity, further diminishing the reputation of the United States in that part of the world. "If we want any assistance, which we often do," he wrote, "we are obliged to apply to the English men-of-war, and I have always found them willing to render the required assistance." But such applications for assistance came at the cost of American honor and respect. Americans' dependence on the British navy reinforced the impression that they could not take care of themselves. Left with little alternative, Syms suffered the embarrassment and persuaded the British governor at Cape Coast Castle to hold his prisoner until a U.S. naval vessel arrived.⁵⁸

American merchants pressed Washington officials to act. American newspapers printed copies of Syms' letter, and the *Merchant's Magazine and Commercial Review* published a long article discussing the Webster-Ashburton treaty and Upshur's latest report. Although merchants supported the administration's proposed West African policy, they worried that the policy would not be carried out and that the government was not doing enough to address the

⁵⁷ Syms letter, originally printed in the *Liberia Herald*, 31 October 1842, was copied or excerpted by many newspapers and periodicals in the United States, for example, the *New York Evangelist*, 22 December 1842; *Kennebec Journal*, 30 December 1842, both copied the letter from the *Providence Journal*, the *New York Commercial Advertiser*.

⁵⁸ *Liberia Herald*, 31 October 1842.

problem. The government, the *Review* argued, must protect and secure the coast from savage natives or Americans would lose access to the promising trade. "We require a permanent squadron on the African seas," it insisted, because Africans were too wild and disorganized to learn from isolated punishments. As soon as one group of savages was scared off, another would move in and take its place. The *Review* argued, "We may continue to punish for each offence, but the idea of punishment will never be linked with the idea of retribution; and our only alternative will be, to secure the safety of our trade by the presence of a standing squadron."⁵⁹ Merchants, colonists, missionaries, and the administration all agreed that the United States needed to maintain a squadron on the African coast to protect American interests from European and African threats and to defend American rights and honor. Suppressing the slave trade remained a low priority. Now it was up to Congress to decide what the country would spend, if anything, to protect and defend those interests.

Congress & the Africa Squadron

The twenty-seventh Congress opened its third session on December 5th, 1842. It received Tyler's annual message, which included Upshur's report, two days later. The Africa squadron was one of the first issues to come up for debate. Once again, Senator Benton led the opposition to the squadron. He began by demanding that Tyler supply details about the proposed squadron, including its anticipated size and expense. Benton questioned Tyler's assertion that the United States needed an Africa squadron to prevent Europeans from attempting to enforce U.S. laws and he demanded that the president answer questions about the Quintuple treaty on this point. The Senate supported Benton's demand for information, and it sent Tyler a request for details about the proposed squadron and for copies of any documents from the relevant treaty negotiations.⁶⁰

Eager to win congressional support, Upshur quickly wrote out a detailed report describing the department's plans for the squadron and submitted it to the president by the

⁵⁹ "The Navy and the Late Treaty," *Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*, January 1843, 49-56.

⁶⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 27 Cong., Sess. 3, 14 December 1842, 50; "Senate," *Niles' National Register*, 31 December 1842, 286-287.

end of the month. Upshur's report declared that "the obligation assumed by the Government to keep a squadron on the coast of Africa does not create any absolute necessity for an increase to that amount of our present naval force."⁶¹ In light of concerns about economy and expense, he chose not to use the Africa squadron as an opportunity to insist on building new vessels. Upshur wanted the Africa squadron to have its own dedicated appropriation. He worried that unless the squadron had its own funding, it would drain resources from his other reform projects. He knew that some congressmen opposed the squadron and would try to block any appropriation for it so he wanted the department to receive additional money to pay for the squadron without making it seem like the navy was expanding. He explained to Congress:

It is not proposed to increase the navy, with the particular view of supplying this squadron; nor would it be proposed to reduce the navy, if this squadron were not necessary. It is merely a part of the customary and useful employment of our vessels, of war.⁶²

Upshur reassured Congress that the proposed Africa squadron would not be unique from other squadrons. It was simply a necessary addition to the existing squadrons and would be employed as the others were, performing customary and useful services to the nation, in particular: protecting American rights, commerce, and honor.

To offset his request for funding for an Africa squadron, Upshur reassured Congress that he had no intention of sending more than eighty guns to the coast for the time being. And to avoid potentially contentious political associations, he minimized the squadron's relationship to the treaty, explaining: "independent of any treaty stipulation, I should have considered it necessary to keep at least eighty guns distributed among a small number of vessels on that coast."⁶³ Indeed, he had complained of the department's inability to send a force to the coast the previous year, and he did not want congressmen to object to the squadron out of any sort of animosity towards Britain or the treaty. Upshur reminded Congress that the Navy Department had advocated a squadron prior to the treaty, for reasons beyond those stated in article eight.

⁶¹ Abel P. Upshur to John Tyler, 29 December 1842, H.R. 283, 774-777.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

Upshur repeated the arguments from his previous reports that American commerce, which spanned some two thousand miles of coastline from Gorée to the Bight of Biafra, needed protection. He wrote, "Our commerce along this coast may now be estimated at one million of dollars, employing from four to five thousand tons of shipping." And he reported that the type and quantity of commodities traded were rapidly increasing. He gave a long list of American produce sold to Africa, including: tobacco, cotton fabrics, brown drills, rum, whiskey, muskets, gunpowder, beef, pork, flour, bread, bacon, lard, butter, cheese, fish, soap, candles, and iron and tin ware, among others; and he argued that the expansion of the scope and scale of trade with West Africa demonstrated a trend that, if properly protected, could be of significant value to the American economy as a whole. Relying on "the most intelligent men, well acquainted with the African coast," Upshur had come to believe in the value of the West African trade and in its potential for growth.⁶⁴

European interest in West African trade seemed to confirm Upshur's beliefs. He had made up his mind that the trade was growing in value and that Americans should not allow Europeans to shut them out. He explained:

It is not so much its present as its prospective value that demands the presence of a naval force. The want of such a force heretofore has enabled the English to exclude us from the most valuable part of the trade of the Gambia and Sierra Leone, and the French to exclude us entirely from the Senegal.⁶⁵

Upshur, like merchants and colonizationists, feared the consequences of a European trade monopoly in West Africa. Witnessing the early stages of European colonization in West Africa, these men worried that European encroachment would harm, and possibly ruin, American economic prospects in the region. Upshur concluded that "it is vain to hope that our commerce with Africa can be maintained even its present condition, and still more vain to hope that it can be greatly extended, unless we offer it the protection which it would derive from the constant presence of our ships of war." Upshur recast the Europeans in this new justification for the Africa squadron; instead of portraying them as abusers of American rights, he depicted them as dangerous commercial rivals.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

European commercial competition was not Upshur's only justification for the squadron. He also argued that savage Africans posed a serious threat to American trade in West Africa. And he repeated his previous arguments that American traders needed the same support from their navy that Europeans had. Savage natives could not be trusted to conduct business like civilized men; merchants who did not have the backing of a respected naval force would be vulnerable to cheats and violent attackers. He told Congress that the *Mary Carver* was just one example of a pattern of ongoing attacks by savage natives against American merchantmen. "Instead of trading with us," he wrote:

the native chiefs think only of plundering our vessels and murdering their crews. The *Mary Carver*, alluded to in my annual report, is not the only case of this sort which has already occurred, nor will it be the last, unless the native chiefs shall be taught to respect and fear us, by proper exhibitions of our national flag."⁶⁶

Upshur claimed that the *Mary Carver* incident represented a pattern of violent attacks against American merchantmen but he could not cite another example because there was no documented pattern of attacks. Instead, Upshur based his assertion on unsubstantiated rumors created and spurred on by self-interested missionaries, colonizationists, and traders. But even though the *Mary Carver* was the only specific example of Africans attacking an American vessel that he cited, no one questioned the assertion that Africans were a predatory threat to American merchantmen.

In addition to protecting American commerce from European competitors and savage Africans, Upshur also identified a third justification for the squadron: suppressing the African slave trade. Although Upshur's first priority was to protect American trade, he was also concerned that accusations of American involvement in the slave trade were damaging the country's reputation.

Like many Virginia slaveholders, Upshur made sharp distinctions between owning slaves and trafficking in them. While many Americans considered slaveholders gentlemen, they believed slave traders to be base pirates and scoundrels. The distinction may have been one of convenience for slaveowners like Upshur, but it allowed them to own slaves and sincerely

⁶⁶ Ibid.

disdain the Atlantic slave trade at the same time. Upshur openly criticized the slave trade and he believed that it was important for the United States to maintain some effort to enforce its laws against that dishonorable business. A visible enforcement effort, Upshur reasoned, would serve as proof to refute defamatory accusations that the United States countenanced, or worse, approved of, the slave trade. Thus Upshur advocated the Africa squadron, not as a means to suppress the slave trade, but as a means of demonstrating the United States' sincere opposition to that trade, and to defend the nation's honor against slanderous accusations to the contrary.⁶⁷

Historians have misunderstood or ignored this distinction, which contradicts their assertion that the Africa squadron's sole purpose was to suppress the slave trade. Upshur and Tyler advocated the squadron on the grounds that it would protect Americans and their honor. Its first priority would be to physically protect and defend Americans on the coast from both Europeans and Africans, lend support to Americans' commercial and philanthropic ventures, and to deter violent and malicious acts against Americans. Its second priority would be to defend the country's honor by attempting to enforce U.S. laws, especially those against the slave trade. Donald Canney and other historians who blame Upshur for hijacking the squadron from its intended purpose fail to consider that Upshur and Tyler openly presented their justifications and intentions to Congress and the people for approval.⁶⁸

Historians also criticize Upshur's choice of vessels and general design of the squadron, again ignoring the constraints that he faced.⁶⁹ Upshur advised the president and Congress that the new squadron would require at least five vessels to police the slave trade along twelve hundred miles of coastline. He advocated sending appropriate vessels to contend with the adroit, fast, well-armed slavers. Still worried that political opposition to the treaty threatened the squadron, he repeated his statement that the treaty was not imposing any new or

⁶⁷ Abel P. Upshur to John Tyler, 29 December 1842, H.R. 283, 774-777; Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur, Conservative Virginian, 1790-1844*, 69-80, 175-176.

⁶⁸ For examples of historical interpretations that misunderstand the squadron's purpose and consequently blame Upshur for the squadron's failure to suppress the slave trade see: Canney, 60-62; Fehrenbacher and McAfee, 173-174.

⁶⁹ This has been a consistent criticism of the squadron beginning with Du Bois; and even Canney, who tries to partially defend the squadron against some of these critics, blames the Navy Department for failing to provide the squadron with more ships. Canney, xiii.

obligations or expenditures on the department “which would not otherwise have been necessary and proper.”⁷⁰

The department’s preliminary plans outlined a squadron comprised of two first-class sloops and four brigs or schooners, to be manned by a complement of approximately seven hundred officers, seamen, and marines at an estimated annual expense of \$281,000. Anticipating that opponents might attempt to scale back this force, Upshur commented that “the squadron now contemplated is as small as this service would require under any circumstances,” and even that was a gross understatement.⁷¹ Upshur had the entire Navy Department and an overall plan for naval reform to consider. \$281,000 was as large an appropriation as he could realistically expect to receive from a less than enthusiastic Congress, without sacrificing other equally important departmental projects. He cautiously asked for the bare minimum, not because he wanted to sabotage the squadron, but because he wanted to ensure that the squadron received some specific funding, so that he would not be forced to steal from elsewhere in the navy’s budget to fund it.

Upshur was right to anticipate political attacks claiming that the proposed squadron represented a costly burden on the treasury. As Congress opened debate on the naval appropriations bill in February of 1843, articles estimating the cost of the new squadron began appearing in newspapers across the country. One story, which appeared in several papers, reported that the squadron was estimated to cost a total of \$1,205,000 over the course of five years. And, the article reasoned, if one considered that the squadron’s allotted armament of eighty-four guns represented eleven percent of the navy’s 946 guns, and that the navy’s total estimated budget for 1843 was eight million dollars, and that the squadron was expected to operate for at least five years, one could estimate that the squadron would actually cost eleven percent of \$8 million, or \$740,000 annually for five years, totaling \$3.7 million.⁷² These figures and calculations made the squadron seem anything but small or inexpensive. During this debate, there was a movement in the House of Representatives to reduce naval

⁷⁰ Abel P. Upshur to John Tyler, 29 December 1842, H.R. 283, 774-777.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² “Cost of the Navy,” *New York Evangelist*, 12 January 1843; “The Expense of the African Squadron,” *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Daily Gazette*, 17 April 1843.

expenditures in general, and against funding the Africa squadron in particular. An amendment to reduce all officers' pay by twenty percent was narrowly defeated by a vote of seventy-four in favor and eighty-two opposed, and Representative John McKeon of New York moved an amendment designed to deny any part of the naval appropriation from covering the squadron's expenses.⁷³

As Upshur had feared, debate over the squadron revived debate over the treaty and the right of search issue. Tyler's open suggestion that in signing the treaty, the British had renounced the right of search, spurred a rebuttal from British Prime Minister Robert Peel, denying the president's assertion. This disagreement over how the treaty was meant to be interpreted jeopardized the squadron's future.⁷⁴ And as *New Englander* magazine put it:

The presence of an American squadron on that coast, will be the surest way to prevent any occasion of complaint. Yet men were found in Congress to propose, that on account of a speech made by Sir Robert Peel in the British House of Commons, the appropriations for the African squadron required by the treaty, should be withheld.⁷⁵

Senator Benton seized on these differing interpretations to encourage opposition to the squadron in Congress. When the naval appropriations bill reached the Senate, Benton tried to kill it, and after the Senate passed an amended version, he moved to send it back to the Naval Committee for reconsideration, specifically to strike out the appropriation for the Africa squadron. Benton argued that the discrepancy over the interpretation of the right of visit was problematic and he attempted to renew the whole controversy over this issue.⁷⁶ Tyler's frank description of the administration's intentions in forming the squadron upset the British and threatened the squadron's future in Congress.

⁷³ "Congress," *Boston Recorder*, 16 February 1843.

⁷⁴ Daniel Webster had to work carefully to smooth over this disagreement and preserve the treaty. Daniel Webster to John Tyler, n.d. February 1843, H.R. 283, 780-781; Daniel Webster to Edward Everett, 28 March 1843, H.R. 283, 788-796.

⁷⁵ "Congress," *New Englander*, April 1843, 299-304; "African Squadron," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 23 February 1843, 211; *Baltimore Sun*, 24 February 1843; *Daily Madisonian*, 23 February 1843; "The African Squadron," *Philanthropist*, 22 March 1843.

⁷⁶ "The Treaty of Washington," *Niles' National Register*, 4 March 1843. Congress debated various courses of action. Besides motions to block all funding for the squadron, Congressman Horace Everett of Vermont suggested that the navy provide American merchantmen with certificates of authenticity certifying that an American officer had inspected their papers and authenticated their right to fly the American flag. Of course, this solution contradicted the purpose of ship's papers to begin with and was ultimately rejected. "The Right of Search," *Daily National Intelligencer*, 8 April 1843.

Fortunately for squadron supporters, Upshur had predicted this problem and had worked to distance the squadron from the treaty. Sen. William Archer of Virginia defended the appropriations bill and the squadron against Benton's attacks, reiterating the argument that the squadron was necessary for reasons independent of the treaty. Archer pointed out that the president's message clearly stated that the provision for the squadron "had been dictated by the purpose of maintaining our declared principles, fulfilling our existing obligations, executing our own laws by our means and power, as a 'means to supercede any supposed necessity or any motive for examination or visit of our vessels – as removing all pretext for violating the immunities of our flag on the seas as they exist and are defined by the law of nations'." Archer argued that debate over the treaty was irrelevant because the squadron was necessary for independent reasons.⁷⁷

Ultimately, the Senate rejected Benton's concerns and passed the naval appropriations bill with a vote of thirty-six to five.⁷⁸ The appropriation, which covered all of 1843 and the first half of 1844, totaled over nine million dollars. Calculated as an average annual rate of about \$6.5 million, it was slightly smaller than the appropriation for 1842, and considerably smaller than the 1841 appropriation of \$7.4 million. The largest reduction was for capital projects, but the essential budget for repairs was also significantly reduced from \$2 million in 1842, to \$1.6 million. Upshur had indicated that the repairs budget was essential to his plan of keeping the fleet continually active and its ability to service more stations, this reduction indicated legislators' lack of support for his overall plans to improve the quality and performance of the navy. Congress reluctantly approved the Africa squadron, but it had little interest in Upshur's larger plans for naval expansion. It was a marginal victory. The treaty and the *Mary Carver* affair had helped the administration to win funding for the Africa squadron, but Upshur was left with limited resources to support and maintain what amounted to a mediocre navy overall.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Boston Recorder*, 2 March 1843; "The Treaty of Washington," *Niles' National Register*, 4 March 1843, 6-9.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ "An Act making appropriations for the naval service for the half calendar year beginning the first day of January and ending the thirtieth day of June, one thousand eight hundred and forty-three, and for the fiscal year beginning the first day of July, one thousand eight hundred and forty-three, and ending the thirtieth day of June, one thousand eight

As the session wore on, Congress also took up the question of African colonization. The ACS had submitted its convention memorial the previous spring. The House had referred the memorial to its Commerce Committee, which released its report in the midst of the naval appropriations debate. Friendly to the colonization cause, the committee's report outlined the history of colonization and its early relationship with the government, describing the Liberian colonies in the most positive terms: "They present themselves to this country and the world, not only as eligible asylums for our free colored population, and for such as may become free, but as republican and Christian States informed by the elements of indefinite growth and improvement, capable, duly countenanced, and guarded against the interference of unfriendly Powers, of rising to honor and greatness, and of diffusing the influence of its laws and example over wide districts of Africa."⁸⁰ The commerce committee depicted the colonies as the foundation of a wider project of civilizing and developing Africa. According to this interpretation, the colonies paved the way for missionaries and created a refuge for traveling Americans. They were a potential base for U.S. foreign operations, and their positive influence helped combat the African barbarism which nurtured the slave trade. The report concluded that the colonists were "entitled, as dependents upon our guardianship, to our sympathy and support," and that the Liberian colonies "may justly invoke the regard of the Government, and ask from it some measure of protection and support." The memorialists had overcome the first hurdle. The committee agreed that the ACS was justified in asking for the government's help.⁸¹

The commerce committee's report expressed the hope that some day the government might take on more responsibility for African colonization "with an energy and on a scale far transcending any as yet realized," but it recommended a more moderate course for the present. The committee was confident that the government could afford to grant moderate aid and countenance to Liberia "without fully assuming all the hazards and responsibilities of a system of colonization." It argued that such moderate support would secure the colonies'

hundred and forty-four." 27 Cong., 3 sess., 3 March 1843, *Statutes at Large: List of the Public Acts of Congress*, (Vol. 5) 615-619; U.S. Navy Department.

⁸⁰ U.S. Congress. House Committee on Commerce.

⁸¹ Ibid.

“permanency, growth and prosperity.”⁸² Recognizing Americans’ opposition to any formal responsibility for colonies, the committee recommended a policy of informal support that would ensure the colonies’ success and allow the U.S. government to benefit from this relationship, while denying any responsibility and avoiding the burdens of formal colonial possessions.

The committee suggested that a more active relationship with Liberia might benefit Americans by giving them power to decide questions of trade. In exchange for occasional aid and protection, Liberia would offer Americans commercial advantages:

Questions of commercial regulation would frequently arise, demanding the care and supervision of this Government. The profitable trade of our citizens may be deeply involved in the adjustment of such questions. The interest which we may have hereafter in this subject is one in which it would be impolitic for us to neglect or abandon.

It recommended giving the Liberian government \$20,000 to help it purchase the remaining territory along the coast between Cape Mount and Cape Palmas. This assistance, the committee advised, would prevent Europeans from gaining a foothold within territory considered essential to Liberia’s success. Such an appropriation it argued, “whether regarded as a measure auxiliary to the suppression of the slave trade, or to the interests of American commerce,” would be “highly expedient.”⁸³

The commerce committee’s report cited Dr. Hall’s information and his recommendation to establish an American commercial agency in the colonies. With a commercial agent in Liberia to make periodic visits along the coast in American men-of-war, American trade would be protected and the natives would learn to respect the American flag. Such an agent could also form conventions and treaties with natives that would help combat the slave trade and “secure for American vessels a free and unrestrained right of trade at all important stations.” The committee concluded its report by offering a resolution that:

the increasing importance of the colonies on the western coast of Africa, both in regard to the commerce of that coast and their influence in suppressing the slave trade, renders it expedient that an agent should be appointed by the

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

Government, to protect and advance the interests of American trade in that region.⁸⁴

This resolution held that the agent should reside in the colonies and would be empowered to form treaties and conventions with the African natives for the advancement of American trade and suppression of the slave trade.

The House accepted the report and ordered it to be printed. The report itself covered only a little more than six printed pages, but the accompanying collection of documents, which included just about any relevant document that touched on the subject dating back to the beginning of the republic, totaled an impressive 1,082 printed pages. The committee had unquestioningly studied the subject thoroughly. The evidence that it presented in this hefty volume added weight to its arguments but its resolutions remained tabled for the rest of the session, which closed on March 3rd. Support for colonization in Congress remained largely limited to good wishes. The new Africa squadron was the colonies' best hope for U.S. support.

The Africa Squadron

Once Congress passed the naval appropriations bill, Upshur could finally start organizing an Africa squadron. His first challenge was to assign a commander; Africa's reputed deadly climate made this particular squadron one of the less desirable assignments in the service.⁸⁵ Upshur chose forty-nine-year-old Matthew Calbraith Perry of Rhode Island, the head of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, to command the new squadron. Perry, the younger brother of Oliver Hazard Perry, the hero of Lake Erie, had joined the navy at age fifteen as a midshipman and fought in the War of 1812. Most recently, he had worked on several reform projects, including new methods for the education and training of young officers, and projects to

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ And the ongoing court-martials of the last two captains to return from the coast, Ramsay and Alexander Mackenzie, did not help promote the assignment among officers. Mackenzie was on trial for executing the secretary of war's son for his participation in a mutiny. The brig *Somers* was designated a training ship for young midshipmen and assigned to deliver mail from the United States to *Vandalia* while she was on the African coast. During *Somers'* cruise in late 1842 some of her crew organized the first ever mutiny in the U.S. Navy. Mackenzie successfully defended his command and executed the perpetrators, including the ringleader, Mid. Philip Spencer, son of Secretary of War John C. Spencer. Although the Navy Department supported Mackenzie's decision, Sec. Spencer wanted retribution and his anger helped make the case a national sensation. There were also a number of charges filed against *Vandalia's* officers, generally relating to poor or improper treatment of the crew during the recent cruise. The junior officers were generally acquitted but the Navy found Ramsay guilty of at least one charge and he received a suspended sentence of six months.

develop and improve steam navigation, ordnance, and lighthouses.⁸⁶ Perry was well suited to command the new squadron, he was knowledgeable about the African coast, he had seen African duty twice before, and he was sympathetic towards the Liberian colonies.⁸⁷ Acknowledging that Perry's experience would be particularly useful, Upshur wrote to the new commander: "Your own observation and experience, while heretofore in service upon that coast, will enable you to direct your inquiries in a proper channel, and has already supplied you with much valuable information."⁸⁸

As one of the navy's few captains with African experience, Perry was the logical choice to command the squadron. Of the five officers who had commanded U.S. men-of-war off West Africa in the 1820's, Perry was the only one available to command the Africa squadron in 1843. Edward Trenchard had died in 1824. Robert Stockton and Alexander Wadsworth had retired from active sea duty: Stockton was busy supervising construction of the navy's new experimental steam powered warship USS *Princeton*, and Wadsworth was the current inspector of ordnance. The only other senior navy officer with West African experience was George C. Read. Read had recently completed an assignment commanding the East Indies Squadron, during which his flagship USS *Columbia* had circumnavigated the globe, and he was currently serving as a judge at the court martial of Alexander Mackenzie.⁸⁹ Perry, who had not been to sea for a while, was the obvious choice. The navy had other officers with West African experience, including Bell and Paine, but these men did not have the requisite experience and seniority to command a squadron, let alone one mired in sensitive political and diplomatic

⁸⁶ Perry biographer, Samuel Eliot Morison, described the squadron as "far from being a blue-ribbon assignment." Morison suggests that Perry was given the assignment because he was a Democrat serving under a Whig administration. Considering that the president (and his close adviser Upshur) had been written out of the Whig party and were suspected of wooing Democrats with an aim to win the next election this argument is not entirely convincing. Perry was just the sort of reform-minded officer that Upshur relied on to help advance his plans to change the service. Perry did express a feeling that he was not a favorite of the administration, but he did so in March of 1844, a year after receiving the command. John Schroeder interprets this letter as a reference to the changes since Upshur had left the department: "Perry suspected that the Tyler administration included many individuals who would use any mistake or misstep to embarrass him now that Upshur was no longer there to protect him." Friends of the former Secretary of War John Spencer, the father of the young midshipman who had been hanged by Perry's brother-in-law Alexander Mackenzie for his suspected role as leader of the mutiny aboard the USS *Somers* may certainly have held a grudge against Perry for his connections and even blamed him for his role in the affair. Morison also suggests that Perry's remark may have been a reference to the *Somers* mutiny and his connection to Mackenzie's court martial. Morison, 164. Schroeder also connects the *Somers* mutiny with Perry's decision to accept command of the Africa squadron: Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry: Antebellum Sailor and Diplomat*, 94, 117.

⁸⁷ Morison, 61-76; Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry: Antebellum Sailor and Diplomat*, 103-104.

⁸⁸ Abel P. Upshur to Matthew C. Perry, 30 March 1843, NASPNA-DA, vol. 2, no. 206, 381-385.

⁸⁹ Read took his turn as commander of the Africa squadron in 1846.

issues.⁹⁰ Perry was the most suitable and available officer for the assignment and the public generally agreed. The *New York American* commented that "a more discreet and fitting officer for so responsible and delicate a post, could not have been found."⁹¹

Americans were even more interested in what vessels Upshur would assign to the new squadron. Both Americans and Britons generally believed that the number, size, and class of vessels chosen would have more bearing on the squadron's success than the men who sailed them; an officer could only do his duty as well as his tools allowed. After much speculation, Upshur chose four vessels: *Saratoga*, *Macedonian*, *Porpoise*, and *Decatur*.⁹² USS *Saratoga* was a new 882-ton-sloop-of-war just launched the previous summer.⁹³ She carried a complement of 210 officers and men and was armed with four eight-inch shell guns and eighteen thirty-two-pounders. Forty-seven-year-old Commander Josiah Tattnall from Savannah, Georgia was assigned to captain her. The sloop was ready to sail for Africa by mid-March, and as Perry was anxious to sail as soon as possible, he made *Saratoga* his temporary flagship.⁹⁴

USS *Macedonian* was a thirty-six-gun, second-class frigate which had been rebuilt from the keel of a captured British ship. Launched in 1836, *Macedonian* was an imposing ship of 1,341 tons that carried a complement of 489 men. Fifty-one-year-old Capt. Isaac Mayo of Maryland was assigned to command her. Upshur had not originally intended to assign a frigate to the squadron; everyone agreed that smaller, quicker ships were best suited to this mission. But political and logistical considerations caused him to change his mind.⁹⁵ Upshur also

⁹⁰ Naval Historical Center U.S. Navy Department, "Officers of the Continental and U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, 1775-1900," (Department of the Navy, 2006). <http://www.history.navy.mil/books/callahan/index.htm>.

⁹¹ "African Squadron," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 23 February 1843, 211; *Niles' National Register*, 25 February, 11 March 1843; *Daily National Intelligencer*, 27 February 1843; *Christian Watchman*, 17 March 1843.

⁹² Some historians have criticized Upshur's choice of vessels, describing them as old, decrepit, and generally unsuitable. For example, see: Booth, 100-101. But Booth exaggerates the problems, and his only example from Perry's squadron was a supply ship, (*Consort*) not a cruiser.

⁹³ *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 19 January 1843, 58; *Niles' National Register*, 11 March 1843, 20.

⁹⁴ Description of vessels taken from: Naval Historical Center U.S. Navy Department, "Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships," (Department of the Navy, 1991). www.history.navy.mil/danfs (accessed 9 September 2007).

⁹⁵ Donald Canney suggests that she was chosen purposely to annoy the British during the ongoing controversy caused by Prime Minister Peel's speech in response to Tyler's comments in his last annual report. Canney, 51. He also claims that there were only six of the smaller class of ships and therefore they had to send large ones but the *Army and Navy Chronicle* of 19 January 1843, listed nine vessels and suggested that the navy might purchase or build an additional eleven. This of course seems to contradict Upshur's statements denying plans to increase the fleet, as the estimates in the article were drawn from reports submitted to Congress, presumably by the Navy Department. To complicate matters more, Upshur authorized each of the yards to design and construct a sloop. He did this ahead of any authorization from Congress with the idea of fostering competition and promoting design improvements. Of course construction of new vessels was a long process and none would be ready for service for some time after the squadron

assigned two smaller vessels to the squadron: a second sloop, and a small brig. At 566 tons, US sloop *Decatur* was somewhat smaller than *Saratoga*. She carried a complement of 150 men and sixteen guns. Fifty-year-old Commander Joel Abbott of Rhode Island was placed in command. And instead of the three brigs or schooners that he had originally planned, Upshur only assigned one: USS *Porpoise*, a 224-ton brig that carried eighty men and ten guns.

Porpoise was the first vessel to sail for Africa; she left New York in early February under the command of Lieut. Arthur Lewis. She reached the West African coast in late April and visited Monrovia in early May. *Saratoga*'s departure was delayed. She was caught in a bad storm off the coast of New England and her crew had been forced to cut away her masts. She had to be towed back to port and repaired.⁹⁶ *Macedonian* did not receive her assignment until early March and it took some months before she was fitted out and ready to sail.⁹⁷ *Decatur*, which had only just returned from service with the Brazil squadron, was the last vessel assigned to the squadron, and the last to sail for Africa.⁹⁸

Upshur's orders to Perry explained the government's policy in careful detail. The orders covered two main subjects: the protection of American commerce and the suppression of the slave trade.⁹⁹ Historians have observed that these orders appear to contradict article eight of the Webster-Ashburton treaty, and have concluded that Upshur abused his position and thwarted the squadron's mission to suppress the slave trade. But these orders did not contradict article eight, in fact Upshur included a copy of the treaty with the orders and directed Perry to follow it carefully. Rather than contradicting the squadron's intended purpose, Upshur's orders were designed to implement the policy objectives that he and Tyler had been consistently advocating since first proposing the squadron in 1841.¹⁰⁰

sailed. Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur, Conservative Virginian, 1790-1844*, 172. But none of these suppositions takes into account that the limited size of the navy and the treaty requirement to supply a sufficient force combined with the navy's limited budget dominated the choice of ship assignments.

⁹⁶ *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 23 March 1843; *Niles' National Register*, 25 March 1843; Horatio Bridge, "The Wreck of the *Saratoga*, 1843," mss., Horatio Bridge Papers, M18, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, ME. For details of the *Saratoga*'s cruise as a part of the Africa squadron see: Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*.

⁹⁷ *Niles' National Register*, 15 April 1843, 98.

⁹⁸ U.S. Navy Department, "Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships."

⁹⁹ Abel P. Upshur to Matthew C. Perry, 30 March 1843, NASPNA-DA, vol. 2, no. 206, 381-385.

¹⁰⁰ For example, Booth mistakenly argues that Upshur "immediately changed the primary goal of the African Squadron from the suppression of the slave trade to the protection and fostering of American commerce on the coast." Booth, 89. In a similar interpretation, Canney writes that Upshur "turned the purpose of the squadron on its head." Canney, 57. This interpretation, a result of misreading the treaty and ignoring events and policy preceding the formation of the

Upshur made it clear to Perry that the squadron's "chief purpose" was to protect American commerce. During peacetime, the navy's primary responsibility was to protect Americans and their interests and this squadron was no exception. Upshur had consistently argued that the United States needed an Africa squadron to protect and foster American commerce in West Africa, and he instructed Perry accordingly. He ordered Perry to afford to American commerce "all the aid and support which it may require," explaining that, "the rights of our citizens engaged in lawful commerce are under the protection of our flag, and it is the chief purpose, as well as the chief duty of our naval power, to see that these rights are not improperly abridged or invaded."¹⁰¹

Upshur could not predict the specific circumstances that Perry might encounter on the coast, he could only give general orders that made the government's policy and priorities clear. For example, Upshur specifically authorized Perry to use force to protect Americans' interests. He wrote, "the department relies with full confidence on your judgment and discretion, so to employ the force under your command as to protect the rights and interests of your own countrymen, without violating those of any other people, and therefore deems it unnecessary, as indeed it would be almost impossible, to give you specific instructions upon the subject."¹⁰² Perry was free to use whatever lawful means he deemed necessary in order to protect Americans' interests, within the general framework of U.S. policy.

Upshur also instructed Perry on dealing with the slave trade. Referring to it as "the other branch of your duties," Upshur made it clear to Perry that enforcing U.S. laws against that trade was an important, but secondary, mission for the squadron. He explained that the United States was "sincerely desirous wholly to suppress this iniquitous traffic," but again he emphasized the importance of following the government's policy closely. He provided Perry with a copy of the Webster-Ashburton treaty and stressed that Perry should strictly observe the relevant terms of the treaty, "preserving inviolate the pledged faith" of the United States.¹⁰³

squadron, mistakenly places too much responsibility on Upshur and consequently blames him for the squadron's failure to achieve its supposed purpose of suppressing the slave trade.

¹⁰¹ Abel P. Upshur to Matthew C. Perry, 30 March 1843, NASPNA-DA, vol. 2, no. 206, 381-385.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

A strict reading of article eight made it clear that the squadron was responsible for enforcing U.S. law against the slave trade, not suppressing that trade altogether.

Upshur offered Perry some suggestions to help clarify the government's position on this delicate subject. His first suggestion included an exposition of the right of search; the United States, Upshur reminded Perry, denied any such right. He lectured Perry on international law, explaining that in cases of suspected piracy, the general law of nations allowed officers of one nation to visit the ships of another nation "for the purposes of ascertaining their true character," but he stipulated that in such cases, there must be probable cause to justify such a visit, and that the visit must be made in good faith and limited to that one purpose.¹⁰⁴

Upshur then went on to explain that the United States recognized different types of piracy: international piracy as defined by the law of nations and domestic piracy as defined by individual nations. Although the United States and a few other countries had declared the slave trade to be piracy, these declarations were merely domestic laws; the slave trade had yet to be recognized as piracy under the law of nations. According to Upshur, this right of visit was limited to crimes designated as piracy under the law of nations, and therefore the United States did not admit any right of search or visit of suspected slavers flying the American flag because, as such, they were only allegedly violating the domestic laws of the United States and only the United States had the right to enforce those laws.¹⁰⁵

The only question that presented any difficulty, as far as Upshur could see, was how to determine if suspected vessels were in fact American. On the one hand, a flag should be respected and men should be given the benefit of the doubt, but on the other hand, criminal abuse of the flag weakened the power and value of these emblems. He reasoned that, "the flag which the vessel wears is *prima facie*. Although it is not conclusive proof of her nationality; it is a mere emblem, and it loses its true character when it is worn by those who have no right to wear it."¹⁰⁶ Upshur concluded that vessels suspected of participation in the slave trade should be inspected and required to present identification papers proving its right

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

to fly a given flag. But because the suspected crime was slaving, a domestic crime, the United States was solely responsible for policing vessels flying its flag. The United States would continue to consider the flag as *prima facie* evidence of nationality and therefore it insisted that other nations do the same, except in cases of piracy as defined by international law.

The United States also recognized the potential for abuse of its flag and the consequent damage that abuse caused to the flag's power, therefore the government would actively take responsibility for inspecting those vessels suspected of slaving while sailing under the American flag. As Upshur explained, "The United States certainly do not claim that the mere hoisting of their flag shall give immunity to those who have no right to wear it; such a pretension would subject their flag to degradation and dishonor, because it would make it a cover for piracy and other crimes of similar atrocity; but they *do* claim that their own citizens who rightfully display it shall have all the protection which it implies."¹⁰⁷ The U.S. Africa squadron would inspect vessels flying the U.S. flag and determine if they had the legitimate right to hoist those colors. This policy would enforce U.S. law against the slave trade and preserve the honor and value of the American flag without weakening the principles of international law or compromising citizens' rights.

Just because the U.S. government's primary concern was to protect Americans' rights and property did not mean that the government was indifferent to, or supportive of, the slave trade. The administration sincerely disliked the slave trade and wanted the squadron to enforce U.S. law against it. Upshur tried to help Perry carry out that duty by providing him with carefully researched advice on identifying and capturing slavers. He recognized that slavers were "constantly devising new disguises and schemes of deception" to elude detection and avoid capture. Because slavers often disguised themselves as honest traders, Upshur recognized that finding proof of slave trading on board a ship before it loaded a cargo of slaves was difficult. He advised Perry to study the slavers' tricks and to rely on informants for the latest information. He supplied Perry with a list of warning signs to help him identify slavers, including: vessels carrying double sets of papers and vessels with unusual preparations or

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

excessive provisions for their ostensible purpose, but more importantly, he advised Perry to investigate the coast for himself by communicating with the U.S. agents, colonies, and other reliable sources for the latest information.¹⁰⁸ The government did not have a great deal of information about West Africa or the slave trade, the more that Perry could learn about these subjects, the more effective the squadron would be.

Upshur also directed Perry to examine suspected ships' logs closely, and to question their officers carefully. Slavers, he warned, kept false logs describing a course that would not draw suspicion. Upshur suggested that American officers could detect this fraud by carefully questioning suspects about their vessel's course. All papers, he advised, should be inspected. The shipping list, which contained a roster of the crew with information about their nationality and wages, might also reveal clues. For example, he suggested that higher wages were suspicious because slavers were obliged to pay more to compensate for the increased dangers of their voyages. Upshur did not pretend to school Perry in the ways of slavers, he simply suggested examples. "Nothing but the utmost vigilance," he wrote, "will enable you to detect them. I have no doubt that your own observation and sagacity will soon discover other contrivances for deceiving and escaping you, and I have as little doubt that you will apply, promptly and effectually, the requisite means of defeating all such attempts."¹⁰⁹ It would be an embarrassment to the service if such despised criminals were able to outwit the U.S. navy.

Upshur reminded Perry that this mission required the "greatest prudence and the soundest discretion." Most importantly, Perry should remember the government's policy and its priorities. "It is to be borne in mind," Upshur wrote, "that while the United States sincerely desire the suppression of the slave trade, and design to exert their power in good faith for the accomplishment of that object, [they] do not regard the success of their efforts as their paramount interest nor as their paramount duty." The United States would not sacrifice any rights as an independent nation nor subject its citizens to "injurious and vexatious interruptions in the prosecution of their lawful pursuits." Although the United States despised the slave trade and sincerely wanted American slavers to be captured and punished (if any

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

really existed) the government would not sacrifice its rights or unduly inconvenience law-abiding citizens in the process. “While, therefore,” Upshur wrote, “the utmost vigilance is to be exacted to detect slave traders, great care must be taken not unnecessarily to interrupt the citizens, whether of our own or of other countries, in their lawful pursuits.” The United States wanted the squadron to police American involvement in the slave trade with caution and restraint so that the crimes of a few did not inconvenience the many.¹¹⁰

Upshur carefully crafted these orders to convey the subtleties of the government’s policy.¹¹¹ Although he never mentioned the *Mary Carver*, and he did not explicitly command Perry to punish Africans for attacks against Americans, he did make it clear that the squadron’s “chief purpose” was to protect American commerce, and he gave Perry full authority to use force if he chose. Upshur left Perry free to determine the best course of action to accomplish this mission. But these orders did make it implicitly clear to Perry that investigating the *Mary Carver* attack and punishing the culprits was an important part of his mission to protect American commerce and restore honor to the American flag in West Africa. By now, the *Mary Carver* had come to symbolize the unprotected American in West Africa, and by avenging her, the squadron could demonstrate its value to the nation.

Matthew C. Perry, Squadron Commander

Perry received his orders in early April and began making preparations to sail for West Africa as soon as possible.¹¹² Perry had a clear idea of how he wanted his squadron organized. His first concern was to protect his men’s health and this consideration informed all of his preparations. In addition to health concerns, Perry also tried to organize the squadron to perform as many of its duties in the most effective way possible. He made recommendations to the department regarding vessels, provisions, and personnel. But unfortunately, larger concerns, including politics, budget constraints, and the logistical difficulties of establishing a

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Schroeder mentions that Congressman John Quincy Adams scrutinized and approved of the orders. Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry : Antebellum Sailor and Diplomat*, 98.

¹¹² Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 6 April 1843, reprinted in: U.S. President and Matthew Calbraith Perry, *Message from the President of the United States, in Compliance with a Resolution of the Senate, Communicating Information Relative to the Operations of the United States Squadron on the West Coast of Africa; the Condition of the American Colonies There, and the Commerce of the United States Therewith*, 28 Cong., 2 sess., 1845. S. Doc. 150, 3.

new station in a remote part of the world with few established services meant that many of Perry's recommendations were impractical, expensive, and premature.

Perry asked the navy to assign small vessels to his squadron. He argued that these would be most useful for patrolling for slavers, navigating smaller ports, and performing reconnaissance. He suggested that smaller vessels like the USS *Phoenix* would be especially useful on the Pongo and Nuñez Rivers, "to which numerous American trading vessels annually resort whose interest requires to be looked after."¹¹³ Perry's reasoning was logical but impractical for the squadron's overall mission. Smaller vessels carried few guns and had little room for men or supplies. They were not likely to impress Africans or British naval officers, and they would not be able to make long, unsupported cruises along the expansive African coastline. The United States intended its squadron to deter Europeans and Africans from abusing Americans, larger ships were better suited to this purpose and the United States simply just had more of these larger vessels available.

Porpoise was already on the coast and Perry wanted her to serve as a scout or reconnaissance vessel, gathering information that would help the squadron perform its various duties. Perry ordered Lieutenant Lewis to cruise the coast with "a view to the protection of lawful commerce," and "the suppression of the slave trade," and he instructed Lewis to stop at the different settlements to gather information.¹¹⁴

After the men's health, Perry's main concern was punishing the Africans responsible for the *Mary Carver* attack. He sent a letter of introduction to Cape Palmas, explaining: "It will be one of my first duties to chastise in some manner the perpetrators of the massacre of the master and crew of the schooner *Mary Carver* in April of the last year." He asked for the governor's assistance, writing, "I shall therefore be obliged if you will use every possible means of ascertaining the names of the ringleaders in the massacre, their places of residence and any particulars connected with their movements in order that we may take them by surprise."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 6 April 1843, reprinted in: S. Doc. 150.

¹¹⁴ Matthew C. Perry to Arthur Lewis, 17 April 1843, MCP Letter Books.

¹¹⁵ Matthew C. Perry to the Governor or person in charge of the American Colony at Cape Palmas, 17 April 1843, MCP Letter Books.

Perry was contemplating a plan to surprise the people at Little Berriby and he cautioned the governor to use discretion when making inquiries.

Perry and Upshur were anxious that he should sail for West Africa as soon as possible. The latest news from the coast suggested that conditions were deteriorating for the Americans there. At the end of March, the *Liberia Herald* reported that “trading along the coast is becoming more and more dangerous, and it behooves all masters at every point where they touch to be prepared for prompt and vigorous resistance.” It was starting to look like protecting American commerce in West Africa would require more than just showing the flag. Feeling abused and cheated by white men, some Africans were growing increasingly indignant and violent. The *Herald* noted that “many instances are in our recollection in which [Africans] were most villainously treated – abused in their person, and robbed of their property when for the purpose of trade they commended themselves to the power of the white man.”¹¹⁶ Some white men pretended to trade, only to lure Africans into vulnerable positions and rob them of their goods. The coast seemed to be degenerating into a lawless world characterized by abuse and retribution traded back and forth between merchants and natives; the sooner Perry arrived, the sooner the situation could be contained and defused.

Saratoga’s repairs were completed and she finally arrived at New York in early May. Upshur pressured Perry to set sail for Africa, but Perry could not get under way because the sloop was still short twenty-five seamen and the arrangements for her armaments and fittings were incomplete. To make up the crew, Perry requested special permission to ship black seaman, suggesting that “this class of men are more enduring in hot climates, and are very serviceable to act as Holders and crews for the launches.” This reasoning may have helped to justify granting an exception to the navy’s general prohibition against black sailors, but the reality was that Perry needed the men. He explained, “The permission to ship Blacks for the *Saratoga* would facilitate the completion of the complement of her crew.” Upshur authorized

¹¹⁶ *Liberia Herald*, 31 March 1843.

him to take on fifteen to twenty black seamen and *Saratoga* finally sailed for Africa on June 5th.¹¹⁷

American Merchantmen in West Africa

While Upshur and Perry hurried to organize the new squadron, new information arrived from West Africa describing the growing need for a squadron on that coast. American merchants reported their troubles with Africans to officials and the press at Monrovia, who in turn relayed the news back to the United States. In addition to the latest news of the *Mary Carver* and *Atalanta* cases, a third case, involving the American brig *Edward Burley*, came to light.

Captain Syms of the bark *Rhoderick Dhu* arrived at Monrovia at the end of February 1843 and sent a letter to the new U.S. agent there, Dr. J. Lawrence Day, reporting that his Little Berriby prisoner had escaped. Defending his actions, Syms explained that he had left the prisoner at Cape Coast Castle expecting *Vandalia* to visit that place sometime during the autumn of 1842. When Syms returned to the fort months later, he was disappointed to learn that *Vandalia* had never visited the place.¹¹⁸ Syms complained to Day that *Vandalia*'s captain had known of the prisoner, and yet the cruiser had sat anchored at Cape Palmas for three weeks doing nothing. He wrote, "I certainly thought, as many others did, that the United States Ship *Vandalia*, would have gone to Cape Coast for the man, but she has been like the rest of American men of war that have visited this coast, stop a few days at one or two places where they can do no good and then go off."¹¹⁹ Syms was indignant, he continued:

The natives here are less afraid of American vessels than any others. They say that if Americans are a large people, and have ships of war, why did they not kill Craco (the king of Half Bereby people) and burn this town – if it had been an English vessel, they would have done it. And so they would – and so it was expected that the *Vandalia* would have done *something*.

Realizing that no American vessel would appear in the near future, the British authorities had suggested that Syms transfer the prisoner to the custody of the Liberian authorities.

¹¹⁷ Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 11, 16 May, 1843, Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from commanding officers of squadrons, 1841-1886, NARA RG 45 M89 Roll 101; "Naval Intelligence," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 8 June 1843.

¹¹⁸ R. T. Syms to J. L. Day, 27 February 1843, *Liberia Herald*, 31 March 1843.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Responsible for the expense of holding the prisoner, Syms had agreed, took custody of the prisoner, and sailed from Cape Coast Castle on January 16th.

The *Rhoderick Dhu* made a slow and tedious passage to Monrovia. She was not equipped to hold prisoners and Syms could not spare the men necessary to stand guard around the clock. Instead, he had left the prisoner on deck with his hands bound in irons. One night, while *Rhoderick Dhu* was becalmed off the coast, the prisoner jumped overboard and swam some four miles to shore. Syms later learned that the man had made it to shore alive and that there had been "great feasting and rejoicing in his and all the neighboring towns" upon his return. Syms blamed *Vandalia* for the failure.¹²⁰ The *Liberia Herald* printed Syms' letter on March 31st, along with: a letter from an English captain reporting that he had narrowly escaped a native plot against him at Grand Berriby, a report of a native attack against Liberia's trading cutter, and a report of a deadly attack on the American merchantman *Edward Burley*. The coast of West Africa seemed to be turning into a very dangerous place for unprotected merchantmen and Syms had every reason to write that he was "hoping that we shall have soon some permanent protection of this coast."¹²¹

Although the attack on the *Edward Burley* happened within the sphere of colonial territory, Captain Burke and the bark did not arrive at Monrovia until a month after the incident. As soon as he did, Dr. Day wrote to Secretary Webster, reporting the news that two crewmen from the American merchantman *Edward Burley* had been killed by Africans at Blue Barre, near Sinoe.¹²² Burke only stayed at Monrovia for two days before setting sail for the United States. When the *Edward Burley* returned to Massachusetts in July, Burke told the *Salem Register* that the ship's mate and cook had gone ashore at the town of Blue Barre to settle some business when the locals had seized them both and killed the cook John Freeman.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ *Liberia Herald*, 31 March 1843.

¹²² Webster's tenure as secretary of state was coming to an end and the letter ended up in Perry's hands. Perry sent a reply to Day when he reached Liberia in August. Matthew C. Perry to J. Lawrence Day, 3 August 1843, MCP Letter Books. The *Edward Burley* was a small schooner of eighty-seven tons, built in Essex, Massachusetts in 1839. Her two owners, John C. Gallop and Thomas Burke, Jr. of Beverly, Massachusetts registered her there in 1840. Early in 1842, Captain Gallop sailed his vessel to West Africa for a lengthy trading voyage, arriving at Monrovia, Liberia on February 9th. Within the week she sailed for the leeward. Nothing much was heard of her until April 1843. *Liberia Herald*, 24 February 1842; A. Frank Hitchings, Stephen Willard Phillips, and Institute Essex, *Ship Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts, 1789-1900*(Salem, Mass.: Essex Institute, 1906).

The mate, Henry Glading, had escaped with the help of a Krooman, and spent the night at a nearby colonial settlement. But the next morning, when Glading had tried to return to the *Edward Burley* in a canoe, the attackers caught up with him and he was never heard from again.¹²³

Burke claimed that he had fled Blue Barre after discovering the Africans' plot to murder his crew and take possession of his ship. Making the obvious connection, the *Register* suggested:

The place where this affair happened is near where the 'Mary Carver,' of Plymouth, was cut off, and her crew massacred two or three years since. The natives are said to be a fierce, cannibal-like race, and well fitted for treachery of this kind.

The article concluded with the admonishment that "the African squadron must keep a sharp look out upon these fellows."¹²⁴ Newspapers across the country reprinted this article; it seemed to confirm the public's fear that Africans along the coast were bloodthirsty savages just waiting to rob and massacre Americans. Publicized just after Perry sailed for Africa, Burke's story helped to further justify the government's decision to send a squadron to Africa.

Conclusion

The political possibility of creating a U.S. Africa squadron completely changed over the course of 1842. Upshur's initial proposal for a squadron fell on deaf ears in the winter of 1841 but the opening of treaty talks with Britain in the spring of 1842 transformed Upshur's squadron proposal into a possibility. With the support of John Tyler and Daniel Webster, the Webster-Ashburton treaty made the squadron a serious subject of debate in Congress. The ACS convention and other colonization efforts helped promote the idea in Washington and other parts of the country. And the *Mary Carver* affair helped to finally make the squadron a reality by convincing Congress and the American people that West African savages threatened American commercial interests.

¹²³ *Liberia Herald*, 3 May 1843.

¹²⁴ *Boston Courier*, 13 July 1843; "Latest from Africa," *African Repository*, August 1843, 15.

Upshur, merchants, colonizationists, and missionaries used the attack on the *Mary Carver* to create the specter of a new and dangerous enemy to American interests – the savage African. They held up the attack as just one example of the growing threat that Africans posed to Americans' honor, and their commercial and philanthropic interests in West Africa. Americans readily believed these stories and never questioned the innocence of the *Mary Carver*'s captain Eben Farwell or of the others who made similar claims to have been threatened or abused by Africans. Instead, Americans wanted their navy to punish those savages responsible for their countryman's death; the need for the proposed Africa squadron began to seem more real and immediate.

The *Mary Carver* story helped increase public support for the Africa squadron and by the spring of 1843 that squadron finally became a reality. As the navy organized and dispatched its new squadron, the latest news from West Africa seemed to confirm the decision to create the squadron. Reports of additional attacks against Americans, the *Vandalia*'s failure, and the embarrassment of the *Rhoderick Dhu* all helped to fuel Americans' desire to show their flag in West Africa. These events appeared to confirm the belief that the United States needed to maintain at least a small naval presence on that coast in order to defend its honor, punish savage insults, and command respect for Americans abroad. When Americans finally accepted the idea and expense of the squadron, they did so because they wanted to protect their rights and interests, defend their honor, and avenge their countrymen. Although the president and his cabinet understood that Britain continued to threaten Americans in West Africa, they needed the threat of African savages to convince the people to support a squadron and they used the *Mary Carver* affair to serve that purpose.

CHAPTER 8

THE AFRICA SQUADRON PART I: PALAVERS

Matthew Perry sailed for West Africa in June of 1843 on board his temporary flagship *Saratoga*; *Porpoise* was already on the coast and the other two squadron vessels, *Macedonian* and *Decatur*, were preparing to follow as soon as possible. The U.S. Africa squadron was finally a reality, but a lot of difficult work lay ahead. The government had assigned Perry several important responsibilities, including protecting American rights and commercial interests and policing American involvement in the slave trade, but it provided him with limited resources to perform these duties. The United States had very little knowledge of the West African coast and no infrastructure in place to support a squadron. The only American outposts in the region were the small Liberian settlements scattered along the coast, and these were ill-equipped to provide the services that even a relatively small naval squadron required.

This chapter examines the first six months of Perry's command and argues that despite significant obstacles, Perry managed to establish a new station and accomplish his initial primary objectives with the best possible results that Americans could have expected under the circumstances.¹ Perry began his service on the Africa station by addressing three main issues: logistics, information and reconnaissance, and palavers. Logistically, he needed to find sources for supplies, provisions, and currency, and he needed to establish a supply depot and base of operations for his squadron. But the squadron had little information about the vast territory within its cruising ground, and before he could make any definite plans Perry needed to gather the most current information available on a variety of subjects including: exchange rates, potential locations for purchasing foodstuffs, climate and weather, sailing conditions, and

¹ This interpretation and conclusion challenges certain historians who criticize Perry or certain policies that he supported, particularly his decision to base squadron operations at the Cape Verde Islands and allot time and resources for squadron vessels to sail back and forth between the coast and these islands. For examples see: Fehrenbacher and McAfee, 174; Spears, *The American Slave-Trade : An Account of Its Origin, Growth and Suppression*, 155; Wright, 98-99.

current legitimate and slave trading practices. He also needed to investigate the *Mary Carver* incident and the other reported cases of African attacks against Americans before he could make any plans to palaver or parley with the accused natives. The lack of any American diplomatic agents in the region made performing these tasks more difficult and time consuming for Perry and his staff.

This chapter tells the story of the squadron's first six months on the African station. The first section describes the initial months, during which Perry focused on logistics. The remaining squadron vessels reached the base in the Cape Verdes in September and were ready to sail for the coast within a month. The second section follows Perry as he planned his response to the *Mary Carver* attack and other similar cases. The squadron rendezvoused at Monrovia in mid-November, by which time plans for the palavers were in place. And the third section follows the squadron as it proceeded down the coast, settling one dispute after another. It stopped at Sinoe to hear the *Edward Burley* case, Settra Kroo to settle the *Atalanta* matter, at Cape Palmas where Perry moderated between the Grebo, the colony, and the missions, and then finally at Little Berriby to avenge the *Mary Carver*. By the end of the year, the squadron had resolved all of these matters to Perry's satisfaction, formed a treaty with African villages all along the coast, and then returned to its base at the Cape Verde Islands. Although Perry still had numerous responsibilities to fulfill, he ended the year feeling confident and relieved; the squadron had successfully concluded its most pressing business, and his men had survived with very little injury to their person or their health. Perry could not have reasonably asked for a better outcome.

Setting Up a Squadron Base

Saratoga set sail from New York in early June and reached Santa Cruz, Tenerife, one of the Canary Islands off the coast of Northwest Africa, in less than three weeks. Quarantined for a week, Perry ordered the ship's hold broken out, thoroughly cleaned, and re-stowed. *Saratoga's* crew was already experiencing considerable sickness and Perry blamed exposure and dampness; he reasoned that the ship needed to be cleaned and dried out in order to protect

their health.² When Tenerife officials lifted the quarantine, Perry sent officers ashore to collect information about the island, including: currency exchange rates, tariffs, labor rates, warehouses, and commodities prices. Dissatisfied with their findings, Perry ordered *Saratoga* to sail for the Cape Verde Islands, some thousand miles to the south.

Perry was looking for a place to establish a supply depot that would afford facilities for refreshment and resupply and a place to cash drafts at reasonable rates. Finding a safe and convenient place to house provisions and stores for the squadron was not easy. Initially, Perry wanted to set up the squadron's base of operations on land, but he struggled to find any suitable place. He began to think that it would be more expedient and economical for the squadron to rely on a regular storeship instead. A storeship, Perry reasoned, would give him greater control over the squadron's goods and its men, it would save the cost of customs duties and storage fees on land, it would allow the squadron greater flexibility, and it would reduce the squadron's contact with the various dangers lurking on shore. Perry believed that both the goods and the men would be better preserved if kept on board a ship and away from the ravenous insects and debilitating air that blanketed the shore. Soon after arriving in West Africa, Perry wrote to the Navy Department requesting a storeship: "I am more and more impressed with the expediency of having a storeship permanently attached to this squadron, to serve as well for the stowage of provisions, stores, and munitions, as for the accommodation of the sick and convalescent of the several vessels."³ In the meantime, he still needed to organize a base of operations on land and he chose Porto Praia in the Cape Verde Islands as the best available option.

While Perry was busy arranging squadron business at Porto Praia he received some distressing news about *Porpoise*. The brig was reported to be cruising along the coast according to Perry's orders, but her captain, Lieutenant Lewis, had abandoned the vessel and another officer's command. There had been trouble on board *Porpoise*; in early June, while

² Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 29 June 1843, Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from commanding officers of squadrons, 1841-1886, NARA RG 45 M89 Roll 101.

³ A storeship that could double as a hospital would be safer and more economical than private medical services on land, and by confining sick men on board a ship Perry could maintain closer control over his men and enforce discipline. He noted that even sick men could not "be easily kept from indulging in drunken and other vicious practices, tending rather to aggravate than to cure their complaints." Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 21 July 1843, S. Doc. 150, 8.

anchored at Porto Praia, Acting Master M. C. Watkins had sent a report to the Navy Department accusing Lieutenant Lewis of “outrageous conduct.”⁴ Afraid of the consequences, Lewis had abandoned *Porpoise* and returned to the United States.

Watkins reported that Lewis’s behavior while in command of *Porpoise* was a disgrace to the navy, and accused him of “acts of outrageous drunkenness, utter disregard for the truth, total want of veracity, unofficerlike, ungentlemanly and scandalous conduct exhibited on so many occasions.” Lewis habitually drank alone in his cabin and frequented grog shops when in port. Watkins accused him of being degradingly drunk at anchor, at sea, and in the presence of foreign officers on shore. According to Watkins, Lewis’s drinking frequently caused him to be completely “incapacitated” and “to endanger the lives of the men.” One night, Lewis was found passed out naked on the cabin floor. He stole bread from the storeship, admitted that “he would say anything for his own purposes,” and made a habit of calling the officers “sons of bitches” and “using the most disrespectful language to the junior officers of their superiors.” In short, Watkins accused Lewis of being a complete drunkard and totally unfit for command.⁵

When he learned of Watkins’ report, Lewis decided to abandon his command and return to the United States to plead his case in person. Before he left, Lewis asked *Porpoise*’s officers to sign a letter for him; it expressed their general sympathy for him and concluded that they would all be sincerely pleased if the navy should grant Lewis’s request to be discharged with a pension. Six officers, including the new temporary captain, First Lieut. Henry Stellwagen, and Acting Master Watkins, signed the note.⁶ With the letter in hand, Lewis sailed for the United States on the merchantman *Rienzi*, leaving Stellwagen in command of *Porpoise*.

When Perry arrived at Porto Praia he received letters from *Porpoise*’s officers reporting that Lewis had left because, as they explained, he was conscious of the justice of Watkins’ report and hoped to escape the “consequences of his misconduct, by throwing himself upon the

⁴ M. C. Watkins to Abel P. Upshur, 1 June 1843, Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from commanding officers of squadrons, 1841-1886, NARA RG 45 M89 Roll 101.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Officers of the *Porpoise* to Arthur Lewis, June 1843, Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from commanding officers of squadrons, 1841-1886, NARA RG 45 M89 Roll 101.

mercy of the President of the United States.” *Porpoise*’s officers affirmed the truth of Watkins’ accusations and reported witnessing various incriminating incidents. Lieut. George Selden described Lewis’s conduct as “anything but creditable to the commander of a US vessel of war.”⁷ Perry was “pained and mortified” by this news. He reported to Upshur: “from what I have already learned, Lieutenant Lewis will find it difficult to establish the least shadow of justification for the unfortunate step taken by him.”⁸ Perry was anxious to meet with *Porpoise* in person and he ordered *Saratoga* to sail for the coast.⁹ Before he could do anything else, he needed to assess the situation on board *Porpoise* for himself.¹⁰

Perry’s First Visit to the Coast

When *Saratoga* arrived at Monrovia on August 1st, Perry found *Porpoise* at anchor. He questioned her officers and decided to leave Stellwagen in command for the time being, at least until the entire squadron arrived on the station. He issued new orders, instructing his officers on how to deal with their British counterparts and the slave trade, and he collected information about the colonies, trade, and Americans in the area.

Perry reminded his officers never to permit a British officer the right to search or visit an American vessel, and he forbade British officers from boarding any vessel flying the American flag without his personal permission. But Perry did not mean to allow the American flag to protect criminal acts. He ordered his officers to “use every vigilance in examining” suspicious American vessels; those found to be flying the flag without authorization, but having no other cause to be detained by the United States, were to be reported to any vessel of war in sight.¹¹ U.S. officers would take all responsibility for verifying a vessel’s right to fly the

⁷ Individual letters from *Porpoise* officers Henry Stellwagen, G. W. Chapman, Robert Pettit, George Maulsby, George Selden, and M. C. Watkins to Matthew C. Perry, 3 August 1843, Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from commanding officers of squadrons, 1841-1886, NARA RG 45 M89 Roll 101.

⁸ Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 22 July 1843, S. Doc. 150, 9.

⁹ The department furloughed Lewis immediately after he arrived in the United States. *Daily National Intelligencer*, 13 July 1843.

¹⁰ Perry was particularly sensitive about the subject of order and discipline amongst the officers and men serving in his squadron. The first mutiny in the history of the U.S. Navy had recently taken place on board USS Somers, and Perry’s friend, Somers’ captain, Alexander Mackenzie was currently being tried for his efforts to suppress that mutiny. Perry was connected with the Somers case in a number of ways and consequently he was especially sensitive to any hint of disorder or insubordination amongst the men under his command.

¹¹ Matthew C. Perry to Commanders of U.S. vessels of war attached to the African Squadron, 1 August 1843, S. Doc. 150, 11.

American flag. And those that were found, by Americans, to have no right to fly that flag would lose the protection it afforded.

In keeping with the Navy Department's orders, Perry emphasized protocol over results; the means mattered more than the ends. He instructed his officers to use "the utmost suavity of deportment" when boarding and inspecting vessels, never to detain anyone longer than necessary, and to conciliate citizens with "politeness and tenders of service."¹² When dealing with the British, he cautioned his officers to maintain professional conduct at all times. Perry doubted that the British would cause any trouble, but if they did attempt to "enforce their imperious claim" Perry wanted his own men to respond appropriately. It was important to him that the department should approve of the squadron's actions and that his men's conduct remained above reproach, especially after the Lewis embarrassment. He wrote to Upshur: "I trust there will be no vessel under my command, whatever may be her force as compared with her opponent, that will do discredit to the service to which she belongs."¹³

After reassuring himself about the conditions on board *Porpoise*, Perry spent several days at Monrovia making inquiries about the state of the colonies, the slave trade, American merchants, and relations with the natives. Collecting information was a necessity; he could not make plans to carry out his many duties until he knew more about the coast. His initial inquiries led him to believe that slavers had stopped abusing the American flag. He reported: "So far as I can learn, by diligent inquiry, the American flag has not been used, within two years, on this part of the coast, by any vessel engaged in the slave trade." Colonial officials were his primary informants and their priorities had changed since Buchanan's time; they were now more concerned about problems with their European rivals and their African neighbors than they were about the slave trade. Russwurm wrote to Perry: "We know of no instance of the slave trade being carried on under the United States flag on this part of the coast for the last three years."¹⁴ Still, Perry reserved his final judgement on the question, noted that he

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 4 August 1843, S. Doc. 150, 10.

¹⁴ John B. Russwurm to Matthew C. Perry, 10 July 1843, S. Doc. 150, 40-41.

would know more after spending some time on the coast, and instructed his officers to “use every vigilance in examining” suspicious American vessels.¹⁵

Dealing with colonial affairs, on the other hand, was more complicated. Perry was unsure of how much assistance to offer the Liberians. When he learned that the colony was having trouble collecting duties from foreign merchantmen he hesitated to get involved. He knew that he could help the colonists, but the squadron’s interference might complicate matters. The dispute between Britain and Liberia raised difficult questions about private colonies and their territorial rights. If Perry interfered he would be doing so as an official representative of the U.S. government and his actions might have political or diplomatic consequences. If his actions appeared to suggest that the United States was accepting responsibility for Liberia as an American colony there was a good chance that the U.S. government would repudiate his efforts, and that could potentially cause more harm than good to the colonies, not to mention to the squadron’s reputation. Perry was certainly more careful than Ramsay in his dealings with the colonies.

Upshur had given Perry vague instructions on how to deal with the Liberian colonies and Perry prudently wrote to the department asking for clarification of his orders and for specific instructions in this case. He recommended that “it would certainly add very much to the stability and prosperity of the settlements if the citizens were recognized as being under the unequivocal protection of American laws,” but he was not willing to take responsibility for making that decision.¹⁶ Upshur had promised Latrobe that the squadron’s cruisers would “extend whatever countenance & support they may lawfully afford to the Colony of Liberia,” but Perry knew that the United States drew a line between support and interference and he wanted Upshur to clarify exactly where that line was. Perry wanted to offer Liberia all possible support and he suggested that the United States should recognize the colonies as a

¹⁵ Matthew C. Perry to Commanders of U.S. vessels of war attached to the African Squadron, 1 August 1843, S. Doc. 150, 11.

¹⁶ Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 3 August 1843, Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from commanding officers of squadrons, 1841-1886, NARA RG 45 M89 Roll 101. The same letter No. 10 is dated 4 August 1843 in S. Doc. 150, 11-12.

protectorate, but he doubted that it would.¹⁷ Perry did not want to take the chance of contradicting the government's wishes and opening himself or his squadron to criticism or reprimand.

While he waited for specific instructions, Perry decided to "hold out merely the appearance of a recognition of these settlements as belonging to the United States," though he promised to carefully avoid taking any step "which may be construed into a deviation from the settled policy of the nation not to hold colonies abroad."¹⁸ Perry chose to handle the colonial question with caution, as he did with most of the issues that he faced as commander of the Africa squadron. A cautious man, Perry wanted the squadron to perform its duties with honor and to maintain the respect and support of the government and the American people.

Inquiries & Planning

While he was on the coast, Perry worked on his plans to resolve the *Mary Carver* and *Edward Burley* affairs. The people of Sinoe were particularly anxious to settle the *Edward Burley* matter. When Perry arrived at Monrovia, he found their envoy waiting for him with an invitation to meet at Sinoe and settle the affair as soon as possible.¹⁹ Perry consulted Governor Roberts about the case.

Roberts' account of the *Edward Burley* incident differed substantially from the story that Captain Burke had told the *Salem Register*. Roberts described Burke's movements on the coast as "very strange," and even suspicious. He blamed Burke for the deaths of the *Edward Burley*'s mate and cook, and denounced him for abandoning two wounded men on the coast without any money or means of support. Roberts explained that Burke had employed a Fishman called Jack Dandy as a trader, and that sometime the previous November, Jack Dandy had run off with ten or fifteen pounds of tobacco that Burke had advanced him. The next time that Burke called at Sinoe he spent two or three days conducting business with the locals, and then just as he was preparing to leave, Burke had "incautiously remarked to some that he did

¹⁷ Abel P. Upshur to John H. B. Latrobe, 31 December 1842, MSCSP.

¹⁸ Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 3 August 1843, Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from commanding officers of squadrons, 1841-1886, NARA RG 45 M89 Roll 101.

¹⁹ Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 3 August 1843, S. Doc. 150, 9-10.

not intend to pay the Fishmen employed in his boats, unless they would deliver to him Jack Dandy.” To protect themselves, the Fishmen seized the *Edward Burley*’s boats and held them as collateral until they received their pay.²⁰ Burke then complained to the colonial authorities at the nearby settlement of Greenville and the colonists helped him recover his boats, but the captain was not satisfied. To avenge himself, he sent his mate with a boat and a large canoe to attack a party of Fishmen returning from sea in canoes. When the Fishmen at Blue Barre and Sinoe heard of Burke’s attack, they immediately set out to assist their friends. The Fishmen counter-attacked Burke’s men, killing two, and dangerously wounding two others in the fray. As soon as Burke heard what had happened, he sailed the *Edward Burley* out to sea, abandoning his wounded men and their boat at Greenville.²¹

Although Roberts’ blamed Burke for the death of the two Americans, he advised Perry that an imposing show of force at Sinoe would have a “salutary influence in impressing upon the natives greater awe of the American flag.” Perry agreed and he arranged for a palaver to convene at Sinoe in November, when he expected the full squadron would be assembled and sailing together. Perry had every intention of listening to the people of Sinoe and treating them fairly, but whatever responsibility Thomas Burke bore in the case, he still believed that it would be necessary to admonish the natives to treat American trading vessels in a friendly manner.²²

Settling the *Mary Carver* affair required more careful planning; Perry did not expect to settle this case with a simple palaver. The people of Little Berriby had no envoy to plead their case, and no witnesses to question Captain Farwell’s culpability; all reports described them as bloodthirsty savages and dangerous killers. Roberts knew little about the matter, so Perry turned to Governor Russwurm at Cape Palmas for information and advice. He learned that two of the suspected culprits had died and that the remaining suspects were on guard against any

²⁰ “A New Version of the ‘Massacre of the Crew of the Edward Burley’,” *Maryland Colonization Journal*, August 1843, 27-29; Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 39-40. The account recorded by Bridge based on his 23 October 1843 interview with a Sinoe colonist named Morris essentially verifies Roberts’ account with slight variations. Bridge notes that the two men killed were the mate and cook and that they were both harpooned.

²¹ “A New Version of the ‘Massacre of the Crew of the Edward Burley’,” *Maryland Colonization Journal*, August 1843, 27-29; *Ibid*.

²² Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 3 August 1843, MCP Letter Books.

attempt to capture them. Consequently, Perry decided that resolving this case would require him “to proceed by stratagem and with great caution.”²³

Russwurm provided Perry with details about the *Mary Carver* and her suspected attackers. According to Russwurm, Farwell had visited Little Berriby a total of three times. On his second visit he had set up a factory to purchase camwood and ivory and had left a man named Crackow, the headman's brother, in charge while he visited other villages and ports along the coast. On his return voyage to Little Berriby, Farwell had visited Cape Palmas where he discharged several of his crew. Russwurm told Perry that the *Mary Carver* had left the cape with three natives on board: one head trade man and two boys, and that these three were suspected of conspiring with the people at Little Berriby to attack the *Mary Carver*. Russwurm reported:

The head trademan and principal instigator, in connexion with the Cracows, is a native by name of Séget, alias George. He was head trademan of the vessel here; he was formerly of Rockboukah, but now resides at *Rock Tabou*, between Rockboukah and Tabou river. The next in importance was Jack Masser's son, named Erooploop, alias Young Jack Masser. He was quite a lad, hardly 21 years of age; speaks good English, and resides at Grand Tabou. The other Kroo boy was a person of no consequence; he resides near Tabou river; name forgotten. Old Cracow, the trademan, known all over the coast, and his brother, who keeps the factory above spoken of, and was deeply implicated in these murders, *are both dead*. But Ben Cracow, a trademan, who resides at the last town of Little Berriby, is still alive. He is supposed to have been concerned, as all the three towns which compose what we call Little or Half Berriby are known to have been participators in the spoils.²⁴

Russwurm reported that the three towns of Little Berriby were very close to each other, and that the “scene of the action” had been in the center, implicating all three. He also surmised that the nearby towns of Rockboukah, Tabou, and Bassa had all known of the plot ahead of time because Old Crackow had suspiciously been at Rockboukah during the attack.

After a few days at Monrovia, *Saratoga* and *Porpoise* sailed for Cape Palmas. Perry was anxious to consult further with Russwurm about his plan. Perry had decided that a successful attack on Little Berriby was not likely to “secure the object desired” and that a failed attempt “would make matters worse.” Instead, he proposed to lay a trap to capture leading men from the suspected towns. Lieutenant Stellwagen and a small contingent of armed men would

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ John B. Russwurm to Matthew C. Perry, 10 July 1843, S. Doc. 150, 40-41.

conceal themselves on a merchant vessel, lure men from Little Berriby on board under the pretense of trade, and then seize them as prisoners. Perry thought that the colonies could hold the prisoners at the navy's expense until the people of Little Berriby surrendered the guilty persons or paid restitution to the owners of the *Mary Carver* and to Farwell's widow.²⁵ Not terribly original, Perry's scheme was basically the same as Ramsay's, Captain Syms', and the original plan of attack against the *Mary Carver*.

Russwurm believed that the people at Little Berriby were guilty of attacking the *Mary Carver* and he advised Perry accordingly. In addition to the conspirators on board the *Mary Carver*, he identified two additional suspects: Kato Duet (alias Tom Nimber) who had reportedly participated in binding Captain Farwell and had been seen bringing a large canoe-load of clothing and other goods from the *Mary Carver* to Rockboukah, and Q Choah (known as one of "Tom Nimber's boys") who had helped transport the canoe and was supposedly "concerned in the murder." Russwurm supported Perry's plan but he did not think that it went far enough; he wanted to hang any prisoners that could be captured. He advised Perry that "no ransom ought to redeem them but a halter; they were all concerned in the murder – men, women, and children; and though the feeling heart revolts at the idea of such a scene, still there can be no doubt about it." Russwurm also advised Perry that the plan to exact restitution or remuneration was a waste of time because the people of Little Berriby were "a bloodthirsty set" who had wasted all of their ill gotten gains and were actually quite poor.²⁶

Russwurm supported Perry's plan, but he warned that "the news along the beach would fly, I may say, so rapidly, that only one attempt could be made with success for months, or perhaps years – two or three." Russwurm suggested that *Porpoise* pose as a British merchantman instead of an American vessel, or even better, that the Americans should employ a real British vessel to carry out the plan, noting that "several have expressed a willingness to aid in capturing any of the parties concerned."²⁷ But Perry rejected the idea; if

²⁵ Matthew C. Perry to John B. Russwurm, 10 August 1843, MCP Letter Books.

²⁶ John B. Russwurm to Matthew C. Perry, 11 August 1843, S. Doc. 150, 41-43.

²⁷ Ibid.

Americans wanted to prove their naval power to the world and command any sort of respect from Africans or the British, they would need to resolve this problem on their own.

Perry's plans to avenge the *Mary Carver* were set. He had consulted with both Roberts and Russwurm and had learned the identity of the main suspects. Capturing them would be difficult, but he believed that he could force them out of hiding by taking their friends and neighbors hostage. Both Roberts and Russwurm had agreed to help with the plan, and Russwurm had agreed to hold any prisoners that might be taken at a rate of eight to ten dollars per day. There was just one last complication: the missionaries. Russwurm informed Perry that the missionary outposts at Rockboukah and Tabou would be in harm's way if any fighting were to break out between the Americans and the Africans, hinting that Perry should order the missionaries to leave any area of potential conflict.²⁸

Then Perry suddenly appeared to turn off the idea of kidnapping hostages from Little Berriby. He told Russwurm that he had "determined not to precipitate matters in regard to the Berriby People," writing: "The more I learn of the state of things, the more difficult seems to be the work of getting possession of the ring leaders engaged in the murder of Capt. Farewell."²⁹ Appearing to have given up the kidnapping plan, Perry ordered *Porpoise* to cruise the coast between Tabou and Monrovia, to stop at the American settlements, show the American flag, and offer friendly assistance to the colonists. He did not instruct Stellwagen to carry out any plan to capture hostages. Instead, Perry merely advised Stellwagen to:

Look out for the protection and interest of the American Settlements, Mission Stations, and the Trading vessels, and if an occasion offers promising certain success in capturing more or less of those engaged in the destruction of the *Mary Carver*, to seize upon it, but in no way to compromise the safety of the missionaries residing in the neighborhood of these towns.³⁰

According to these orders, *Porpoise's* capture of any Little Berriby people would be incidental or fortuitous, not premeditated.

But Perry's apparent change of heart was only a ruse; he still intended to carry out his plan to capture hostages from Little Berriby. He met with Stellwagen in private and explained

²⁸ The Rev. Minor had died late in 1842 and the Paynes had taken his place at the Tabou mission.

²⁹ Matthew C. Perry to John B. Russwurm, 12 August 1843, MCP Letter Books.

³⁰ Matthew C. Perry to John B. Russwurm, 12 August 1843, Matthew C. Perry to Henry Stellwagen, 12 August 1843, MCP Letter Books.

his true intentions. After the meeting, Perry gave Stellwagen a second set of written instructions that said, "having been made fully acquainted both verbally and in writing with my views in regard to the proposed plan of capturing some of the Berriby People as hostages to secure reparation for the destruction of the *Mary Carver* and the murder of her captain I now hand you general instructions by which you are to be governed."³¹ Perry carefully suggested that Stellwagen seek out any good opportunity to fulfill the original plan to capture hostages, taking care that the operation appeared coincidental, not premeditated. These additional orders authorized Stellwagen to go beyond the limits of his proscribed cruising ground; "if by any concerted arrangement with any master of an American vessel to assist in securing some of these culprits" he found it necessary.³² Perry emphasized that Stellwagen was to conspire with American vessels only. And he instructed Stellwagen to constantly drill his crew so as to be ready "for any service." Perry had only pretended to turn off the original plan in the hope of tricking the people of Little Berriby into letting their guard down.

Perry took a much more aggressive approach to resolving the *Mary Carver* case than he did to the other incidents between Americans and Africans along the coast, in part, because he was more certain of the Little Berriby people's guilt. He knew that there were two sides to every story, and that Americans bore as much responsibility as Africans for these conflicts. As he explained to Upshur:

I am everywhere told, that in most cases, the natives have been as much sinned against as sinning, and that the representation of the outrages which they have committed upon American and other vessels, if accompanied by a recital of the facts which led to them, some apology might be allowed to the natives. The Government at home hears but one side of the story, it is not known there that the Masters of trading vessels often maltreat the natives, it is in proof that towns and fishing boats have been fired into and lives destroyed and that the natives of one tribe at war with another have been carried and delivered up to their enemies, thus exasperated, the natives wreak their vengeance upon the first vessel, or boat, or white man, whether innocent or guilty, that may chance to fall in their way and they dare to attack.³³

Perry realized that under these circumstances, the job of protecting American commerce was transformed into a much larger challenge of combating the unlawful atmosphere that pervaded

³¹ The second of two letters from Matthew C. Perry to Henry Stellwagen, dated 12 August 1843, in MCP Letter Books.

³² Ibid.

³³ Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 5 September 1843, MCP Letter Books.

the coast and prejudiced the attitudes of different groups against one another. His solution was twofold: he would use the presence of his squadron to instil order along the coast, and he would carefully examine each case in order to demonstrate the ideals of American justice and end the cycle of retribution and violence.

Saratoga's visit to Cape Palmas lasted less than one day. She transferred her provisions to *Porpoise* so that Stellwagen could continue his mission, and then she sailed up the coast, stopping briefly at a few settlements, before returning to Porto Praia. Perry had accomplished his preliminary goals. The Sinoe palaver was set for November, the plan to capture the *Mary Carver's* attackers was set in motion, and initial inquiries suggested that the problem of slavers abusing the American flag had subsided. Perry returned to the Cape Verdes to send off his report to Upshur and await the arrival of the remainder of his squadron. Once all of the vessels had arrived, he could return to the coast and finish what he had started.

Back to Base

Perry planned to wait out the West African rainy season at Porto Praia, while waiting to meet the rest of his squadron. But when *Saratoga* reached Porto Praia the port was sickly and the anchorage so unsafe that Perry was compelled to shift the squadron's base to Porto Grande, St. Vincent, another Cape Verde Island. It was the only adequate, safe, and healthy harbor that he could find within his cruising ground.³⁴

While he waited, Perry busied himself administering the squadron and writing reports. Planning for the successive relief and resupply of vessels presented a particular challenge; even more so since a portion of the squadron's stores had just been lost when the storeship *Renown* wrecked at Porto Praia. In addition to acquiring adequate provisions, Perry had to carefully organize his vessels' movements, balancing the requirements of his mission with the limitations of the station. Vessels needed to be rotated, keeping some active on the coast while allowing others necessary time at the Cape Verdes for rest, repairs, and resupply. With just two vessels on the station, Perry's options were limited. As long as *Saratoga* was serving as his temporary

³⁴ Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 4 September 1843, S. Doc. 150, 12-13.

flagship, the brunt of the squadron's work fell on *Porpoise*. *Porpoise* had been cruising the coast virtually alone for the past five months and she needed a break. Perry anxiously awaited *Macedonian*'s arrival so that he could transfer his flag to the frigate and send *Saratoga* to the coast to relieve *Porpoise*.

Perry considered it necessary for the squadron's vessels to make frequent trips to the Cape Verdes, Canary Islands, and Madeira in order to preserve the men's health. The mission was only beginning but the African climate was already affecting the men; the ship surgeon reported that there were already ten men who were too ill to continue and must be sent home. Worried, Perry asked the department to send him more doctors. He also asked for additional vessels, reporting that the squadron would need at least five to keep up a regular pattern of cruising and relief between the coast and the Cape Verdes, which he strongly believed was "necessary to the efficiency of the vessels, and the health of their officers and crews." He specifically asked for small vessels, which he called "almost indispensable."³⁵

In addition to his reports concerning the state of the squadron, its men, and provisions, Perry sent the department reports on the state of trade on the coast of West Africa and offered his views on this aspect of the mission. Perry did not make a sharp distinction between protecting American commerce and suppressing the slave trade. He believed that as long as men-of-war cruised the coast and remained vigilant the slave trade would be kept in check, but he also believed that the trade could not be completely eliminated while it remained profitable. Like many Americans, he thought that the only solution was for "the Governments of Europe and Brazil [to] follow the example of the United States in passing a law declaring it piracy to be engaged in the traffic."³⁶

Perry also shared the common American opinion that the British system of suppressing the slave trade was ridiculous. The British expended a great deal of effort and resources policing the West African coast and catching slavers, but they let the criminals go free and

³⁵ Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 4 and 5 September 1843, S. Doc. 150, 12-13. Again, Perry's report and request provide further evidence to refute those historians who criticize Perry's decision to base the squadron at the Cape Verdes and his failure to accomplish more during his mission. (See previous chapter.) Problems with storeships, sickly ports, the general lack of available provisions, and the competing demands and concerns of this squadron all factored in to Perry's decisions. Perry's requests for particular types and numbers of vessels went largely unanswered.

³⁶ Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 5 September 1843, no. 13, Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from commanding officers of squadrons, 1841-1886, NARA RG 45 M89 Roll 101.

merely confiscated the slavers' property, which was auctioned off at Sierra Leone. Not surprisingly, both the men and the property quickly returned to the trade. Under these conditions, Perry calculated that a slaver only needed to make one successful voyage for every three attempts in order to net a profit. These odds, he concluded, practically guaranteed experienced slavers quick fortunes.³⁷

Perry doubted that many Americans participated in the slave trade, and both Roberts and Russwurm confirmed this belief. He admitted that some slavers had probably used the American flag without authority, but he did not believe that these criminals were actual Americans. It was difficult to identify a sailor's citizenship by anything other than his word; many lived nomadic lives with no fixed address. Theodore Canot, for example, had been born to French and Italian parents, reared in Italy, and lived much of his adult life in West Africa, but because he had spent a few adolescent years apprenticed to a sailing captain in Massachusetts he was sometimes called American.

Perry believed that Congress needed to pass new laws before the navy could effectively combat the slave trade using force or police powers. The navy could only enforce existing laws, and as he believed that Americans were not slavers and that slavers had stopped flying the American flag, there were few, if any, violations of American laws to police. Perry did not believe that Americans were completely innocent; he knew that American and European merchants contributed indirectly to the slave trade by supplying essential trade goods but there was nothing that he could do about that. "I do not see how this can be prevented," he wrote, "as precisely the same description of goods are used in lawful trade, in the purchase of palm oil, camwood, gold dust, ivory, &c."³⁸

The only apparent solution to the larger problem of the slave trade, as far as Perry could see, was to foster the spread of legitimate commerce as a competitive threat to the illicit trade. Africans had grown accustomed to the comforts and luxuries of foreign goods and wanted to preserve their access to these things. Perry believed that this demand guaranteed a

³⁷ Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, chapter 7 passim.

³⁸ Matthew C. Perry to Abel P. Upshur, 5 September 1843, no. 13, Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from commanding officers of squadrons, 1841-1886, NARA RG 45 M89 Roll 101.

market for legitimate products. As more American and European merchants refused to deal in slaves, the more incentive they would create for Africans to offer legitimate commodities such as palm oil and ivory for trade. Perry sent the Navy Department encouraging reports about legitimate trade in West Africa, writing that the value of trade "is greater than is generally imagined." He estimated the annual export of gold dust at four hundred pounds, worth about one million dollars. Traders made great profit, he explained, because they could sell inferior goods to natives at inflated prices.³⁹ Believing that there was little he could do about the slave trade freed Perry to concentrate on defending American honor. And in this way, he believed, he was advancing American interests and indirectly helping to end the slave trade.

Shortly after Perry finished making his reports, *Macedonian* arrived at Porto Grande with the latest news from the United States. Webster had resigned from the State Department, and Tyler had appointed Upshur the new secretary of state and Massachusetts Democrat David Henshaw the new secretary of the navy. Upshur's departure from the Navy Department meant that the fledgling squadron lost its greatest champion. His replacement did not have nearly as much interest in the squadron or its mission. When the MSCS requested that the squadron survey its colony's coastline, Henshaw readily agreed. Unconcerned that the squadron was already overburdened and undermanned, Henshaw ordered Perry to make the survey. This information could be useful to merchantmen and assist with the expansion of colonial territory, but it placed an additional burden on the busy squadron.⁴⁰

With *Macedonian's* arrival, Perry transferred his flag to the frigate and sent *Saratoga* to the coast. He remained at Porto Grande handling the ongoing problem of storing provisions, while *Saratoga* visited the settlements along the coast. On September 29th, *Saratoga* caught sight of a suspected slaver and gave chase all day, only to lose the vessel when darkness fell. On her second visit to Monrovia, she fell in with *Porpoise*.

Porpoise had just arrived from Little Berriby with six hostages. Disguised as a merchant vessel, with the men wearing civilian clothes and scotch caps, she had managed to lure four Africans in a canoe alongside. When the first man stepped on deck and saw her

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ David Henshaw to John H. B. Latrobe, 11 October 1843, MSCSP.

cannon he realized the trick. The *Porpoise*'s Kroomen quickly jumped overboard, upset the canoe, and captured the four natives. Shortly afterwards, about six miles down the coast, *Porpoise* captured another two Africans in the same way.⁴¹ Stellwagen transferred the hostages and "a canoe with 'Mary Carver' nails in it," to *Saratoga* and sailed *Porpoise* for Porto Praia.⁴²

Saratoga waited for Perry at Monrovia for nearly a month with little to do. Commander Tattnall held target practice but it went badly. Firing drills seemed to get worse the more they practiced, only one in five shells exploded.⁴³ Although this was something of a problem, the officers still found plenty of time to enjoy themselves: exploring the country, "botanizing," and socializing at Monrovia.⁴⁴ By mid-October, all four vessels were finally on the station and Perry's squadron was ready to begin cruising the coast *en force*. *Macedonian* and *Decatur* sailed for the coast to join *Saratoga*. *Decatur* finally arrived at the colony on the 13th of November, followed by *Macedonian* a few days later. Light winds and adverse currents had made for a rough passage and the frigate sailed poorly. When she arrived, she needed a little extra time in port to recover. *Saratoga* and *Decatur* sailed for Sinoe to open the first palaver and *Macedonian* followed a few days later. Five months had passed since Perry had left New York for Africa. Although he had yet to accomplish any notable results, he had worked hard making preparations and managing mundane but essential affairs. Perry believed that he only had one chance to successfully settle each of these palavers and he made careful preparations. If anything went wrong it could cost American lives and serious damage to the squadron's reputation and precarious future. Things had gone relatively well up to this point; the plans were set and relatively few men had caught the African fever. But the palavers that lay ahead would be the real test of Perry's leadership and planning.

⁴¹ Matthew C. Perry to David Henshaw, 22 November 1843, MCP Letter Books; Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 40.

⁴² "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*, n.d.," James A. Spaulding Collection, MeHS.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 49-53.

Palaver #1: Sinoe

The squadron assembled at Sinoe on November 28th to finally begin the first of several palavers. Perry brought Governor Roberts along to act as local host and interpreter. Roberts considered the job a bit of a chore but he admitted that it was “a favorable opportunity” to visit some of the African peoples along the coast and open negotiations for any land they might be willing to sell. Although Perry did not intend to interfere in colonial affairs, Roberts’ apparently close association with the squadron created the opposite impression on observers.⁴⁵

The squadron anchored off Sinoe overnight. The next morning, at 9 a.m., it launched thirteen boats, carrying about seventy-five marines and a number of sailors, for shore. The men were full of anticipation and eager enthusiasm. One officer recorded how, “with flags flying and muskets glittering, the boats lay on their oars until all were in a line, and then pulled at once for the beach, as if to charge a hostile battery.”⁴⁶ The boats made land in formation, young Matthew Perry Jr. blew a tin horn, and the men rushed the beach, making a lasting impression on the few locals who stood by watching.⁴⁷

Once the officers and marines were assembled in formation on the beach, the trumpet played, and Perry and Roberts stepped ashore. After this auspicious landing, the marines, Perry, and his staff marched to the Methodist church where the palaver was being held. The sailors and junior officers remained on the beach with the boats, and took over a nearby hut, which they nicknamed the “little palaver house,” and made themselves comfortable, making “a frolic of it.” A short while later, some marines carried the motionless body of young Perry on a board *Saratoga*. A sergeant announced that “Fife boy of the ‘Saratoga’” had been badly wounded in the head with a bottle of rum. Several other cases of the same sort soon appeared.⁴⁸ The sailors and junior officers, at least, clearly did not take the day’s events too seriously.

⁴⁵ Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, May 1844, 133-144.

⁴⁶ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 61.

⁴⁷ “Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*. Bridge’s account is undoubtedly embellished and is discussed in the following chapter. The manuscript “Diary” gives a much more raw and believable account.

⁴⁸ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 61; “Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*.”

Meanwhile at the church, the palaver got under way. It was organized to reflect Perry's ultimate authority: he sat at the center of the table, with the colonial delegation to his right and the African delegation to his left. Roberts opened the meeting, introducing Perry and explaining his intention to talk about the deaths of the *Edward Burley's* cook and mate.⁴⁹ Then Perry gave a short speech, saying that he had been sent by the United States to "demand and take redress" for outrages against Americans. He carefully tried to intimidate the Africans with one hand, while offering friendship with the other. But the terms of that friendship were strict; Perry told the Africans that he had plenty of ships that would "punish in the most signal manner" anyone who maltreated Americans. He concluded his speech by asking what Sinoe would offer to satisfy the Americans in this affair.⁵⁰

King George of the Sinoe Bushmen responded first, blaming a rival group of Fishmen for the deaths and calling these Fishmen intruders upon his territory. George claimed that his people had played no part in the attack on the *Edward Burley* and protested that they were powerless to protect themselves from these menacing Fishmen. He asked the Americans to help him drive away these interlopers, and the other headmen agreed with him and made similar remarks.⁵¹

John Smith, Prince of the Sinoe Fishmen, spoke next. He acknowledged that some of his people had killed the two men, but he denied knowing exactly who was responsible. Perry threatened to hold Smith and his father the king liable as accessories for harboring murderers, and to take them to America as prisoners if he did not produce the suspects. To appease Perry, Smith sent a message back to the Fishmen in their villages but received no reply. When the suspects failed to appear, a marine guard escorted Smith back to Fishtown to locate the suspects in person. Armed Fishmen surrounded the party on the path to Fishtown and attempted to rescue the prince. The marines sounded an alarm and reinforcements rushed to the scene. Seeing the reinforcements, the Fishmen aborted their rescue attempt and the

⁴⁹ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 61-62.

⁵⁰ William P. Rodgers, "Notes of a palaver held at Sinoe November 29, 1843," S. Doc. 150, 27-29.

⁵¹ Ibid.

marines took the prince and another hostage on board *Macedonian*.⁵² Perry adjourned the palaver for the day and the Americans returned to their ships.

That evening, Perry convened a council on board *Macedonian* to review the case and determine how to proceed. The council, which included Mayo, Tattnall, Abbot, Roberts, and Dr. Day, reviewed the evidence, including the deposition given by Charles Freeman, the murdered cook's brother who had also served on the *Edward Burley*. Perry asked each member to decide if "they considered the putting to death of the mate and cook of said schooner to be wilful murder."⁵³ They had to decide whether or not any of the Africans should be punished.

The council submitted their opinions to Perry in writing. Based on the evidence, most of them agreed that Burke had been the aggressor, and that the Fishmen had acted in self-defense. But they felt that the natives had overreacted and should have avoided bloodshed. Abbot found that the Fishmen had acted in self-defense, and although they may have used excessive force, "and may deserve chastisement," he advocated that their punishment be tempered by "consideration and mercy." Tattnall agreed that Burke had been the aggressor but felt that the natives had gone too far. He argued that they had had ample force to defend themselves without bloodshed, writing: "The killing of these men was certainly unjustifiable, because unnecessary, as the natives had overpowered and could have held them alive as hostages; but when uncivilized men are maddened by aggression, they are apt to take extreme revenge, and those who have the advantage of more cultivated morals should not judge them too harshly."⁵⁴

Mayo disagreed with the others and believed that the Fishmen had committed the first offense. He reasoned that the Fishmen were guilty of willful murder because they could have easily captured Burke's men without bloodshed. Roberts and Day reached more moderate conclusions. They believed that the Fishmen had overreacted to Burke's aggressive behavior and found them guilty of a lesser charge of either second-degree murder or manslaughter.

⁵² Ibid.; Jabez C. Rich, "Commodore Perry's Expedition to the Coast of Africa," *Spirit of the Times*, 21 June 1845.

⁵³ William P. Rodgers, "Notes of the proceedings of a council held on board the United States frigate *Macedonian*, in the harbor of Sinoe, west coast of Africa, November 29, 1843," S. Doc. 150, 23-24.

⁵⁴ William P. Rodgers, "Notes of the proceedings of a council held on board the United States frigate *Macedonian*, in the harbor of Sinoe, west coast of Africa, November 29, 1843," and accompanying documents, S. Doc. 150, 23-27.

They argued that Perry should show the Fishmen mercy. Roberts recommended “only punishing them in such manner as will most likely prevent future acts of the same kind.”⁵⁵ The final decision rested with Perry. He rejected the majority opinion of the council and concurred with Abbot that the Fishmen had killed the two men in self-defense and that Burke was at fault. But despite these findings, Perry still determined that the Fishmen should be punished and forced to move away.

Early the next morning, Roberts sent a message to the Fishmen, insisting that they leave the colony’s territory and go back to their own country. Their conduct towards the colonists, robbing shops and farms, killing cattle, assaulting and even murdering a colonist, had become intolerable. The message did not surprise the Fishmen. The Liberians had wanted to eject them from the coast for some time. The colonists claimed to have purchased the Sinoe territory years before and had only grudgingly allowed the Fishmen tenancy on the condition of good behavior. In reality, the colony had had little choice but to tolerate their presence. The Mississippi Colonization Society neglected its colony at Sinoe, leaving it in a weak and powerless condition. Taking advantage of that weakness, the Fishmen disregarded colonial authority and had asserted control over the territory. The Fishmen’s efforts to control trade and prevent other Africans from dealing directly with foreigners created conflict, which had led to the murder of a colonist named Shuman earlier in the year. Liberians had wanted to evict the Fishmen ever since, but they had lacked the power to drive them off.

Conditions at Sinoe had changed recently. New settlers had arrived, strengthening the settlement and emboldening the colony to confront the Fishmen. Roberts seized the opportunity afforded by the squadron’s arrival to create an inflated appearance of colonial power. He promised the Fishmen that if they left quietly, the Americans would allow them to return to the beach to “gather up their effects and go off unmolested.”⁵⁶ The neighboring Bushmen reluctantly agreed to go along with this plan. They wanted the Fishmen to leave, but they also worried about the colonists’ growing power. In fact, fearing the Americans, many of the Fishmen had already fled, abandoning their villages during the night. When the palaver

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, 133-144.

reconvened later that morning, the head Bushmen from Blue Barre and Sinoe were present, but no Fishmen appeared.

On the third day, the palaver met at Blue Barre, a Bushmen town just across the river from Sinoe, to finalize an agreement. The Bushmen, left with little choice, formally pledged to help protect the Liberians' Sinoe colony. Faced with a coalition of colonists and Bushmen that was backed by the squadron's guns, the remaining Fishmen conceded the territory and abandoned their homes. As *Saratoga's* Purser Horatio Bridge observed:

The interposition of the American Commodore, and the affair of the murder, afforded the Governor the advantage of mixing up that question with the colonial one; so as to give the natives the impression that everything was done at the instance and under the authority of [the navy's] armed force... By this ingenious policy, the Bushmen were induced to promise their aid in ridding the settlement of its troublesome neighbors [the Fishmen]; while the Fishmen, overawed by the presence of a force friendly to the colonists, submitted to their expulsion with a quietude that could not, under other circumstances, have been expected... the affair had remarkably the aspect of a forcible acquisition of territory by the colonists.⁵⁷

Immediately following the agreement, Roberts and Day supervised as colonists and Bushmen quickly demolished the Fishmen's village in order to discourage them from returning.

The following day, Perry instructed Captain Mayo to loan ten muskets and two thousand ball cartridges to the Sinoe colonists, in case the Fishmen should retaliate against them.⁵⁸

Roberts was pleased that Perry had evidently changed his mind about interfering in colonial affairs. He reported that the colonists "appeared really overjoyed to be rid of the Fishmen."⁵⁹ Perry's first palaver was a success; he had settled the colonial trouble at Sinoe and the case of the *Edward Burley*, and reinforced the Liberian government's power without violence or bloodshed. It was a promising beginning, but the squadron still had much work to do.

Palaver #2: Settra Kroo

Having concluded its business at Sinoe, the squadron proceeded down the coast about fifteen miles to Settra Kroo to settle the next palaver. Captain Brown of the brig *Atalanta* had accused the people of Settra Kroo of attempting to murder him the previous year. The

⁵⁷ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 64.

⁵⁸ Matthew C. Perry to Isaac Mayo, 30 November 1843, MCP Letter Books.

⁵⁹ Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, 133-144.

squadron arrived on December 3rd and Perry quickly arranged to hold a palaver the following day.

This time, Perry landed with officers and marine-orderlies only. They marched from the beach, up a steep hill, to the native town. Perry told the local headmen that he had come to demand an apology and reparations for the attack against Brown, who had severely wounded by a blow to the face with the butt end of a musket. Perry repeated the same speech that he had given at Sinoe, explaining how the “great father,” the President of the United States, had sent him to “call to account” those who had injured or maltreated any Americans. And again, he combined threats of violence with offers of friendship, explaining that the president wanted friendly relations but that he also demanded “redress for every insult offered the American flag, and for every encroachment on the rights of American citizens.”⁶⁰ Of course, translated into Coast English, Perry’s remarks came across more like a threat than diplomacy. As Lieut. Charles Heywood described, Perry warned them that if they did not make satisfactory restitution “he would make big War.”⁶¹

The Settra Kroo people professed regret for the whole incident involving the *Atalanta* but pleaded that the guilty person had fled the country. They asked Perry to pardon them and offered to make a settlement to preserve peace. Perry replied that he was “inclined to be lenient” because this was their first offence and they maintained friendly relations with the nearby Presbyterian mission. Maintaining good relations with the mission was particularly important to the Americans. The missionary, the Reverend Mr. Sawyer, had recently died and his widow, who was now the only white person living at Settra Kroo, insisted on remaining there to continue his work. Her decision to stay there alone made the American officers uncomfortable. After dining with Mrs. Sawyer, Purser Bridge wrote in his journal: “I cannot reconcile myself to the idea of a woman sharing the martyrdom, which seems a proper, and not

⁶⁰ William P. Rodgers, “Notes of a palaver held at Settra Kroo November on Monday the 4th of December, 1843,” S. Doc. 150, 30-31.

⁶¹ “Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*.”

an undesirable fate (so it come in the line of his duty) for a man.”⁶² To protect Mrs. Sawyer, Perry needed to resolve the dispute with the natives as peaceably as possible. He accepted the Kroo’s offer and asked for a written apology, a pledge of friendship, and a small indemnity of ten bullocks, four sheep, and five goats. The fine was payable to the squadron, which was coincidentally having trouble finding enough fresh provisions to feed its men, who consumed the equivalent of nine hundred pounds of fresh meat a day. The Kroo people agreed and signed a settlement contract written up by the Americans.⁶³

After Perry finished his business with the Kroo, Roberts began talking to them about purchasing their territory. At first, a majority of the Kroo headmen were interested in making a deal, but they changed their minds when they learned that Liberia could not pay all at once. The Kroo pledged to abstain from the slave trade and to not sell land claims to anyone else but Roberts was understandably disappointed. He advised the ACS that this territory should be secured to the colony as soon as possible, because “foreign traders have for a long time been endeavoring to get possession of it.”⁶⁴ But as in past cases, the ACS did not have the necessary resources to make the purchase.

The dispute with the Kroo people had been less serious, and the consequent palaver less dramatic, than the events at Sinoe. Perry was satisfied with the outcome and the squadron only remained at Settra Kroo for a day before sailing to its next destination: Cape Palmas.

Palaver #3: Cape Palmas

As soon as the squadron arrived at Cape Palmas, Protestant missionary, the Reverend Samuel Hazlehurst, sent Perry urgent news of trouble at the cape. The Grebo people in the area had recently united to impose an embargo on the Maryland colony, and a palaver was in progress. News of more trouble between colonists and natives did not surprise the officers. Purser Bridge commented:

⁶² Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 65. After meeting Mrs. Sawyer, Bridge questioned the propriety of sending married men to work as missionaries and suggested that Catholic missionaries had a definite advantage over Protestants in this area.

⁶³ S. Doc. 150, 30-31; Matthew C. Perry to John B. Russwurm, 6 December 1843, MCP Letter Books; Ibid.

⁶⁴ Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, 133-144.

We are in a fair way to have plenty of work in settling palavers and protecting colonists. I fear that the colonists have felt encouraged by the presence of our squadron to assume a higher tone toward the natives and may have gone too far. But we shall see.⁶⁵

Perry quickly arranged to meet with the Grebo and the colonists as soon as possible.⁶⁶

Adhering to his policy of prohibiting his men from spending the night on shore, he refused to send any men ashore to stand guard that night. Believing that the climate was more dangerous after dark, Perry would only risk the health of his men if it was absolutely necessary. If the Grebo did attack the colony, Perry promised to send armed boats to defend it.

The trouble at Cape Palmas extended to the nearby mission at Half Cavally where, Hazlehurst reported, Rev. John Payne and his family were under siege. The trouble with the colony had prompted the Grebo to cut off supplies to Payne's mission station and to break up his school. Hazlehurst feared that the Paynes were in great danger and begged Perry to rescue them. Perry immediately sent *Decatur* to Half Cavally.

The headmen from all of the neighboring Grebo towns had recently held a convention and decided to unite in an effort to increase their control over the coastal trade with foreigners. They doubled their prices for rice and other commodities that the colonists depended on. They banned their people from working for colonists. And they placed an embargo on trade with the interior, in effect requiring colonists to transact all business through Grebo middlemen. Although they were unlikely to succeed, these measures brought a looming conflict to the fore.

King Freeman's people retained ownership of their towns at Cape Palmas. And as the colonial town of Harper grew up around them, life grew increasingly uncomfortable for everyone living at the cape. If war broke out, one half of Harper could be cut off from the other by the Grebo town situated in between. Russwurm wanted Freeman's people to leave the cape and the embargo pushed him to act. Russwurm offered to buy the Greboes' land, but he worried that they would refuse. Russwurm explained the situation to Perry and asked him

⁶⁵ Horatio Bridge, "Holograph Journal, 1843-1844," Nathaniel Hawthorne Papers, New York.

⁶⁶ William P. Rodgers, "Notes of events which transpired at Cape Palmas, in reference to the difficulties between the American settlers and the surrounding native tribes, in December, 1843," and related correspondence contained in S. Doc. 150, 31-33.

what assistance the squadron could offer, "in case they refuse to remove for a reasonable compensation, and we be compelled to use violent measures?"⁶⁷

Perry gave Russwurm even less encouragement than he had given Roberts. He reasoned that the State of Maryland was responsible for its colony, not the United States, and therefore that the squadron could not interfere unless American lives or property were threatened. Perry also claimed to have no cognizance in the private matters between colonists and natives. He assured Russwurm that the squadron would help the colony to defend itself, but he explained that it "could not take any *offensive* measures."⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Perry was willing to make it appear that the squadron fully supported the colony, as he had done at Sinoe. Confident that matters could be settled peacefully, he sent "several armed boats ashore, with a considerable detachment of marines." It was a gamble, if the Grebo did not back down violence could easily break out. Tensions were high and the marines' presence might provoke a confrontation. If violence did break out, Perry would be forced to defend the colony.

After meeting with Russwurm, Perry called Freeman to an interview. At their previous meeting in September, the king had promised continued friendship towards Americans. When Perry asked Freeman to explain why he had broken that promise, Freeman replied that the other Grebo leaders had coerced him into supporting the embargo. Freeman claimed that he disapproved of the embargo and he promised to use his influence to end it. The two agreed to discuss the matter further at a palaver the following day.⁶⁹

The next morning, Perry, his chief officers, Russwurm, Roberts, several colonists, Freeman, and twenty-three other Grebo headmen assembled at the local Methodist church for the palaver. With Russwurm interpreting, Perry explained that he had come to hear the details of the dispute and to reconcile the two sides. Perry's statement was perhaps a little disingenuous; he was hardly an impartial mediator and had obviously already formed an opinion on the matter. Perry demanded that the Grebo lift the embargo, promise never to join any

⁶⁷ John B. Russwurm to Matthew C. Perry, 6 December 1843, S. Doc. 150, 32.

⁶⁸ William P. Rodgers, "Notes of a palaver held at Cape Palmas on the 8th of December, 1843, and proceedings preliminary thereto," S. Doc. 150, 33-34.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

such conspiracy against the colonists again, and allow natives to resume working for colonists. Perry's behavior clearly implied that the squadron fully supported the colony, not to mention contradicting his supposed lack of cognizance in matters between colonists and natives.⁷⁰

Following Perry's speech, Russwurm lectured the Grebo to sell their Cape Palmas land to the colony. He described how it had become impossible for the two peoples to continue to live in such close proximity and argued that their different habits and ways of life made it impossible for them to get along. Someone must move, and according to Russwurm, it should be the Grebo. He repeated his offer to purchase their land and secure "lasting peace." After holding out inducements, including a payment schedule spanning five years and a new location for the Grebo across the river, he concluded that either the Grebo or the colonists must go. Freeman had broken too many promises and the colonists could no longer trust his people to live amongst them. The colonists were willing to fight to stay, and now it appeared that they had the force of the American squadron behind them.⁷¹

Freeman argued that Russwurm was partially responsible for the embargo because he had stubbornly refused to allow any price increase, saying that he would rather eat grass than pay higher prices. That remark had insulted and provoked the Grebo. Freeman complained that Russwurm picked fights too quickly and overreacted to the most minor incidents as if preparing for war. According to Freeman, the Grebo were trying to keep the peace in the face of Russwurm's aggressive behavior.⁷²

Perry settled the matter by declaring that the Grebo were entitled to sell their goods for whatever price they could get on the open market, free from restrictions or price regulation. In return, Freeman consented to lift the embargo and promised to avoid similar troubles in the future. Perry and Freeman considered the matter settled but Russwurm insisted on pressing the removal question. Freeman refused to discuss it. The immediate problem of trade had just been resolved and good relations ostensibly restored, he did not

⁷⁰ William P. Rodgers, "Notes of a palaver held at Cape Palmas on the [9th] of December, 1843, and proceedings preliminary thereto," S. Doc. 150, 35-38. This document is dated 9 December 1843 but the printed version contains a contradictory date of 8 December, which is a misprint. Bridge confirms that these events occurred on 9 December. Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 71-74.

⁷¹ William P. Rodgers, "Notes of a palaver held at Cape Palmas on the [9th] of December, 1843, and proceedings preliminary thereto," S. Doc. 150, 35-38.

⁷² Ibid.

want to ruin it by pursuing such a contentious subject, especially in Perry's presence. Although Perry expressed his intentions to remain neutral, he clearly sympathized with the colonists. Freeman asked for time to consider the matter, and the subject was closed.⁷³

Only the issue of relations between the missionaries and the natives remained. The missionaries had accused the Grebo of blocking their supplies and removing native children from the mission, and had appealed to Perry for assistance. But the missionaries withdrew their complaint when they realized that Perry intended to settle both the colonial and mission disputes with the Grebo at the same palaver, explaining that the mission wanted to avoid any association with the colonists.⁷⁴ Although relations between the mission and the colony had improved since Wilson's departure, the old tensions still remained. The missionaries zealously guarded against any association with the colony, believing that it might potentially subject them to colonial authority and threaten their independence.

Despite the missionaries' change of heart, Perry was upset by the problems at Half Cavally and wanted to pursue the issue. *Decatur* had found Payne and his family in some danger from the Grebo, and Commander Abbot had gone ashore with an armed force to hold a palaver with the local headmen. The Half Cavally Grebo claimed that the embargo had been Freeman's idea and that they had been forced to go along with his plans to make war against all Americans. Abbot's palaver ended badly; he reported: "I am sorry to say [it] broke up with an unfriendly aspect."⁷⁵ Payne decided that the place was no longer safe for his family, and they quickly loaded as much of their property as they could on board *Decatur*, leaving the rest locked up in the mission house. *Decatur* sailed back to Cape Palmas that same night.

The missionaries stayed away from the Perry's palaver with the Grebo, but Perry raised the issue with Freeman nevertheless. He lectured the Grebo on the importance of maintaining friendship with all Americans on the coast, and he warned them that the president would "not allow his own countrymen to be treated unjustly or cruelly."⁷⁶ To insure respect for

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 72.

⁷⁵ Joel Abbot to Matthew C. Perry, 7 December 1843, S. Doc. 150, 34-35.

⁷⁶ William P. Rodgers, "Notes of a palaver held at Cape Palmas on the [9th] of December, 1843, and proceedings preliminary thereto," S. Doc. 150, 35-38.

Americans, Perry promised that there would always be a squadron on the coast, authorized to use force if necessary. He described how these Christian sojourners only asked for gratitude in return for the great personal sacrifices they made in coming to Africa. He reminded the Grebo that the missionaries only went to places where they had been invited, and then he asked why the Grebo had invited Payne to Half Cavally and then insulted him and threatened his family and his property. Perry demanded an explanation.

Freeman refused to discuss the matter now that affairs with the colony had been settled peacefully. He simply promised that the missionaries would be treated with friendship and that Grebo children would be allowed to return to the schools. But Perry was not satisfied and he asked Yellow Will, a headman at Half Cavally, to explain why he had invited Payne to settle there and then threatened his life. Yellow Will, who appeared to be “under much apprehension,” admitted that his people had been wrong, and promised to apologize to Payne and to help re-establish the mission. But since Payne did not attend the meeting, the matter could not be settled.⁷⁷

Perry had done his best to resolve all of the disputes between Americans and Africans on the coast. In just two weeks, he had managed to hear four different cases and lend significant support to the various Liberian colonies and missions without any violence or bloodshed.⁷⁸ Only one matter remained to be addressed: the *Mary Carver*.

Palaver #4: Little Berriby

The following day, the squadron’s senior officers: Perry, Abbot, Tattnall, Mayo and Stellwagen, together with Roberts and Russwurm, met in council on board *Macedonian*. They had resolved all of the outstanding issues between Africans and Americans along the coast except for one, the *Mary Carver*. Anticipating that this would be their biggest challenge, and that a Little Berriby palaver could potentially turn violent, they spent the next two days

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ The only exception had been a skirmish between Grebo and colonists at Cape Palmas on December 8th but no members of Perry’s squadron were directly involved or on the scene where the shooting took place. Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 68-69.

discussing their plans.⁷⁹ Perry reviewed Upshur's instructions and asked the council for its opinion on punishing Little Berriby. Unlike his approach to the previous palavers, Perry showed little interest in the African side of this story. In the earlier cases he had kept his mind open and found that often the colonists or Americans were at least partially at fault; he had learned that Africans were just as likely to be victims as victimizers. But in this case, he had already passed judgment against the people of Little Berriby and never considered the possibility that Eben Farwell may have been culpable in his own death.

As the most knowledgeable person present, Russwurm played an influential role at the council meeting. His information helped to reinforce Perry's belief that the people of Little Berriby and several neighboring villages had either collaborated in the attack or benefited from it afterwards. Governor Roberts observed that Russwurm "stated a number of important facts that had come to his knowledge" regarding the *Mary Carver*, and that "from these statements and other facts that had come to the knowledge of Com. Perry, the council was of opinion that the natives inhabiting the whole coast from Rock Boukah to Grand Berebee, inclusive, were concerned, either directly or indirectly, in the murder and piracy, and should be visited and called to answer for their misconduct."⁸⁰ On the strength of Russwurm's information, the council decided to demand reparations from the neighboring towns of Rockboukah, Grand Tabou, Bassa, and Grand Berriby. It supposed that these towns had been involved in the attack, either directly or indirectly by harboring the culprits or sharing in the plunder, and it determined that the towns should be punished for their complicity.⁸¹

The council determined "for the ends of justice and the prevention of future crime," to demand that the suspected towns apprehend the surviving criminals, try the suspects, and execute them under native law. Further, the council decided that that these towns should be forced to pay for the value of the *Mary Carver* and her cargo in order to indemnify the victims'

⁷⁹ "Minutes of a council held on board the United States ship Macedonian, at Cape Palmas, on the 9th of December, 1843," S. Doc. 150, 38-39.

⁸⁰ Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, May 1844, 133-144.

⁸¹ "Minutes of a council held on board the United States ship Macedonian, at Cape Palmas, on the 9th of December, 1843," S. Doc. 150, 38-39.

heirs. The council only proscribed chastisement or physical punishment as a last resort to punish any town that defaulted on these obligations.⁸²

The council set the amount of the indemnity at \$12,000, grossly overestimating the value of the *Mary Carver*. Eben Farwell had chartered her for less than \$900, and his heirs eventually collected \$2,128.29 from the Boston Insurance Company for the loss of his one-third-share of the cargo.⁸³ Most likely the insurance only covered the loss of the outbound cargo, while the \$12,000 figure may have included the potential value of the return cargo, which Eben had partially collected at the time of his death. Having made inquiries about the attackers, but not about the victims or their property, the council set the amount of restitution arbitrarily high. The council's presumption of these towns' guilt belied its prejudice in this case; and its demand for full indemnity exposed its ignorance of local conditions. Perry should have known that these towns could not pay \$12,000, or even half of that amount. Russwurm had already warned him that they were poor and profligate people who had quickly wasted their ill-gotten gains.⁸⁴

Perry's council reconvened the following day to settle its plan. The men listened as "all written evidence that could be produced in the case of the murder was read," and then discussed how to proceed.⁸⁵ They decided to allow these towns four months to apprehend, try, and execute the culprits. If the Africans failed to complete this task within the allotted time, the council recommended that the squadron destroy any towns harboring suspects. Perry and his advisers also determined to fine each town \$3,000 in restitution. When Roberts protested that these towns could never afford such a large sum, the council decided that any town unable to pay could mortgage its land to the colonization society. The society would hold the mortgage in trust for the Farwell heirs and "others concerned in the ownership" of the *Mary*

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Eben Farwell Probate file, Kennebec County Court Records, Augusta, Maine. His younger brother James owned a third-share in the charter that was later valued at \$288.28. It is not known what the vessel was valued at.

⁸⁴ John B. Russwurm to Matthew C. Perry, 11 August 1843, S. Doc. 150, 41-43.

⁸⁵ "Minutes of a council held on board the United States frigate *Macedonian*, December 10, 1843," S. Doc. 150, 39-40. This evidence included documents supplied by the Navy Department and the two letters Russwurm had written to Perry that summer. Minor and Russwurm's testimony formed the basis of the case against Little Berriby and the neighboring towns.

Carver, and the towns could redeem their land by making six successive annual payments of \$500.⁸⁶

The council noted that the squadron would welcome payment in the form of provisions, at prices set by the squadron, "for the convenience of the natives." Of course it would be impossible for these people to find \$12,000 in specie, but the offer to accept produce and foodstuffs was made for the squadron's convenience, not the Africans'.⁸⁷ The squadron suffered chronic shortages and this arrangement would theoretically give them leverage to induce these Africans to produce more food. But in reality, it was just as difficult for these towns to raise \$500 as it was for them to raise \$3,000, regardless of the medium of exchange. Perry and his officers supported the mortgage scheme as a means of producing more provisions, and the colonists, who expected the scheme to fail, saw it as an opportunity to force the Africans off their land; it would only be a matter of time before the towns defaulted on their mortgages and the colony could take possession of their land.

Saratoga's Commander Josiah Tattnall questioned the evidence against these four towns and advised against taking severe measures without stronger proof. Perry agreed that they lacked enough hard evidence to justify reprisals but the circumstantial evidence satisfied him that these towns were all implicated in the murder. Perry's only concern was the necessity of justifying his actions before the world, and he expressed concern that "the acts of the squadron in this matter would be considered those of the Government, to be justified before the world, and for these reasons extreme measures should be resorted to only upon strong proof." He did not worry about guilt, only that the degree of punishment should seem reasonable to the rest of the world. Perry hoped to obtain more direct evidence, possibly confessions, from the towns themselves and concluded that "it would be more easy to decide what amount of chastisement should be inflicted upon them after visiting the scene of outrage and murder." And with that the council adjourned and the squadron sailed for the first of the four towns: Rockboukah.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

The squadron reached Rockboukah later that the same day and quickly arranged for a palaver with King Tom the following morning. Perry expected that the meeting would produce either evidence of guilt or protestations of innocence, and hoped that the matter would be decided one way or the other. The Americans intended to force Tom to face the Little Berriby people in person, and Perry planned to use the threat of this confrontation as leverage to force him to admit culpability in the *Mary Carver* attack.⁸⁹

On the morning of the 11th, Perry, Tattnall, Abbot, Mayo, and Roberts landed at Rockboukah with twelve boats and a "considerable force of sailors and marines."⁹⁰ "Forming a line abreast," the boats "charged on the open beach, on which an ugly surf was rolling." Lieut. Charles Heywood described how "several boats filled in landing, many men were wet through, and a large proportion of the muskets."⁹¹ Lieut. Jabez C. Rich, the marine commander, described how "the officers and men were often seen in the most glorious confusion, floating about in what direction soever the winds and the waves chose to carry them."⁹² Heywood received orders to lie off and, with some difficulty, landed his marines two at a time in a canoe. When they reached the shore, the marines observed that the natives "showed symptoms of fight" and Perry decided to land all of his forces, save a few sailors to watch the boats.⁹³

On shore, hundreds of African men armed with muskets, spears, and knives formed a line of defense along the beach.⁹⁴ Many others peered out from the bush and still more continued to arrive from the south. Heywood described the scene:

Bells were jingling, and war horns blowing, and these noises would swell on the arrival of new parties. There were a few vocal sounds, but nothing like the whooping of the American Indians. We did not know to what extent our muskets were wet.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Notes kept by William P. Rodgers, Secretary to Commodore Perry, 10 December 1843, S. Doc. 150, 43.

⁹⁰ Notes kept by William P. Rodgers, Secretary to Commodore Perry, 11 December 1843, S. Doc. 150, 43-44. The Spaulding "Diary" notes that the force landed on this date was smaller than usual as the launches were not used. Lieutenant Rich described "a full force of marines - about 90 in number." Governor Russwurm decided to stay at Cape Palmas because he felt that the situation with the Grebo was too precarious.

⁹¹ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

⁹² Rich.

⁹³ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 74; "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

⁹⁴ Notes kept by William P. Rodgers, Secretary to Commodore Perry, 11 December 1843, S. Doc. 150, 43-44; Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 74; "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*. Officers and men tried to guess the number of men, Rodgers gives five hundred. Later Bridge mentions hundreds of natives laid aside their weapons. Rich estimates five hundred. Roberts listed it as three to four hundred.

⁹⁵ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

The chief “war men” walked up and down the native lines, “talking, dancing and gesticulating to them.”⁹⁶ They were all blackened with soot and one wore a headdress made of black feathers. Purser Bridge thought that the Africans showed more independence and less fear standing in their ranks than any others he had encountered along the coast. Roberts recognized these menacing gestures, ones he had witnessed before, as a sign that the Africans were preparing to attack.⁹⁷

The Africans did not advance or try to prevent the Americans from landing, but they maintained their military discipline and held their ground. Rich described the weakness of the Americans’ position: “A movement made by our forces to out-flank them on the south, below their town, was most promptly met by their deploying, and taking a new position, in line, upon our right, rendering one half our force for the time entirely ineffective.”⁹⁸ Overall, the Americans interpreted the Africans’ confidence as insolence, which made them “the more ready for a tustle.”⁹⁹ Heywood readied several of his men to “bring down” the “war chief” if shooting broke out. He noted that “their attitude as we now faced them was creditable and nonchalant,” but he was confident that the Africans would flee “on the first fire,” assuming of course that the Americans’ wet muskets would fire. But the Americans did not get the chance to test their firearms. They landed one of *Macedonian*’s guns on the beach, “which caused a wavering in the enemy’s ranks,” and under the cover of this big gun, Perry finally went ashore and led his men into the town of Rockboukah.¹⁰⁰

Eight-foot-tall palisades enclosed the town of Rockboukah, and its inhabitants did not intend to admit the Americans.¹⁰¹ But with the rainy weather and the confrontation on the beach, Perry decided to take possession of the town and move the proceedings indoors. This maneuver allowed him to firmly regain the upper hand after the Americans’ embarrassing

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 74. Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, May 1844, 133-144.

⁹⁸ Rich.

⁹⁹ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 74.

¹⁰⁰ Notes kept by William P. Rodgers, Secretary to Commodore Perry, 11 December 1843, S. Doc. 150, 43-44; Ibid; “Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*.”

¹⁰¹ Rich describes the palisades as a very strong, oak, double-stockade fifteen feet high.

landing. With a force of some thirty or forty marines, Perry proceeded uninvited into the town, leaving the remainder of his troops posted outside the gates.

Inside the palisades, the town was effectively deserted. The men of Rockboukah were all assembled on the beach and the women and children had gone into the bush to hide. With a large force positioned inside the walls, and guards at every gate, Perry's men controlled the town. Tom did not want to open the palaver without bringing his own armed force inside the gates, and so he proposed that each side occupy one-half of the town. But as they tried to settle this issue, a ruckus erupted outside one of the gates. A group of armed men had attempted to force their way in, an alarm had sounded, and a contingent of marines was responding. Roberts worried that the Americans underestimated the Africans:

We found Lieut. Rich and Purser Bridge outside of the palisade, trying to pacify an infuriated set of fellows that almost surrounded them. I knew their danger, - perhaps they did not. The war horn had sounded, and war chieftains were going in every direction ringing their war bells, evidently preparing for an attack. In fact the armed men had commenced to skirt the woods; and at that moment if by any accident a gun had been fired, an attack would have been the sure result.

Roberts' was right to doubt Bridge's savvy as a sailor. The lawyer-turned-purser had limited military experience and was a terrible shot. Roberts took one of the Rockboukah elders aside, warned him that he discerned their plan, and demanded that they stop preparing for war. Roberts kept close to the old man until the situation quieted down. Eventually, after considerable delay, Perry allowed Tom's men to enter the palisades of their own town.¹⁰²

Perry had called the palaver to discuss Rockboukah's participation in the attack on the *Mary Carver*. With Roberts acting as interpreter, he asked Tom to answer these charges. Tom replied that none of his people had been at Little Berriby during the attack. He confirmed that some Little Berriby men had visited Rockboukah shortly before the attack, but he called it a coincidence and denied that there had been any conspiracy between the two towns, and denied having any knowledge of the attack until after the fact. He admitted that some of his people had visited Little Berriby soon after, and that Crackow had given them a little cloth and

¹⁰² Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, May 1844, 133-144.

a few other things, but he swore that was all they had received. Tom kissed his sword and swore the truth of his words.¹⁰³ The Americans expected such denials and remained unconvinced. Heywood believed that the people of Rockboukah had not only consented to the crime at their meeting with Crackow's sons, but that they had also participated in the attack. Bridge was convinced that they had at least shared in the spoils.¹⁰⁴

Tom professed great happiness to see the Americans and wanted the Little Berriby people punished. He explained that since the attack, the trade at Rockboukah had suffered severely; traders had begun to fear this stretch of coast and avoided coming ashore. Tom even offered to go to Little Berriby with his own armed force to help take on Crackow's people, but Perry quickly refused the offer.¹⁰⁵ According to Tom, the people of Rockboukah had little more help to offer the Americans. He acknowledged his town's connection to Séget, one of the surviving suspects, but explained that the man had fled and denied knowing where he had gone. Frustrated, Perry insisted that Tom "exculpate himself from all blame and suspicion" by traveling to Little Berriby and repeating his story to the people there. Failing to get the hard evidence that he had hoped for, Perry planned to use Tom's denial to provoke a reaction at Little Berriby.¹⁰⁶ Tom was reluctant to go. He wanted to bring his own armed men but Perry refused, arguing that the squadron had a sufficient force. When Tom hesitated, Perry threatened to declare him guilty and to punish Rockboukah if he did not go to Little Berriby and protest his innocence. With such a large force of sailors and marines occupying his territory, and three men-of-war anchored just offshore, Tom had little choice.

It took the Americans just as long to disembark from Rockboukah as it had taken them to land. Using canoes, they ferried men to the ships two or three at a time. All the while the locals gathered on the beach to watch. Bridge described the scene as quite animated, "the women and children came from the woods in swarms, all talking, screaming, laughing and

¹⁰³ Some of the officers took the gesture as a pantomime meant to indicate that the sword did not have any blood on it, or was innocent of the crimes. Heywood noted that Perry returned the gesture by kissing his own sword, presumably to swear or attest to the truth of his own word, perhaps as a means to gain the king's confidence and help persuade him to board the ship.

¹⁰⁴ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 77; "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

¹⁰⁵ Rich.

¹⁰⁶ "Notes of a palaver, held at Rockboukah on the 11th of December, 1843," S. Doc. 150, 44.

running hither and thither.”¹⁰⁷ About three-quarters of the African men carried muskets, and despite the relaxed atmosphere and presence of the women and children, it still made Heywood nervous. Tom had not yet boarded the *Macedonian* and Heywood was afraid that he might try to escape. Although Tom had agreed to go, he was more or less an American prisoner. But there was no escape attempt, just a little commotion when canoes occasionally capsized in the rough surf. The waves threw men into the sea or back onto the beach, and several lost their hats, jackets, and muskets in the process. One officer counted ninety-eight locals diving into the water after lost muskets. Some impatient marines chose to swim rather than wait their turn for a canoe and marines could be seen swimming with their muskets held above their head, or in the cases of those who could not swim, being carried by Kroomen.¹⁰⁸

Once the Americans managed to reboard their vessels, the squadron set sail. Finally on their way to Little Berriby, the men were not quite sure what to expect. So far, they had visited a few African towns and seen a glimpse of life on the coast, but in their estimation, different villages rated quite differently. Rockboukah was the first palisaded town that they had seen. They described the people of Settra Kroo as superior, the best informed, most intelligent, and best in appearance.¹⁰⁹ But there seemed to be a general expectation that the people of Little Berriby would be thoroughly wretched.

When the squadron arrived at Little Berriby on the afternoon of December 12th the men had their first glimpse of things to come. Rich measured distance in terms of firing range. According to his estimates, the squadron was anchored within half cannon shot of the beach, and the beach was within musket range of the town. As he sized up the terrain, Rich noted less than favorable conditions for a landing. A high ridge of rocks commanded the beach and covered the only landing place for boats, and a double stockade, fifteen feet high, with what appeared to be many new timbers, protected the town. Rich judged that the palisades had been recently “put in the best possible state of repair.” Roberts was surprised to see Crackow’s people in the town, he had expected them to flee into the interior. A dirty looking

¹⁰⁷ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 76.

¹⁰⁸ “Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*.”

¹⁰⁹ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 65.

flag flew above the town. At first Rich and some others thought that it was a white flag, but Roberts later claimed that it had been the flag of a Portuguese schooner, supposedly captured there sometime before the *Mary Carver*.¹¹⁰

Perry's council met on board *Macedonian* at 8:30 the next morning and unanimously agreed "that unless some exculpatory evidence should be educed at the palaver about to take place, the five towns in question should be destroyed, after first ascertaining that the women and children had left them." Despite his failure to coerce a confession from the people of Rockboukah, Perry had decided that "sufficient proof had been obtained" to condemn Little Berriby. The council deemed Tom's testimony, added to that of King George of Sinoe and other unnamed sources, adequate to justify its decision "to fasten a direct participation of all five villages of the Crackow family in the piracy upon the *Mary Carver*."¹¹¹ Perry abandoned all of his elaborate schemes; he forgot the plan to exchange the six hostages captured by *Porpoise*, and the plan to exact payment or force mortgages upon the people. The upcoming palaver would be a mere formality, a last sporting chance for Crackow's people to save themselves. It was now all but certain that this palaver would end in violence.

The council met for less than thirty minutes. By 9 a.m., fifteen boats loaded with officers, some 150 sailors, and ninety marines formed a single line and began pulling for the beach abreast of one another. But again, the attempt at military formation backfired and produced an embarrassingly confused and difficult landing. The narrow landing place could only accommodate four or five boats at a time; the extended formation forced most of the boats to beach further down in heavy surf and the huge waves swamped a couple of them. Heywood's boat was so badly stoven that he had to send two men back to *Saratoga* to haul off the launch.¹¹²

Perry stationed most of his forces on the beach, in a line facing the town and the surrounding wood. Meanwhile, a number of armed natives were "mustering along the beach."

¹¹⁰ Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, May 1844, 133-144; Rich.

¹¹¹ "Notes of a council held on board the United States frigate *Macedonian*, off Little Berriby, on the morning of the 13th of December 1843, at half past 8 o'clock" S. Doc. 150, 44-45.

¹¹² The total force is estimated at between 180 and 250 marines and bluejackets, although some reports estimated a force as large as five hundred.

Roberts noticed some in “earnest conversation” that worried him. As Roberts and Captain Abbot walked into town they saw what appeared to be “military preparations” and passed “rapidly through.”¹¹³ Perry ordered his men to build a temporary palaver house on the beach, hoping to avoid repetition of the difficulties at Rockboukah. The men pieced an improvised shed together, using boat oars and awnings, about fifty yards from the town gate.

Several of the squadron officers, along with Roberts, King George, and King Tom assembled in the palaver house where they met Young Ben Crackow, the new headman at Little Berriby, and five or six other men who represented the neighboring villages. The American forces formed two lines on the beach facing the town, the first positioned itself near the palaver house and the second stood back along the shore. From this position, the marines could cover the entire town and protect their boats. Some eighty to one hundred Africans, armed with muskets, stood in front of the town, facing the Americans in a “confused mass.” Rich could also see other groups scattering in all directions, as well as what appeared to be a well-manned defense within the town walls.¹¹⁴

The men of Little Berriby appeared confident and in high spirits. Ben Crackow’s interpreter spoke first, announcing, “This no be war palaver, this be peace palaver.” Roberts’ replied that it may begin as a peace palaver, but that if they did not set things right it would quickly turn into a war palaver.¹¹⁵ The long-awaited moment had finally come, Perry began to speak. He told the men assembled in the improvised shed that he had come to Little Berriby for only one reason: to ask the king a question. He turned, looked Ben Crackow directly in the face, and asked him if he had anything to say about the cruel murder of Captain Farwell, the murder of the crew, and the looting and destruction of the *Mary Carver*.¹¹⁶

Crackow remained calm and told his version of the *Mary Carver*’s end. He said that Farwell had been responsible for his own death, that he had deposited goods at Little Berriby earlier in the year, and that he had contracted for a price. But upon closer inspection,

¹¹³ Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, May 1844, 142.

¹¹⁴ Rich.

¹¹⁵ “Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*; Rich.

¹¹⁶ William P. Rogers, “Notes of a palaver held at Little Berriby, on the morning of the 13th of December 1843,” S. Doc. 150, 45.

Crackow's people became dissatisfied with the goods and the bargain. When Farwell returned to collect his payment, the Berriby people had refused to pay, explaining that his goods were inferior and that "Dutch vessel sell cheaper."¹¹⁷ Crackow told Perry how Old Crackow's people had sent two of their boys on board the *Mary Carver* to return the goods, but that Farwell had refused to take them back, "became infuriated, and finally murdered the boys." When the late Old King Crackow learned of these murders he declared Farwell guilty and sentenced him to death. Meanwhile, the schooner drifted ashore, bilged, and then sank with her cargo. According to Crackow, the old king and anyone who might have helped him to kill Farwell had since died; none of the people now living in the town had been involved in the matter.¹¹⁸

Perry and the other Americans at the palaver knew almost nothing about Eben Farwell. At no point during their investigations had anyone inquired about the captain's character, although several men involved in the palaver either knew something about him or could easily have made inquiries. Roberts and Russwurm knew a little about Farwell from his visits to the colonies. Father Kelly had reason to question the captain's character and could have verified that Farwell sold inferior goods. And at least two officers assigned to the *Saratoga* may have known something of the man.

Saratoga's purser, Horatio Bridge, was the son of Augusta judge, James Bridge: Sen. Reuel Williams' business partner and mentor. In turn, Williams was a friend, mentor, and political ally of Horatio's, and the two shared a close relationship. Williams, a member of the Senate naval affairs committee, had been instrumental in securing Horatio Bridge's commission as purser. Williams also had a close relationship with the Farwell family; he had acted as their attorney and had been a character witness for Eben Farwell at his 1837 trial for the murder of John Brown. Horatio Bridge was only two years older than the slain captain, he came from the neighboring town, and the two men had mutual friends. If Bridge did not know Eben Farwell personally, he certainly knew of him. Likewise, *Saratoga's* Lieut. Charles Heywood also came

¹¹⁷ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

¹¹⁸ Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, May 1844, 142.

from Kennebec County, Maine and likely knew something of the captain or his reputation.¹¹⁹

But despite these acquaintances and connections, Perry and his men did not consider Farwell's character in their pursuit of justice. Perry had taken Thomas Burke's character into account in the *Edward Burley* matter, but that vessel had returned home, whereas the *Mary Carver* had not. As far as Perry was concerned, Americans had been murdered in cold blood for plunder and the people of Little Berriby were responsible. Whatever story Ben Crackow told made little difference.

As the palaver continued, Roberts cross examined Crackow. He asked if Old Crackow had also killed the crew. Ben Crackow's interpreter answered that no one had killed the crew, "crew no dead," he said. When Roberts asked, "What became of the sails and anchors?" the interpreter explained that the schooner had been wrecked on shore causing a total loss. "They all go to bottom," he said.¹²⁰ Everything, Crackow claimed, had sunk with the vessel. This claim incensed the Americans, after all *Rhoderick Dhu's* Captain Syms had reported that these people had offered to sell him various sails and rigging that had likely belonged to the *Mary Carver*. According to Bridge, it was "notorious that a large quantity of goods from the wreck, and portions of the vessel itself, were distributed among the towns along the coast." And besides, he said, "it was well known" that they had "boasted of having 'caught' (to use their own phrase), an American vessel."¹²¹ As Heywood put it, their story "was rather too much." Roberts called Crackow a liar. And then things got out of hand.¹²²

The Americans were finished talking and decided to encourage the Berriby men to cooperate by taking a few hostages. Perry whispered orders to Lieutenant Contee to leave the tent and bring up a guard of marines. Meanwhile, according to their plan, Perry was supposed to hold the palaver party hostage inside the house while his men outside fired the town. But Perry moved too slowly and he missed his chance. Instead of quickly seizing the Berriby men, Roberts and Perry moved cautiously towards Crackow, saying that they knew he was lying and

¹¹⁹ Heywood had a young family back in Waterville, Maine, just a few miles up the Kennebec River from the Farwell home.

¹²⁰ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

¹²¹ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 78-79.

¹²² Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, May 1844, 142; William P. Rogers, "Notes of a palaver held at Little Berriby, on the morning of the 13th of December 1843," S. Doc. 150, 45; "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

that they had evidence of his guilt. They threatened his interpreter, demanding he tell the truth. The people outside realized what was happening, signaled to the town, and men posted inside the palisades began shooting at the Americans on the beach. Frightened, the interpreter ran, and Crackow and the others followed.¹²³

Chaos erupted. Perry and another officer tried to grab Crackow as he ran away, but only managed to tear off his robe. A chase ensued. Perry caught Crackow by his waist cloth, "and in the struggle fell, and dug his nose into the sand."¹²⁴ Crackow, a strong athletic man, struggled to escape, dragging Perry through the sand for ten or fifteen yards. Someone cried out: "don't let them escape." A shot struck Crackow in the back of the neck, he stumbled, and as Heywood described, he "never got a fair chance." But Crackow regained his footing and continued to wrestle with Perry. A marine stabbed him with a bayonet but this powerful and desperate man continued to fight "like a wild beast."¹²⁵ The marine stabbed him again, this time through the groin and into the abdomen. Another marine hit him over the head so hard with the butt of a musket that the stock broke. Crackow lay on the ground while a disheveled Perry stood up. Commotion surrounded them, "bullets were flying thickly."¹²⁶ Just as the men started to look out for their own safety, Crackow spotted a musket lying on the ground and jumped to his feet. Captain Mayo tackled him, but even wounded, Crackow was more powerful and nearly wrestled Mayo's gun away from him. As Governor Roberts described it, "Capt. Mayo with a great deal of skill and presence of mind, just as Krako was bringing his piece to bear on him, drew from his belt a pistol, sprung the bayonet and stabbed him in the breast."¹²⁷ It took five or six men to finally wrestle the naked and bleeding Crackow to the ground. They tied him to a board and carried him to the boats while "he yelled like one possessed."¹²⁸

Meanwhile, Commander Tattnall chased the interpreter across the beach. As the man ran towards the town, Tattnall followed and shot him in the spine. The force of the shot

¹²³ Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, May 1844, 142; William P. Rogers, "Notes of a palaver held at Little Berriby, on the morning of the 13th of December 1843," S. Doc. 150, 45. Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 78-79.

¹²⁴ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

¹²⁵ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 79.

¹²⁶ Rich.

¹²⁷ Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, May 1844, 142.

¹²⁸ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

propelled the interpreter up into the air, and he fell back down to the ground dead. Heywood thought that "it was a picturesque fall." Heywood had just left the boats and was walking towards the palaver house "to see [some] fun," when the shooting began. He described the scene:

As I was behind the line, I could move about pretty freely, and became possessed of a very strong inclination to shoot somebody, but could not see a shot sufficiently certain to expend my charge on, knowing that before I could load again, they would be too far off. So I ran towards the fellows escaping on our left, but seeing two natives in the water, it appeared a most beautiful chance, and I went to give it to them. I could have loaded, and fired frequently, for no matter how deep they dived, they would have to come up again to blow. The Purser [Bridge], also came along with intent to kill, and we were just drawing bead on them, when we learned that they were Kroomen, from the *Macedonian*, who had taken to the water lest they might be mistaken for natives. So we spared them, and I afterwards kept others from shooting at them.¹²⁹

The abrupt end to the palaver and the sudden outbreak of shooting caused a great deal of confusion among the men on the beach. Rich described that, "so unexpected had been this termination, that one scarcely knew what was to be done – whether to fire or not – and in consequence most of the natives near us had run beyond musket shot, before any regular fire was made upon them."¹³⁰ Bridge described the commotion:

The melee had been as sudden as the explosion of gunpowder; it was wholly unexpected, but perhaps not to be wondered at, where two parties, with weapons in their hands, had met to discuss a question of robbery and murder. When the firing commenced, about two hundred natives were on the spot, or in the vicinity; they were now flying in all directions, some along the beach, a few into the sea itself, but by far the greatest number to the woods. Many shots were fired, notwithstanding the Commodore's orders to refrain.¹³¹

With Crackow captured and the other Berriby men fleeing, Perry ordered his men to stop firing and tried to restore order on the beach. He had not wanted anyone killed, but rather preferred to take as many prisoners as possible, especially Crackow. Officers repeatedly shouted orders along the beach to fire only if fired upon, but the situation was difficult to control, as several of the officers, including Heywood and Bridge, were anxious to draw blood.¹³² After the fact, Perry defended his men, reporting:

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Rich.

¹³¹ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 79-80.

¹³² Matthew C. Perry to David Henshaw, 21 December 1843, MCP Letter Books; Rich.

The shedding of blood in the affair was unpremeditated and accidental. The natives commenced the fire, and it is fortunate that no more of them fell. In the melee King Ben Cracow and his interpreter were killed, and this would seem a providential result, as both these persons unquestionably took an active part in the massacre of Captain Farewell and his crew.¹³³

Although it was unclear who had fired the first shot, the official report unquestioningly blamed the people of Little Berriby. And although Perry had wanted to capture Ben Crackow alive, officially Perry described his death as providential.

The Destruction of Little Berriby

Having abandoned the palaver, the Americans proceeded with the punishment phase of their operation. Perry placed Mayo in charge of the expedition. Mayo directed the men to break down the palisades and burn the town. They assembled in formation and waited for the signal. When the launch gun fired, Tattnell and Rich led the advance. The men fired volleys into the town to ensure that it was empty. When they received no return fire, a few men climbed through the small holes in the palisades that served as the town gates. Others cut the withes that bound the planks together, making a large hole over twenty feet wide in one of the walls for more men to pass through. Inside, they all gathered around the council tree in the center of town and cheered.¹³⁴

The men lit a dozen small fires around the town and finished cutting down the remainder of the stockade walls. Then they watched as some one hundred houses with haystack roofs blazed. The entire town burned to ashes in less than fifteen minutes, “leaving an open space of blackened and smoking ruins.”¹³⁵ As Rich stood watching the flames he thought of the thousand souls who were now homeless: “As we gazed upon the ruin before us, when we saw a whole town which had cost years of anxious toil and labor to erect, in an hour laid low – and perhaps forever – did not some of us ask – ‘What right, save that power, had ye to do so?’.” Bothered by the proceedings, Rich asked, “Before what tribunal was Kracko and his interpreter tried, ere he was called to render up his final account for all deeds, whether

¹³³ Matthew C. Perry to David Henshaw, 21 December 1843, MCP Letter Books.

¹³⁴ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 80.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

done or left undone?" Rich believed that Crackow and his interpreter were bad men, but he questioned the Americans' moral right to inflict this course of punishment.¹³⁶

The Americans destroyed Little Berriby in less than thirty minutes. While the town burned, they fired their muskets and grape shot from the launch gun into the surrounding woods. The villagers returned fire from the woods, but from such a distance that they inflicted little damage. As the fires burned down, Mayo ordered the men to cease firing; they were running low on cartridges. But the Berriby people continued to engage, making quick movements forward to the edge of the woods, firing, and then retreating.¹³⁷ Bridge noted that they were not using "Christian bullets," but instead loaded their guns with makeshift ammunition made from old iron pots, nails, and copper slugs, which he assumed had been shaped from the *Mary Carver*'s spikes.¹³⁸ One of these makeshift bullets struck a marine through his waist belt and knocked him down. Another struck a marine's musket, cutting through the barrel and shooting off the hammer. With these near misses, the men grew even more eager to pursue the Africans into the woods.

The Americans had come to Little Berriby to punish its people for attacking the *Mary Carver*, and to impress upon them the extent of U.S. power. Few Africans along this part of the coast had ever seen an American warship and they generally assumed that the United States was a weak country. Rumors that Crackow's interpreter had openly boasted of killing Farwell because he did not fear Americans wounded their pride. When colonists tried to warn Africans that the United States would send frigates or other large men-of-war to punish them the Africans laughed, saying that "'Merica man no have big ship – have little boat – give him plenty fight if he likes." As the months had passed, the natives had grown bolder and taunted colonists, asking, "Where be big 'Merica ship you speak about? – I no see him yet." Rich was convinced that the natives had gotten this idea from the British. He believed that British merchants "industriously circulated" rumors along the coast, encouraging Africans to

¹³⁶ Rich.

¹³⁷ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

¹³⁸ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 80.

disrespect and mistreat Americans.¹³⁹ Perry and his men had come to set these Africans straight and to put the fear of the United States into them.

Anxious to advance, Heywood and his men “asked permission to enter the woods where a few men stationed behind trees could have kept the natives from firing on the main body of our troops.” Tattnell consented and led a small party into the woods. One officer, sent ahead to scout, heard a noise, fired into a tree, and “down fell a negro.” As he advanced a little further he found a little trench dug parallel to the edge of the wood. Tattnell’s party moved carefully through the bush, firing at anything that moved. They found one old man hiding in the underbrush. His friends had apparently left him behind because he was “emaciated and too feeble to crawl.” Expecting to be shot, the man held up his hands. The Americans took him to a safer spot and gave him some food; Bridge remarked that it was “an act of humanity which must have seemed to him very singular, if not absurd, in contrast with the mischief which we had wrought upon his home and people.” Meanwhile, the boats kept firing shots over their heads. *Macedonian* fired at the town while *Saratoga* and *Decatur* fired at each side, keeping the natives back and “shattering the great branches of the trees, and adding to the terror, if not the loss, of the enemy.”¹⁴⁰ Heywood thought it was “a great addition to the flaming town, and cracking muskets, to hear the boom of the guns, and the rushing and whistling sound of the shot as they flew over our heads, and went crashing into the forest.”¹⁴¹

Tattnell led two charges through the bush, forcing the Berriby people to flee deeper into the woods. The action was dying down. Heywood and some marines in his party started losing interest in the waning skirmish and turned their attention to a marine who had been shot. His injury was not serious; a long piece of copper spike had lodged just under his skin. Although the marine was obviously in pain, he took it “particularly good” and sat on the beach clutching his gun in one hand and his side with the other.¹⁴²

Next, Heywood left the wounded man and his arm chest on the beach and joined up with another group of marines standing guard at the east end of the town. He recognized an

¹³⁹ Rich.

¹⁴⁰ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 80-81.

¹⁴¹ “Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*.”

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

old friend and as they stood around talking, they noticed Old Crackow's grave behind a small wicker fence next to a tree. Heywood and some other officers wanted to defile the grave, they began tearing down the fence, hoping to provoke the natives and draw them out from the bush. But before they could get very far a midshipman interfered. As Heywood put it, the man "was romantically exclaiming 'Spare his grave'." Provoking a scene within their own ranks instead of a fight with the natives, the officers gave up the idea.¹⁴³

Heywood and his friend abandoned the grave and were stoking the remnants of the fire, knocking a few remaining pieces of the palisades onto the hot coals, trying to see that every last piece burned, when the bugle sounded. The day's fighting was over and the men returned to their ships. The Little Berriby people lost at least eight men, although it was hard for the Americans to know for sure. The Americans suffered only superficial wounds and some damage to their boats, which had been hit by numerous slugs. Heywood joined Tattnall and some marines making up the rearguard. The commander had been wounded in the leg, but it did not slow him down. He told his men that if the natives fired on them as they embarked that he would charge the woods again. As they reached the boats, they turned and fired one last volley towards the woods for good measure and were off.¹⁴⁴

The Americans managed to collect several prizes and souvenirs on their first day at Little Berriby. They took several canoes, one of which was big enough to carry forty men. They also recovered an American flag, which they guessed had belonged to the *Mary Carver*, and took to be further evidence of Crackow's guilt.¹⁴⁵ On board *Macedonian*, the squadron surgeon Edmund Du Barry immediately examined Crackow. Perry wanted the man to live so that he could imprison Crackow and use him to force the other towns to confess or cooperate. The surgeon dressed Crackow's wounds but they proved to be fatal, he died early the next morning.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid; Rich.

¹⁴⁵ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 81.

¹⁴⁶ Rich. Perry later described the death of Crackow and his interpreter as "providential" because both had been unquestionably taken part in the Farwell's murder. Matthew C. Perry to David Henshaw, 21 December 1843, MCP Letter Books.

The next day, the squadron remained at anchor while Perry held yet another palaver on board *Macedonian*. Perry, Mayo, Tattnall, Abbot, and Roberts met with the headmen Tom and George from Rockboukah and Bassa to discuss the events at Little Berriby. Perry tried one more time to coerce the two men to confess. He told them that he suspected them of being involved in the piracy against the *Mary Carver*, citing that Old Crackow had been at Rockboukah during the attack and that some of the stolen cargo had been taken there.¹⁴⁷

Tom acknowledged that Old Crackow had visited his town, but he insisted that the old man had been ill and that his son, Ben Crackow, was responsible for Farwell's murder. Tom repeated that some of the goods did end up in Rockboukah, but only because his people had gone to Little Berriby and begged for them, not because they had conspired with Crackow. George also continued to deny the charges against his people, insisting that he had warned Old Crackow against the plan, to which the old man had responded by telling him to mind his own business.¹⁴⁸

Disappointed again, Perry discussed the matter with his council. The council concluded that it had insufficient evidence to convict the neighboring towns of Rockboukah, Grand Tabou, Bassa, and Grand Berriby of attacking the *Mary Carver*. This decision forced Perry to abandon his plan to collect restitution from these towns. Instead, he decided to make a compact with them. Little more than a pledge of good faith, the agreement stated that "in order to repel all these suspicions" of "connivance at the piracy and murder" each town would agree "to protect the lives and property of all American citizens" on the coast now and in the future, from Cavally to Tabou, for twenty miles inland. Tom, his son, and two other headmen from Rockboukah signed the agreement on the spot.¹⁴⁹ Perry had wanted a different outcome, but at least he would not leave empty handed.

Later that evening, the squadron sailed a few miles down the coast. It only took them about an hour to reach the chain of four small villages belonging to the Crackow family, which linked Little Berriby to Grand Berriby. The squadron anchored overnight. At six o'clock the

¹⁴⁷ "Notes of a palaver held on board the United States frigate *Macedonian*, at anchor off Little Berriby, on the 14th day of December, 1843" S. Doc. 150, 46-48.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

next morning, the men started preparing for a landing, and within the hour more than two hundred bluejackets and marines were landed safely on the beach. *Macedonian* covered their landing with her cannon, "so as to leave no doubt that this was a war-palaver."¹⁵⁰ The sailors struggled through another difficult landing in rough surf, again using small canoes to land only two or three men at a time. They came ashore off a small point of rocks, with two of the villages situated to the east, and two more to the west. The beach had "the usual skirting of forest" but this forest came unusually close to the water near where they landed, and during the landing they "received a sharp discharge from the bush." The shots made a "loud whizzing noise" over their heads but did no harm. The first crew from the *Saratoga* to reach the shore immediately charged into the bush, but Tattnall stopped the rest of his men from following. When Heywood landed, he complained that "the Captain restrained us from charging till we were all formed in line, so that by the time that we reached the edge of the bush, the birds had flown."¹⁵¹ As the Americans carried out their tedious landing, they faced a smattering of gunfire from the bushes, as close as twenty yards from the water's edge. Yet despite this close range, the shots inflicted no serious damage.¹⁵²

Once on shore, the Americans marched in formation, south-west to the first village. Marching over rocks and across a stream, wading in water up to their knees, they quickly realized that this mission was different from their earlier adventures. As Bridge observed, "the season for palavers and diplomacy now being over," there was no standing around, no guard duty, and no fun as there had been previously.¹⁵³ Heywood commented, "We were in the soldiering business immediately."¹⁵⁴

The first village that the Americans came to consisted of some one hundred houses surrounded by a palisade. As Heywood's line approached, the men saw flames rising. Some men from *Decatur* had already started cutting through the wooden palisades and setting fire to the wicker huts inside. The houses' thatched palmetto leaf roofs easily caught light and

¹⁵⁰ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 81; Rich.

¹⁵³ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 81.

¹⁵⁴ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

burned quickly. Bridge watched the “picturesque scene” as the flames “ran up the conical roofs, and meeting at the apex, whirled themselves fiercely into the darkened air.”¹⁵⁵ The men stopped for a while to watch the village burn before moving on.

Saratoga’s men took the lead as the detachment marched single file for another mile-and-a-half west down the beach to the next village. When Tattnall ordered the marine drummer and fifer to the back of the line for safety, the young drummer caused something of a scene; “deeming it a reflection upon his courage, [he] burst into tears, and actually blubbered aloud as he beat the pas de charge.”¹⁵⁶ As Tattnall’s men approached the second village, they met a group of thirty or forty natives defending their homes and the action began. The Africans fired a large swivel towards Tattnall’s line, nearly causing serious damage. But just then, some of the squadron’s boats came into position opposite the village and fired grape shot from their launch guns, drawing the natives’ fire and covering Tattnall’s advance. Had the defenders stood their ground they could have given the Americans a good fight. This village, like the others, was well-defended with palisades and, as Rich estimated, the two villages combined probably included at least two thousand inhabitants, far outnumbering the American force. But rather than stay and fight, the villagers fled into the bush as Tattnall’s line approached, abandoning their village to the Americans.¹⁵⁷

Saratoga’s men entered the village unopposed. They went from house-to-house knocking down doors with the butts of their muskets, making sure that the place was deserted. They searched the village and collected the few valuables and souvenirs they could find; the inhabitants had taken most everything with them. One officer found a war horn which he used to rally his men throughout the remainder of the day. Heywood found a woman’s scarf which he tied to his belt as a trophy. They saw many boards which they suspected had come from the *Mary Carver*. And Heywood found a bunch of bullocks which he hoped to get permission to

¹⁵⁵ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 81. Bridge and his editor purposely tried to make the descriptions in this journal dramatic and they were not above exaggeration for effect. But the suggestion that he could have stood admiring the flames makes the point about his feeling about the decision to burn the village.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ “Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*; Rich.

shoot, but he could not find the right officer to grant him permission and so he had to march back with his "mouth watering."¹⁵⁸

Tattnall's men destroyed this second village and its canoes, and left it burning while they retraced their steps back along the narrow, sandy beach. As they marched, they were never more than five or ten yards from the bush. And although they were completely exposed, the Africans only fired a few shots at them. Marching through the bush, Heywood came upon Bridge, who had been following in the rear of Captain Mayo's party and had fallen behind.

Bridge and his steward Tom Mahony had been alone in the bush when Tom spotted an African man about fifty yards away. Following Bridge's orders, Tom fired on the man but missed. Tom dropped to his knee to reload while Bridge tried to take aim, but Bridge had not seen the man and had nothing to aim at. As he was struggling to find the target, the man suddenly returned fire. Luckily for Bridge, the man's shot flashed in the pan and signaled his position. Seeing his target, Bridge fired and then dropped to reload. By the time Heywood and the others arrived, Bridge and his steward had each fired three shots, still not knowing if they had hit the man. Bridge, who was somewhat carried away with this experience of soldiering, wanted to explore the bush, but there was no time and no reason to take such a risk. Bridge knew that he had been lucky that the man's musket had flashed; he had been standing quite exposed and as he acknowledged, his opposite had had "as fair and deliberate aim at me as could be wished." Yet the encounter did not shake Bridge's confidence. Rather, he was quite self-satisfied, and pronounced it a "nice little skirmish." The men fired one last random volley into the bushes before marching back towards the beach to rejoin the others.¹⁵⁹

The Americans continued marching about another mile north-east past the point of their landing earlier that morning, following a broad road, until they came to a third village, which Heywood described:

It was a sort of double town, a part of it laying on the beach, the other part extending almost into the bush. We went through it with a party of sailors and found it pretty thoroughly down.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

¹⁵⁹ Bridge, "Holograph Journal; "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

¹⁶⁰ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

This village was empty and they quickly destroyed it like the others. Heywood and his men came across a cow lying on the ground with a young calf. They carried the calf off “partly to express [their] general disgust at the extremely precautions manner in which things were carried on.” (They later baked it into a “fine pie.”) The allure of fresh meat was quite strong and tempted many of the men. Bridge described continually seeing flocks of vultures wheeling in the skies overhead, responding to the scent of slain animals.¹⁶¹

Heywood led his men along a wide path into the bush, hoping to find another village. After a few rods he met some marine guards who told him that no one had passed any further into the interior. Hoping “to come across bullocks or negroes,” Heywood kept going. But before his men could advance more than a quarter of a mile they heard bugles calling them back to the beach. “As a token of hostility,” they discharged their muskets into the trees, just “as Napoleon’s soldiers did at the commencement of the invasion of Russia.”¹⁶²

On the way back, Heywood’s party came upon a small group of houses surrounded by a lime hedge where they met Purser Bridge. The neat little compound, with its privacy and luxury, appeared to belong to some influential person. Bridge and a midshipman had stumbled on the little hamlet while roaming the bush looking for some action. Thrilled by the opportunity, they immediately “attacked” the three deserted little grass huts, but they barely managed to penetrate the thick, thorny hedge surrounding the compound. Bridge attacked the gate with his cutlass. They had cut through some of the palisade’s fastenings, pulled up five or six palings, and made an opening just big enough for a man to squeeze through.¹⁶³

The compound was “a pretty spot, about fifty yards in diameter with a tree of very dense foliage in the centre and three neat houses around it.” The purser and the midshipman took turns keeping guard and beating down doors with the butts of their muskets. Bridge admitted that “it was not much of a sacking, for every article of furniture had been carried off.” They tried setting the compound alight but had nothing to start a fire with. Bridge flashed his pistol near the thatch, and when that failed he tried firing his musket. They were

¹⁶¹ Bridge, “Holograph Journal”; Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 82.

¹⁶² “Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*.”

¹⁶³ Bridge, “Holograph Journal.”

still searching for something to start a fire with when Heywood's party arrived. Better prepared, the marines quickly set fire to the compound. Watching the flames, Bridge imagined that "this was doubtless the settlement of one family, who had been living in comfort till we came."¹⁶⁴

It was now two o'clock in the afternoon and the men had been busy marching and burning villages for nearly six hours. Tired from the heat of the sun and the flames, they marched back to their canoes on the beach. They sat down under the shade of their umbrellas to eat lunch, the ruins of the first village in the background. Later, when asked about the day's events, one Krooman remarked, "Commodore and Merica man devil. Go shore, burn six towns and then sit down on the beach and eat dinner."¹⁶⁵

The men enjoyed the break but Heywood kept thinking about bullocks and the leisurely atmosphere frustrated him. He decided to form his own mini-expedition and recruited the cutter's men. After examining their arms, he led the men on a march down the beach. The little party followed a broad path into the woods. Heywood was nervous because he had no authority to lead such an expedition and so he kept a watchful eye over the men. He led them about a quarter of a mile into the woods, and having seen nothing of interest they turned around and returned to the beach. But the men were not ready to give up the search and insisted that they had seen bullocks at the next village. Although he was still a little nervous, Heywood agreed to continue the search. He tried to keep the squadron in sight and watched for any signs of embarkation. As they came closer to the village, he had trouble restraining the men and he threatened to shoot anyone who disobeyed his orders.¹⁶⁶

When Heywood's party finally reached the village they were disappointed to find that it had been emptied out like the others. But just then, one of the men at the head of the group yelled out that he could see someone driving the bullocks away and the men began to run down the beach. Heywood ran as fast as he could and "sure enough, there were twelve

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Rich.

¹⁶⁶ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

beautiful animals with at least fifteen or twenty natives rushing them along.” He described what happened next:

The scene now became exciting. We gave chase and fired away at the negroes, who increased their speed, but found time to fire back at us. The distance was great and probably no harm was done, but the bullocks now being frightened between two fires, concluded to stand still. We then determined to drive them in, knowing that if we condescended to shoot them, they would be too heavy to carry back. Taking a part of the men, I entered the wood and made a detour which was terribly difficult on account of the thick underbrush. Regaining the beach, to our consternation the bullocks had started off, and were now visible still further down the beach.¹⁶⁷

As others joined in, Heywood led the chase down the beach. Almost giving up a few times, Heywood’s men continued to chase the bullocks as far as the next village, some three miles from the squadron’s landing site. To their “chagrin,” the villagers drove the animals through the village gates. Heywood opened a “brisk” fire on the natives, but not the village, because he was not sure if it belonged to Little or Grand Berriby. Perry had ordered his men to spare villages belonging to Grand Berriby in anticipation of his upcoming palaver with that town. The men were “exceedingly importunate” when Heywood ordered them to give up their attack. Instead, they sat down on the beach to show the Africans that they were in no hurry to leave and begged Heywood to hold a palaver with their foes. Fifteen minutes later, an officer approached, placed Heywood’s party under arrest, and ordered them to report to the boats immediately. Heywood’s men had unknowingly fired on this officer during their race up the beach. As they marched back, they took continuous fire from the bush. One of the men was shot through the thigh and had to be carried back in a litter. Heywood implored the officer for permission to shoot back but he was refused.

Heywood had no idea of the excitement that his expedition had caused among the squadron. *Saratoga*’s spyglasses had followed the chase down the beach while Tattnall had paced the deck listening to the reports. Perry was likewise upset. He worried that the men would attack the village and spoil his upcoming palaver. Initially, he ordered an officer to go ashore and handle it, but Perry was so upset that he reconsidered and decided to go himself.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

In the process of landing, his barge took fire from the bush and confusion and excitement covered the beach.

While Heywood's escapade was causing commotion on the beach, Rich, Bridge, and others marched to the fourth and last village of Little Berriby. It was a hot and tiring three-mile march at the end of a long day but they were rewarded for their efforts. The men reveled in their mayhem. Bridge described the excitement:

Man is perhaps never happier than when his native destructiveness can be freely exercised, and with the benevolent complacency of performing a good action, instead of the remorse of perpetrating a bad one. It unites the charms of sin and virtue. Thus, in all probability, few of us had ever spent a day of higher enjoyment than this, when we roamed about, with a musket in one hand and a torch in the other, devastating what had hitherto been the homes of a people.¹⁶⁸

While destroying "this last village of the pirates," they finally found what they considered to be "abundant proofs" against Crackow's people. The marines recovered several items from the village, including two chain cables and a chest that contained a letter addressed to Capt. Robert McFarlane, the *Mary Carver's* first mate.¹⁶⁹ At this point the Americans had destroyed all of the villages of Little Berriby, and Rich estimated that they had rendered some six thousand people homeless, "a lesson to them which they are not likely soon to forget," he thought. Finished with their work, the men returned to the beach.

After destroying Little Berriby, the Americans disembarked, taking with them several canoes, the supposed remnants of the *Mary Carver*, eight or nine bullocks, and a few miscellaneous souvenirs. Three men had been wounded; the carpenter's wound was superficial, and another sailor had accidentally been shot by his own pistol. The only man seriously injured that day was the sailor who had been shot returning from Heywood's chase. His case appeared rather bleak, and when the surgeon could not find the musket ball in his leg he feared the worst, but luckily for this sailor the ball had passed through and in time he began to recover.

¹⁶⁸ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 83.

¹⁶⁹ Bridge, "Holograph Journal"; "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*"; Rich.

The Grand Berriby Treaty & Other Loose Ends

The squadron set sail for the neighboring town of Grand Berriby at daylight the next morning. When it reached the main village, it hoisted white flags. The squadron still had the six prisoners captured by *Porpoise* back in October, and Perry sent one of these hostages ashore with a message inviting the headmen of Grand Berriby to a palaver. They accepted and several men from Grand Berriby visited *Macedonian* later that day.

When they came on board, Perry informed the headmen that although he had suspected the people of Grand Berriby in the piracy against the *Mary Carver*, he was glad to find that there was no evidence against them.¹⁷⁰ King Ben replied that he had never had troubles with trading vessels. He criticized Old Crackow's people for attacking strangers, and claimed that his people had cut off all trade with Little Berriby after the *Mary Carver* incident. Ben explained that the two communities were now at odds; the people of Grand Berriby welcomed the punishment of their unruly neighbors and hoped that it would help to revive trade, which had diminished after the attack.¹⁷¹

Perry presented King Ben with the treaty that the headmen of Rockboukah and Bassa had signed two days earlier. He explained that Grand Berriby could protect itself from further suspicion by joining the compact and pledging to protect Americans and their property, and he suggested that the resulting alliance between these towns would help to prevent Crackow's people from returning and renewing their depredations on the coast. The Grand Berriby men readily agreed and pledged to prevent Crackow's people from rebuilding their villages. Afraid that the Americans would destroy their towns as well, the people of Grand Berriby offered to pay any ransom that Perry asked for to save their homes from the flames.

After the men signed the treaty, Perry released the remaining hostages, including King Ben's eldest son Prince Jumbo, and a happy reunion took place on board *Macedonian*. According to Bridge:

¹⁷⁰ "Notes of a palaver held on board the United States ship *Macedonian*, off Little Berriby, December 16th, 1843" S. Doc. 150, 49-50.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

They threw themselves into each other's arms, wept, laughed, and danced for joy. To the King, his son was like one risen from the dead; he had given him up for lost, supposing that the young man had been executed.¹⁷²

As a gesture of good will, the Americans gave each of the released prisoners a new suit of clothes, some tobacco, handkerchiefs, and other tokens. They gave Prince Jumbo an old lieutenant's coat, which gave him quite a bit of trouble. The jacket's snug fit made it impossible for him to paddle his canoe and the Americans laughed as they watched him struggle to get out of the coat without capsizing. When they eventually made it to shore, the hostages received a great welcome from their friends.¹⁷³

Over the course of the next three days, Perry met with the headmen from Grand Berriby, Grand Bassa, Grand Tabou, and Tabou River. He convinced local leaders from each town to sign his treaty, creating a compact with all of the African towns along the coast from Rockboukah to the Tabou River. After concluding its business, the squadron set sail back up the coast towards Cape Palmas, flying white flags "as a sign of peace to all Africa."¹⁷⁴ It stopped briefly at Rockboukah, where King Tom and his son took their leave. From there, the squadron continued on to Cape Palmas, where it anchored on December 20th.

When the squadron arrived at the cape, the Grebo, having heard reports of the destruction of Little Berriby, retreated into the woods with their possessions. But there was no need for such precaution; the squadron had completed its palaver business. The colonists and missionaries at Cape Palmas greeted the squadron warmly. Perry received letters of thanks from Russwurm, Father Kelly, and Mr. Hazlehurst among others.¹⁷⁵ Payne noted in his diary: "The way is therefore open for the re-occupation of the stations at Rockbookah and Taboo being reoccupied, as soon as laborers can be procured."¹⁷⁶ Everyone seemed to agree that the squadron's mission had been both merciful and yet a success. Perry reported to Washington

¹⁷² Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 85.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

¹⁷⁴ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

¹⁷⁵ S. Doc. 150, 58-59.

¹⁷⁶ *Episcopal Recorder*, 25 May 1844.

that, regarding “the amount of punishment inflicted upon these people, there is but one opinion on board ship and on shore that it was far short of what they deserved.”¹⁷⁷

The squadron remained together at the cape only briefly. *Decatur* left almost immediately, bound for the Bight of Biafra. Perry ordered Abbot to sail towards the equator, show the American flag at as many places as possible, and collect information about trade. Perry wanted information about the slave trade and instructed Abbot to “show your ship at as many of the slave and trading marts as time and circumstances will authorize.” But he was primarily interested in information that would help the squadron protect legitimate American trade. If Abbot did capture any slavers, Perry instructed him to deliver them to Dr. Day, the U.S. agent at Monrovia.¹⁷⁸

Saratoga remained at Cape Palmas for two days. On the second day, the colony’s General Lewis gave a dinner for her officers. Roberts and several other colonial officials attended. The guests enjoyed themselves and the dinner; Heywood was glad that the days of eating mud turtles seemed to be behind them. They toasted the squadron and celebrated the success of its mission. *Stellwagen* sang several songs and had a merry time. The officers laughed and carried on the whole way back to the wharf, Bridge chased a pig down a hill. After the party, *Saratoga* sailed for Monrovia.¹⁷⁹

Macedonian also sailed for Monrovia, but she took her time getting there, stopping to revisit the sites of the earlier palavers along the way. She stopped at Settra Kroo on December 24th to collect the fines levied on behalf of *Atalanta*’s Captain Brown. The people of Settra Kroo delivered six bullocks the next morning. Rich inferred that the news about Little Berriby had influenced them to settle their debt as soon as possible. Dr. Day reported that there had been a great change in the natives’ attitude towards the colonists, writing, “every day the benefit of the palaver was made more manifest.”¹⁸⁰ Rich summed up the whole adventure, “I

¹⁷⁷ Matthew C. Perry to David Henshaw, 21 December 1843, MCP Letter Books.

¹⁷⁸ Matthew C. Perry to Joel Abbot, 22 December 1843, S. Doc. 150, 53-54.

¹⁷⁹ “Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*.”

¹⁸⁰ “Doc. Y: Additional Notes,” S. Doc. 150, 57-58.

am sure more good, in the way of protecting our commerce, could not have been done by any one in a shorter time, or better manner, than by our Commodore.”¹⁸¹

Next, *Macedonian* sailed for Sinoe where she arrived later that same evening. Perry learned that although the Fishmen’s town there had been wholly destroyed, a few of its people still lingered in the neighborhood. Annoyed, Perry and Mayo visited the shore with a group of officers the next morning. They intended to meet with the headmen of Sinoe and Blue Barre but as most of the locals were away working in their rice fields in the interior, only one headman, Nimini, was around to hear their exhortations. Nimini promised that their agreement would be upheld and explained that the town had given special permission to this particular family of Fishmen to return in consideration for their having rescued Charles Freeman during the attack on the *Edward Burley*. Unsatisfied with this explanation, Perry canceled his plans to release three hostages he was holding, and decided to deliver the men to Roberts at Monrovia instead.¹⁸²

Perry then turned his attention to the colonists at Sinoe. He scolded them for failing to begin improvements, in particular a much needed blockhouse and stockade for their defense. He explained that the squadron was not authorized to interfere in their disputes with the natives and that he had other business to attend to. He told the colonists that they should not expect to be “constantly looked after.” They were fully capable of helping themselves in these matters and they would have to do so if they expected to receive the squadron’s help. Although Sinoe’s leaders generally admitted that they needed to improve their defenses, they explained that the settlers were strongly disinclined to do the necessary work, even for their own good, and pleaded with Perry to show them mercy.¹⁸³

Continuing along the coast, *Macedonian* reached Monrovia a short time later where she received a warm welcome. The *Liberia Herald* celebrated the destruction of Little Berriby, noting that:

The presence of these vessels will be of incalculable advantage to us. The present expedition, accompanied as it was by Governor Roberts – a

¹⁸¹ Rich.

¹⁸² Matthew C. Perry to Joseph Roberts, 3 January 1844, S. Doc. 150, 59.

¹⁸³ “Doc. Y: Additional Notes,” S. Doc. 150, 57-58.

circumstance identifying them with us in the minds of the natives, has presented the colony in an altogether new attitude in the estimation of the atlantic tribes.¹⁸⁴

Macedonian rejoined *Saratoga* and together they sailed for Porto Praia, only to be quickly separated. *Saratoga* encountered the Harmattan and cruised into Porto Praia in just six days. Although the wind coated her masts with fine white sand, the crew did not mind the dry breezes. *Macedonian*, on the other hand, found the passage extremely slow and hard going; it took her thirty days to make the same journey. Perry was so incredulous that he had to examine *Saratoga*'s log book before he would believe that she had made the same journey in such a short time.¹⁸⁵

Back at Porto Praia, after cruising the coast for a hundred and fourteen days, Perry was distressed to find that no new stores or provisions had arrived for the squadron. He had written to Secretary Henshaw in November, reporting that the squadron was running out of certain rations and that "nothing of any importance can be procured nearer than the Canary Islands." He had informed Henshaw that the squadron "must depend altogether" on regular supplies from the United States but nothing had arrived.¹⁸⁶ Finding no supplies or storeship waiting at the Cape Verdes, Perry wrote to the secretary again:

To my inexpressible disappointment, I learn that not an article of provisions has been sent out for the squadron since the shipwreck of the store ship *Renown*, in July last. The squadron is already very much straitened; and I am at a loss to find the means of providing for the immediate wants of the vessel. Supplies on this station are very uncertain, and are to be had only in small quantities, and at extravagant prices. I shall endeavor, however, to do the best I can.¹⁸⁷

He had to, with the slow speed of communications and the unlikelihood of provisions arriving any time soon, he had little choice.

It was important to Perry that the squadron return to Porto Praia and then continue on to Madeira. Not only could the boats resupply, but more importantly, he firmly believed that the men needed time to recover from their exposure to the coast. Dr. Du Barry, the fleet surgeon, reported that after the expedition to Berriby the entire complement of officers and

¹⁸⁴ *Liberia Herald*, 30 December 1843.

¹⁸⁵ "Diary of an Officer of the *Saratoga*."

¹⁸⁶ Matthew C. Perry to David Henshaw, 22 November 1843, S. Doc. 150, 20.

¹⁸⁷ Matthew C. Perry to David Henshaw, 5 February 1844, S. Doc. 150, 64-65.

crew were in reasonably good health, but that they had all been generally weakened. He stressed that the men exhibited a “general disposition to debility, when attacked by the least symptom of disease.” And, he noted, this was particularly the case on board *Saratoga*, the vessel that had been on the coast longest. Du Barry’s observations supported Perry’s belief that the men must take regular breaks in a healthier climate like Madeira in order to preserve their health and bolster their spirits. Still, these were only temporary measures, and the doctor strongly advised that “remaining too long on this station will prove eventually very disastrous to both officers and men.” Perry agreed with this recommendation but he could only pass it along to the department.¹⁸⁸

Conclusion

By the end of the year, Perry’s squadron had only been on the Africa station for little more than six months, but in that time he managed to accomplish a great deal. Although his men were weakened, Perry had largely kept them safe from disease and injury. He had managed to successfully handle the initial challenges of administering a squadron on a new station with no real support system in place. The squadron had helped to protect both the colonies and the American missions in West Africa, while working to resolve disputes with their African neighbors. Perry had settled all of the outstanding disputes between American merchantmen and Africans along the coast. And the squadron had successfully punished the people of Little Berriby for attacking the *Mary Carver* without suffering any serious injuries or losses. All of these accomplishments demonstrated the power of the U.S. government and its navy, and helped to instil respect for Americans in Africans along the coast.

Considering the difficulties that Perry faced in West Africa, the squadron successfully accomplished the initial phase of its mission during these first six months. But there was still more work to be done and Perry did not delay. *Decatur* was already exploring the coast, gathering information about legitimate and illicit trade. And as soon as the other vessels were rested and resupplied they would resume similar duties. Perry still had to find a permanent

¹⁸⁸ Edmund Du Barry to Matthew C. Perry, 21 December 1843, S. Doc. 150, 52.

solution to the supply problem, he had to fulfill Henshaw's order to survey the Maryland in Liberia coast, and sooner or later he would have to deal with the British. Finally, Perry had to report to the department on the squadron's activities. And ultimately, it would be up to the American people to decide if they approved of his work, especially his decision to destroy Little Berriby.

CHAPTER 9

THE AFRICA SQUADRON PART II: REACTIONS

By the end of 1843, Americans were growing anxious for news of the Africa squadron. Relations with Europe and questions of trade, slavery, and national honor all seemed to be connected to the squadron's success. But most importantly, people were curious about the *Mary Carver* affair. When news of the squadron finally arrived, Americans' reactions were mixed. The Tyler administration generally approved of Perry's actions, but the government said little about them. Most Americans agreed that the pirates of Little Berriby had deserved some punishment, but graphic and callous reports of the action made some people uneasy. And not surprisingly, politics played a part; colonizationists enthusiastically praised Perry and his squadron, while abolitionists sharply criticized both Perry and the mission.

With the *Mary Carver* affair finished and no new attacks against American merchantmen to worry them, Americans started to lose interest in West Africa again. Meanwhile, Perry and his squadron still had a job to do. The squadron spent most of 1844 cruising along the African coast, showing the American flag, and visiting almost every port from Sierra Leone to Benguela at least once. In addition to the squadron's general orders, the Navy Department wanted Perry to gather information and provide support to the Liberian colonies. Perry continued to establish the station, especially a squadron base and storage depot, and to collect information about sailing conditions, trade, and other activity along a coast that was largely unfamiliar to the navy.

The squadron spent the next year cruising the coast, patrolling for slavers, gathering information, and generally providing an American presence in West Africa. As the highest ranking American official in the region, Perry was responsible for mediating Americans' disputes with European colonial officials and the British navy. The burdens of the station began to wear on him, and he began to resent some of the many different hats that his position

forced him to wear. By the summer of 1844, Perry was growing increasingly anxious to relieve his men. New squadron vessels started to arrive in the autumn, and one by one the original squadron vessels returned to the United States.

The vessels of the Africa squadron received little attention when they returned home. Much had changed within the department, the administration, and the country since they had left some two years earlier, and Americans had lost interest in the squadron. With the help of his friend Nathaniel Hawthorne, Horatio Bridge published a moderately successful book recounting the mission, but its primary audience remained those people who had an interest in promoting the squadron or West African causes such as colonization.¹ Most Americans had only a passing curiosity about West Africa, and after the *Mary Carver* affair ended they turned their attention to places of more immediate concern, particularly Texas and Mexico.

This chapter recounts the conclusion of the *Mary Carver* affair: the newspaper reports of the squadron's attack on Little Berriby and Americans' reactions to those reports. It also tells the story of the squadron's mission during the remainder of Perry's command, throughout 1844 and into the first part of 1845. And finally, it traces the publication of Bridge's book and the reception that both Perry and the book received in 1845. Using press reports from 1844 and 1845, this chapter argues that Perry's squadron was a success, especially when considered by the standards and expectations of its time. Historians may wish that Perry's squadron had been managed differently or that it had achieved different results, especially with regard to the slave trade, but as this chapter shows, Perry successfully carried out his mission following his orders and the wishes of the majority of the American people, and he did as much as could have reasonably been expected of him given the resources and circumstances that he had to work with. The United States failed to suppress the slave trade in the 1840s because the government and the people never seriously tried to do so, not because the Africa squadron a failure.

¹ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*.

Waiting for News

President Tyler anxiously awaited news of the Africa squadron. He was particularly concerned about how the new squadron was affecting U.S. relations with Britain. With no new complaints against the British navy for molesting American merchantmen, Tyler was claiming that the squadron had helped improve relations between the two countries on the West African coast. In his annual report to Congress in December of 1843, Tyler wrote, "The treaty lately concluded with Great Britain has tended greatly to increase the good understanding which a reciprocity of interest is calculated to encourage, and is most ardently to be hoped that nothing may transpire to interrupt the relations of amity which it is so obviously the policy of both nations to cultivate."² But he had yet to receive any positive reports from Perry confirming this assumption. Tyler optimistically chose to interpret no news as good news.

Tyler reported to Congress that the cases of American vessels improperly detained by British cruisers had "been placed in a fair train of adjustment." And although it was still too early to know the results of Perry's mission, he concluded that the squadron was a preliminary success. He reported that "no new cases have arisen since the ratification of the treaty of Washington; and it is confidently anticipated that the slave-trade, under the operation of the eighth article of that treaty will be altogether suppressed."³ Unless it received reports to the contrary, the administration was going to portray the squadron as a success because it had apparently helped to prevent further abuses of Americans' rights on the coast. Tyler's statement that the administration confidently anticipated that the squadron system would suppress the slave trade rested on the general belief that few Americans were involved in the trade, and that the British squadron, once freed from the distraction of harassing Americans, would return to policing the trade and capturing those European subjects who carried it on.⁴

Like Tyler, the MSCS was anxious to hear news of the squadron's impact on the balance of power in the region. The last reports it had received from Africa had described the French

² John Tyler, "Message of the President of the United States," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 28 Cong., 1 Sess., December 1843, 1.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ It must be pointed out that these statements were politically-minded, and that anyone reasonably well-informed on the subject could not have seriously believed that the squadron model as it was employed could have suppressed the slave trade.

occupation of Jarroway, a territory on the coast between Monrovia and Cape Palmas. This incursion into the Liberian neighborhood was especially threatening because colonists believed that their survival depended upon control of this entire coastline. Russwurm had reported:

One of [France's] national vessels has lately been out, and marked out two sites for occupation on their territory heretofore purchased – one for a stockade and the other for a town. Their distance from us is 15 or 18 miles, and I do not wish to see them any nearer.⁵

The French encroachment made Russwurm anxious about other choice territory in the area. He especially wanted to secure a place called Fishtown, just south of Jarroway, which included an excellent harbor. He had wanted to purchase Fishtown for some time, but a lack of funds and more pressing concerns had forced him to put it off. Now, with the arrival of the French, acquiring this land seemed more important than ever. Russwurm admitted that the colony already had sufficient land to accommodate its settlers, and thirty-five miles of coastline, but he wrote, Fishtown harbor is “the finest on this part of the coast, and we should dislike to see it occupied by any other nation, particularly the French, to whom the natives are at present opposed, but how long they would stand proof against their rum, merchandise and five franc pieces, it would be hard for any one to say.”⁶ Control of the best harbor in the area would certainly benefit the colony. Increased trade and connections with the wider world would increase its wealth, political power, and influence over the Grebo. If the French took control of that harbor, Russwurm feared that their corrupting influence, through an influx of rum and easy money, would spread throughout the area further weakening his dry little colony’s already precarious position.

Following the French occupation of Jarroway, Russwurm immediately began negotiating to purchase Fishtown, and within a month he completed a deal to purchase the territory for approximately \$300.⁷ Relieved, the MSCS asked the Navy Department to survey the harbor, hoping that the squadron would establish its headquarters or at least a supply depot there. As the *Maryland Colonization Journal* argued, Fishtown “ought now to be the U.S. Naval Station or rendezvous for their squadron, and we doubt not when the survey which has been ordered is

⁵ John Brown Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 26 June 1843, *Maryland Colonization Journal*, September 1843, 35.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ John Brown Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 31 July 1843, *Maryland Colonization Journal*, October 1843, 49.

concluded, the good sense of the commandant of that station will recommend it to the department as a more suitable depot than a Portuguese Island, one thousand miles removed from any slave mart, and which for months in the year proverbially affords the most unsafe anchorage ground of any port on the west coast of Africa and a climate not less fatal to the European constitution.”⁸ Colonizationists insisted that Africa held vast natural resources just waiting to be developed. They repeatedly warned that Europeans were taking advantage of these resources and that Americans would be shut out from these opportunities unless they acted quickly. When the French began moving into Jarroway, the MSCS predicted that “all European governments” would follow suit.⁹ Observing these early signs of European colonization in West Africa, it warned that “the extending of their empire and increasing their commerce are of course their main objects, and the influences of colonies established for such motives upon savage nations is already but too well known.”¹⁰ The colonization society pleaded with Americans to actively support their national interests in Africa, and one of the first steps, it suggested, was for the Africa squadron to establish its base in Liberia.

Americans’ reluctance to actively support Liberia frustrated colonizationists, who believed that their black-American colonies were a bulwark of American-style democracy and tolerant Christianity against a spreading tide of European empires and oppressive white colonial rule. Colonizationists predicted that without support from the United States, Europeans would slowly take control of Liberian institutions of government and capital, re-enslaving the American freedmen turned colonists. If that happened, Americans would lose the chance to spread their ideals of democracy and civilization to West Africa.¹¹

Initially, the MSCS had supported the Webster-Ashburton treaty and the Africa squadron, but by the end of 1843 some colonizationists were losing confidence in the squadron and its commander. Disappointed by Perry’s decision to establish the squadron’s base at “a Portuguese Island,” the *Maryland Colonization Journal* began criticizing the squadron: calling the U.S. effort to suppress the slave trade insincere and suggesting that the treaty was merely

⁸ “Fishtown,” *Maryland Colonization Journal*, October 1843, 50-52.

⁹ “The Occupation of Garroway by the French,” *Maryland Colonization Journal*, September 1843, 37-40.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

a diplomatic compromise, not a principled document. The *Journal* observed that the squadron, made up of slow sailing ships assigned to cruise some three thousand miles of coast, was not really designed to suppress the slave trade and surmised that the government only intended to meet the minimum treaty requirements. It argued that the way to end the illicit trade was to watch the slave marts, not cruise along long stretches of coast, and noted that the squadron's extensive cruising ground served to keep it away from the relatively small areas where the slave marts were concentrated.¹²

The MSCS's criticisms resembled abolitionists' attacks on the squadron, but instead of condemning the squadron model, the MSCS was simply trying to turn it to the colonies' advantage. The *Journal* argued that since the U.S. government had obviously created the squadron to protect American commerce, and not to suppress the slave trade, that the United States should make treaties with neighboring Africans and extend greater help the Liberian colonies. These measures, the *Journal* argued, would be the best means to further the government's agenda of protecting and fostering commerce. The first step, the MSCS argued, should be to establish an American naval base at Fishtown. Receptive to the idea, Secretary Henshaw encouraged Perry to establish a depot somewhere within Liberian territory and ordered him to make a survey of the Fishtown harbor.¹³ The *Journal's* criticism of the squadron and its failure to effectively suppress the slave trade in 1843 was a carefully calculated and self-interested maneuver. Neither Russwurm, nor the MSCS had ever been particularly interested in or vocal about the slave trade, which was somewhat removed from Cape Palmas. They were much more interested in seeing the squadron remain close to their colony, and wanted it to establish a base or depot there. Such a base would not only provide the colony with security, but it would also increase the volume of trade and colonial revenue. When colonizationists spoke of the United States waking up to its interests in Africa, they invariably meant their own colonial interests.

¹² "Our 'African Squadrons'," *Maryland Colonization Journal*, December 1843, 81-88.

¹³ David Henshaw to John H. B. Latrobe, 11 October 1843, MSCSP; David Henshaw to Matthew Perry, 22 January 1844, NASPNA-DA.

First Reports

As the New Year passed, Americans continued to wait for news of the Africa squadron. Newspapers had been following the squadron's movements since it had sailed for Africa the previous spring. They reported occasional sightings, but Americans still knew very little about the squadron's actions. So when the *New York Herald* printed the first news of Perry's attempt to "obtain the surrender of the murderers" in the *Mary Carver* case, the report received widespread attention.¹⁴

The *Herald* had received "private advices viz England from the African squadron," dated November 30th, 1843, written in the midst of the first palaver at Sinoe. The *Herald* reported that the squadron planned to inflict "summary punishment" on the perpetrators of the *Mary Carver* attack by burning the town, and that it was expected that "the negroes would make an obstinate defence." The article cast the story in a stark light; as far as it was concerned the "negroes" were unquestionably guilty and Perry should have little trouble securing and punishing them all. The *Herald's* article concluded with the comment, "We shall therefore look for the next news from the squadron with somewhat of an anxious interest."¹⁵

Newspapers across the country copied the *Herald's* story, including the: *Army and Navy Chronicle*, *Cleveland Herald*, and *Niles' National Register*.¹⁶ Americans did not have to wait long for additional news. In March, two squadron officers, Midshipman Lyman Law and Lieutenant Ferris, arrived in the United States carrying letters and reports describing the Berriby palaver. The *Philadelphia U.S. Gazette* interviewed Ferris and printed a very positive article describing how the squadron had sailed down the coast from Monrovia "with the intention of ascertaining and punishing the particular tribe of Africans, who about two years ago murdered the captain and crew of the schooner *Mary Carver*."¹⁷

The *Gazette's* article explained that the Americans had held a palaver at Little Berriby, but that the local king had not answered Perry's questions, and that "the whole conversation

¹⁴ "Important from the African Squadron," *New York Herald*, 18 February 1844.

¹⁵ "Important from the African Squadron," *New York Herald*, 18 February 1844.

¹⁶ "From the African Squadron," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 22 February 1844; "Important from the African Squadron," *Cleveland Herald*, 11 March 1844; "The Navy," *Niles' National Register*, 9 March 1844.

¹⁷ Several newspapers reprinted the original *Gazette* article including: "Interesting from Africa," *Chambersburg, Pennsylvania Weekly Messenger*, 20 March 1844.

was unsatisfactory.” Thereafter, the *Gazette* explained, the king and his people had “turned and ran toward a neighboring jungle,” but they did not make it twenty yards before “a volley from the American sailors instantly killed both him, the Interpreter, and others of the fugitives.” Ferris described how the people “took to the Jungle” and continued to fire on the Americans, who “returned their volleys with interest,” for about an hour, after which, the Americans burned the town and destroyed its canoes. The article went on to describe how Perry’s men had burned five more towns along the coast, all while taking fire from the natives. It mentioned that in one of these towns they had found the *Mary Carver*’s register, a private letter belonging to the captain, and several other papers, “thus clearly proving that punishment was being inflicted in the right quarter.”¹⁸ Newspapers across the country printed articles based on the *Gazette*’s account.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the letters delivered by Ferris and Law started circulating. The *Boston Post* printed one account that added new details, including a description of how the Africans’ muskets had outnumbered Americans’ by two to one at Little Berriby. The letter’s author described the palaver in more detail, calling Ben Crackow’s story, “a shallow, made-up story of lies” and claiming that the natives had fired the first shot:

On their being told that the story was known to be false, and that the Americans did not come there to hear false statements, the king’s interpreter, who spoke English, took a pinch of snuff in a peculiar conspicuous manner, and in an instant a musket was fired by the natives. Then the king and others began to run.²⁰

This account depicted Perry heroically tackling the king, “a great scoundrel,” and it explained how Crackow had been taken on board *Macedonian* where he died of his wounds the following day. It also introduced the idea that the accused had made up a false defense, and that the people of Little Berriby had fired the first shot as part of a preconcerted plot (a point that was far from certain). This version characterized the Little Berriby people as dishonest, deceptive, and even treacherous, clearly implying that they deserved punishment and more.

¹⁸ The letter was actually addressed to Capt. Robert McFarlane, apparently written by a woman, and postmarked Castine, Maine. This detail is described by Horatio Bridge in his original letter dated January 10, 1844 and published in the April 1844 issue of the *African Repository*.

¹⁹ “Interesting from Africa,” *Chambersburg, Pennsylvania Weekly Messenger*, 20 March 1844; “From the African Squadron,” *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 21 March 1844; “Late from Africa – An African King Killed, and towns Destroyed by the American Troops,” *Bangor Whig and Courier*, 20 March 1844; *Niles’ National Register*, 16 March 1844.

²⁰ “From the Coast of Africa,” *Christian Watchman*, 22 March 1844.

Not all newspapers limited themselves to simply copying a version of Ferris's account or reprinting a letter written by one of the squadron's officers. Some papers, especially those with a particular interest in the politics of slavery, published strongly-worded editorials. The abolitionist paper, the *Cincinnati Weekly Herald* commented sarcastically that the Africa squadron was earning its laurels. The paper attacked the squadron, printing, "We have not heard of its capturing a single slaver, but it has done something: - it has stained the soil of Africa with the blood of its children."²¹ Referring to Ferris's account, the *Weekly Herald* pointed out that "no statement is made of the questions or answers" put to the accused king, "all that is said, is, that the talk was unsatisfactory." The *Weekly Herald's* editor depicted Perry's actions as anything but heroic. Admitting that it had incomplete information, the paper nevertheless condemned the squadron's actions at Little Berriby:

So far as [Ferris's account] goes, it places the American commander in a very unenviable light. The transaction throughout appears like a cold-blooded butchery of the miserable natives. We cannot see what right the Americans had to fire upon the savages, when they became alarmed, and ran away from them. They could not answer the questions put to them, satisfactorily to Commodore Perry, and the probability is, that his menaces and demonstrations were such as to frighten them off. To us, the act of firing upon them in such a case, seems brutal. No evidence appears to have been presented that the murderers belonged to their tribe, it was a diabolical mode of punishment, to send a volley of bullets into a thick mass of people, a majority of whom, perhaps, were innocent. The whole affair is sickening, and demands investigation.²²

As Perry had anticipated, some people scrutinized the evidence closely in this particular case. And Ferris had not helped matters; he had failed to grasp the political aspects of the affair and by giving an account that carelessly assumed the Americans to have been in the right he had opened the squadron up to such attacks.

Ferris had delivered several letters, but none from the governments at Cape Palmas or Monrovia. The *Maryland Colonization Journal* delayed publication of its March issue for ten days hoping to receive some news from its colony.²³ When none arrived, the *Journal* reluctantly copied Ferris's story from the *Gazette*. But the delay did give its editors the opportunity to respond to some of the early criticism levied against the squadron. As the

²¹ "Our African Squadron," *Cincinnati Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, 27 March 1844.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Maryland Colonization Journal*, 26 March 1844, 140.

Journal put it, “there are not wanting, however, those who cry out, ‘shame on the officers of our gallant navy, to fire upon and destroy poor retreating savages!’” Defending the squadron, the *Journal* responded that the attack on the *Mary Carver* “was a declaration of war against peaceful commerce,” and declared that Perry had dealt with the Little Berriby matter in a “summary way.”²⁴

Letters from Cape Palmas finally reached the MSCS in time for the *Journal*’s April issue. However, Russwurm mostly wrote about the colony’s relations with the Grebo. With his characteristic penchant for understatement, he related the story of the recent conflict with Freeman and described how the squadron’s timely arrival, which the *Journal* called providential, had raised the Greboes’ respect for colonial authority.²⁵ Russwurm praised the squadron and expressed his relief at its long-awaited arrival: “all that our vessels have hitherto wanted, they now have, *protection from armed vessels of their own* – and it will be a long time before you hear of another outrage on an American merchantman, from the judicious, firm and mild course pursued by our Commodore.”²⁶

As for Little Berriby, Russwurm limited his remarks to the affair’s salutary effect on the colony’s relations with its African neighbors. Russwurm reported that many Africans now feared that the squadron would drive them from the coast as well. Dr. McGill also sent a report, agreeing that the squadron’s presence had given “the greatest advantage to the colony.” Optimistic, he wrote:

It will insure us against any outbreak on part of the natives, and enable us to extend the colony in any manner that may be thought advisable for its best interest. It will also have a good effect upon the colonists. They now feel that they are not forsaken and neglected by their foster country.²⁷

Russwurm and McGill expected the squadron’s influence to help the colony expand and remove the Grebo from the area. Encouraged by these reports, the *Journal* credited Perry and his squadron for restoring peace and security to its colony.²⁸

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁵ *Maryland Colonization Journal*, April 1844, 145-146.

²⁶ John Brown Russwurm to James Hall, 10 January 1844, *Maryland Colonization Journal*, 146-149.

²⁷ Dr. McGill to James Hall, 17 December 1843, *Maryland Colonization Journal*, 149-154.

²⁸ *Maryland Colonization Journal*, May 1844, 161.

Perry's report of the palavers arrived at the Navy Department at about the same time. The administration approved of his actions and released Perry's account to the public. The pro-administration newspaper the *Madisonian* and the ACS journal *African Repository* both printed copies of the report, which offered a more measured account than Ferris's version of events. Echoing Jackson's strategy for demonizing native peoples, Perry defended his own actions by depicting the people of Little Berriby as insolent pirates: "The known fierceness and treachery of most of the African tribes made it a measure of necessary prudence to land with a considerable armed force; and the result has shown the propriety of such precaution, as at almost every place we were received by strong bodies of well-armed natives, while we noticed great numbers lurking in the skirts of the neighboring woods."²⁹ Perry conveniently failed to mention that these natives had assembled, in expectation of the arrival of a squadron of American warships, to defend their homes and territory, or that it was well known along the coast that this imposing American naval force had come to settle grievances.

Perry described his own actions as restrained in light of the general consensus on ship and shore that the Berriby people had deserved much more severe punishment than they actually received. The shedding of blood, he emphasized, had been "unpremeditated and accidental." Still, he believed that the death of Crackow and the interpreter in the "melee" had been "providential" seeing "as both these persons unquestionably took an active part in the massacre of Captain Farewell and his crew." Unlike his other reports, which stressed the squadron's limitations and weaknesses, this letter celebrated its successes and strengths. Perry concluded that the mission had been a success, writing, "this act of retributive justice upon the Little Berriby tribe will furnish an impressive lesson to the people of other towns suspected of piratical acts, while the friendly demonstrations made by me to those tribes not implicated will go far to show that the American Government greatly prefers a pacific intercourse with all nations, however insignificant, to one of strife."³⁰

Unfortunately, since Upshur's appointment as secretary of state in July of 1843, the Navy Department lacked a strong leader or clear sense of direction. Henshaw, who had

²⁹ Matthew Perry to David Henshaw, 21 December 1843, S. Doc. 150, 22-23; *African Repository*, April 1844, 115-116.

³⁰ Matthew Perry to David Henshaw, 21 December 1843, S. Doc. 150, 22-23.

replaced Upshur, had resigned just six months later. Tyler had recently appointed Thomas W. Gilmer the new head of the department in February, but neither Gilmer nor Upshur had the chance to read Perry's report. Both men were killed in a horrible accident on board the USS *Princeton*. Tyler, Upshur, Gilmer, and several other high-ranking members of the government had been invited on a cruise to observe demonstrations of the radical new vessel, the first U.S. warship with a screw propeller. During the cruise, Capt. Robert F. Stockton also demonstrated the vessel's impressive new gun, and the guests toasted the day with champagne. After dinner, several guests returned to the deck to see the huge gun fired again, but this time it exploded, killing Gilmer, Upshur, and six other men. The blast severely burned Stockton, knocked Sen. Thomas Hart Benton unconscious, seriously injured eleven sailors, and blew away twenty feet of the vessel's bulwark.³¹

A month later, Tyler appointed John Y. Mason his fifth secretary of the navy. Mason took over the department just as the first reports of the squadron's activities reached the United States. In the midst of all of this confusion, disorder, and tragedy, neither the Navy Department nor the administration made much effort to capitalize on Perry's report. Without Upshur and his determination to expand and reform the navy, interest in the Africa squadron waned. Tyler had never felt the same passion for the navy as Upshur, and by 1844 he was too preoccupied with Texas and other foreign policy concerns to pay much attention to the Africa squadron.

Although U.S. foreign policy focused on more important issues like Texas, Americans remained interested in Perry's punishment of the Little Berriby pirates. Ferris's story spread to the West, copied from one newspaper to another, while new reports arrived in the East, adding additional details that sustained peoples' interest in the subject.³² The supply ship *Consort* returned from a voyage to the Cape Verdes on April 5th with a fresh batch of letters that included new details about the story of the Payne's evacuation from Cavally, among others.³³ The *New York Evangelist* described how Perry had "seasonably rescued" Payne from a danger

³¹ Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur, Conservative Virginian, 1790-1844*, 210-212.

³² "Interesting from Africa - Fight between the U.S. Squadron and the Natives," *Norwalk, Ohio Experiment*, 3 April 1844; "Later from Africa," *Lorain Republican*, 10 April 1844.

³³ *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 11 April 1844.

that “arose from the hostile attitude assumed by the colonists and the natives.”³⁴ Perry’s squadron not only punished savage Africans for assaulting and killing Americans, but it also saved other innocent Americans from a similar fate. The squadron certainly seemed to be proving its worth, at least in the eyes of those Americans who had an interest in West Africa.

Many newspapers published positive accounts of Perry’s conduct. For example, the *Evangelist* gave a flattering account of his benevolent rescue of an African man from a saucy-wood trial.³⁵ And the *Cincinnati Atlas* commented that “the Commodore had carried the war into Africa, as we had previously heard, and the effect, it was thought would be salutary to our commerce, and highly beneficial to the colony of Monrovia.” Defending Perry’s actions against anti-slavery editorials, like those in the *Cincinnati Weekly Herald*, the *Atlas* concluded that “from the known prudence and humanity of Com. PERRY, we have no doubt there was abundant provocation for the chastisement inflicted upon the natives, and our gallant seamen seem to have dealt the blow ‘with a will’.”³⁶

The *Kennebec Journal* also followed the squadron’s story with some interest. It published Ferris’s account and copied the article “A Timely Rescue,” about the saucy-wood rescue. Although the *Journal* continued to print articles about the Little Berriby attack throughout the year, it never added any local comment or editorial, and it never mentioned Farwell or Vassalboro. After first reporting the news of Farwell’s murder, the *Journal* never acknowledged the local connection in any way again.³⁷ Despite the fact that two of the main sources of information about the squadron and its attack on Little Berriby, John Brown Russwurm and Horatio Bridge, came from Maine, no one in the state seemed to take a personal

³⁴ “Late from Africa,” *New York Evangelist*, 11 April 1844.

³⁵ Ibid.; Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, May 1844, 139. On the morning of December 8th the squadron landed nine armed boats at Cape Palmas. But before they could open their business, the commodore observed a crowd of natives gathered on the beach for their own murder trial. A man stood accused of causing the death of another by incantations and “necromantic” arts. The accused was forced to drink poisonous saucy-wood to test his innocence. The natives believed that the poison killed witches and evil spirits and that death was proof of guilt. Roberts believed that this old man had been accused in retaliation for his outspoken views. “The secret is,” he wrote, “is that this old man had become obnoxious, from an independence he manifested towards the king in some of the palavers.” The naval officers, witnessing these proceedings, rushed to the scene and, after a canoe chase and some indignant threats to take hostages, they took possession of the accused man. They ushered him to medical treatment where he recuperated. The officers took great pride in the success of their intervention which no doubt left a lasting impression on the disappointed natives.

³⁶ “African Squadron,” *Cleveland Herald*, 20 April 1844.

³⁷ “Late From Africa,” *Kennebec Journal*, 22 March 1844; “A Timely Rescue,” *Kennebec Journal*, 19 April 1844; *Kennebec Journal*, 13 September 1844.

interest in avenging Farwell's murder.³⁸ Like most Americans, Mainers viewed the squadron and the *Mary Carver* affair as national, not local, issues.

The *Liberia Herald's* account, which referred to the natives along the coast as pirates, was also circulating in the United States by this time. The *Herald* roundly supported the squadron's actions and expressed the hope that the punishment inflicted on Little Berriby would subdue the unruly Africans:

The natives at some points of the coast, especially at Berreby, had become so treacherous and piratical, that it was dangerous to anchor in their waters. Indeed, in their fancied security on shore, they ridiculed the idea of any force being landed to chastise them: Therefore they did not hesitate to avow their murders and robberies when questioned on the subject. We hope the severe lesson now taught them – the destruction of their towns, and the death of their King, will not be lost upon them – but have the effect to humble them, and bring them to their senses.³⁹

The *Herald* also printed a letter written by an anonymous American officer, which offered a different point of view. The officer depicted both the Americans and the Africans in more realistic and human terms. Instead of labeling the Berriby people as pirates, he was the first to call Crackow by name. Instead of blaming the bloodshed on the Africans, he claimed that the marines had fired the first shots. He described with new detail how Perry had caught Crackow and struggled with him, "as much from a desire to prevent his being shot by the marines, who were ready and eager, as from a wish to detain him."⁴⁰ The officer emphasized Crackow's massive size and strength, and described how difficult it had been to prevent him from escaping; implying that Crackow's strength and determination to get away had made it impossible for the Americans to capture him without inflicting serious wounds.⁴¹

This officer described how, in addition to dealing with the Africans, Perry also had to restrain and discipline his own men. Describing the destruction of Little Berriby, he reported that the Americans had received a few minor scratches, with just one man being seriously wounded – shot through the thigh – and that had been his own fault, for "straying away against

³⁸ Bridge always noted in his letters that Farwell came from Vassalboro but made no other comment about the local perspective; no one in Maine seemed to notice or care, including the several influential politicians and newspaper men that knew the Farwell family personally.

³⁹ *Liberia Herald*, 30 December 1843.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Liberia Herald*, 30 December 1843; "From the Liberia Herald," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 18 April 1844, 496-499.

orders.” He estimated that a total of ten or eleven Africans had been killed, again emphasizing that “the Commodore, in fact, did not wish to take life, but to destroy the towns.”⁴² Perry faced a real challenge, despite his orders, even his junior officers had been carried away with the desire to shoot Africans. Both Bridge and Heywood had expressed the desire to shoot some natives. According to Bridge, “many shots were fired, notwithstanding the Commodore’s orders to refrain.” And Bridge personally lamented that he had not even been able to “bag” a boy:

Early in the fight I looked round, for somebody to shoot, and saw only a boy of sixteen, within gunshot. I took deliberate aim at the scamp, but could not find the heart to fire; and besides, I hoped to shoot a full grown man. Fate, however, was adverse, and during the whole day, I did not even bag a boy.⁴³

Nevertheless, the *Liberia Herald’s* source concluded that the expedition had been a grand success, in particular because the mission to destroy the towns had been accomplished with so little bloodshed. He concluded that “the result of the expedition is perhaps the best praise of the manner in which it was designed and conducted.”⁴⁴

Despite its obvious interest in the squadron’s activities, the *African Repository* was one of the last journals to print the news about Little Berriby. Like the Maryland society, the ACS was waiting for news from its colony. The last letter it had received from Roberts had been dated August 10, 1843.⁴⁵ When no letter arrived in time for its April issue, the *Repository* printed as many scattered reports as it could collect and managed to create the most interesting and detailed account of events with the greatest number of sources published to that point. In addition to a copy of Ferris’s account from the *Gazette*, the *Repository’s* April issue included Perry’s December 21st report, a brief excerpt from a letter regarding Payne’s rescue, and a long letter, written by Purser Bridge to a “lovely and large-minded lady” of Washington. Dated January 10th, 1844, Bridge’s letter recounted the squadron’s activities up to that point in greater detail than anyone else so far.⁴⁶

⁴² *Liberia Herald*, 30 December 1843.

⁴³ *African Repository*, April 1844, 121.

⁴⁴ “From the Liberia Herald,” *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 18 April 1844, 496-499. It should be noted that reports of the killed and wounded among both sides vary, and that there are no reliable sources for the actual number of Africans killed or wounded.

⁴⁵ *African Repository*, April 1844, 117.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 114-124.

Horatio Bridge

Horatio Bridge had received his appointment as a navy purser through his political connections to the Democratic Party; and his writings about the squadron and its mission were crafted with political considerations, particularly the question of African colonization, in mind. Born in Augusta, Maine on April 8th, 1806 (just two years before Ebenezer Farwell) Horatio Bridge was the third son of Judge James Bridge, a prominent Augusta attorney and businessman, and Hannah North, daughter of Augusta's Judge North.⁴⁷ He attended Bowdoin College and was a member of the class of 1825, which also included Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Longfellow, and George B. Cheever, among others. At Bowdoin, Bridge formed lifelong friendships with Hawthorne and Jonathan Cilley in particular, as well as Longfellow and Franklin Pierce (a member of the class of 1824.) Bridge also made the acquaintance of John Brown Russwurm (class of 1826) at Bowdoin, although the aloof Russwurm had not been part of his close-knit group of friends.⁴⁸

At Bowdoin, Bridge, Hawthorne, and their friends spent many hours walking the footpaths in the pine forests of Brunswick, shooting pigeons and squirrels, and watching logs float down the Androscoggin River.⁴⁹ They were part of a group of young Democrats and belonged to various clubs, including the Athenaeum literary society.⁵⁰ Bridge's wider circle of friends also brought him into regular contact with a variety of views. In addition to Russwurm, Bridge befriended several future abolitionists at Bowdoin, including: George Cheever, William Pitt Fessenden, John P. Hale, and Calvin E. Stowe. As a Northern Democrat and Unionist, Bridge supported colonization and, although he counted several abolitionists among his friends and acquaintances, he rejected their cause as destabilizing. Despite their political differences,

⁴⁷ William Willis, *A History of the Law, the Courts, and the Lawyers of Maine from Its First Colonization to the Early Part of the Present Century* (Portland, Me.: Bailey & Noyes, 1863), 154-159. James Bridge was born the eldest son of Edmund Bridge of Lexington, Massachusetts in 1765. Edmund moved to Maine because he felt that Cambridge was getting too crowded. But James maintained ties in both places. He witnessed the Battle of Lexington from his grandparents' farm and later attended Harvard College as a classmate of John Quincy Adams. After college, James Bridge returned to Maine and set up a law practice at Fort Western in Hallowell, where for a time he was the only practicing lawyer in the county.

⁴⁸ "Commodore Horatio Bridge," *Daily Kennebec Journal*, 23 March 1893; "Death of Commodore Bridge," *Athens, Pennsylvania News*, 22 March 1893; "Founder-Developer of USN Supply Corps, Horatio Bridge..." *Brunswick, Maine Record*, 3 March 1955; "Bridge Family Prominent in Early Maine," *Lewiston-Auburn Journal*, 30 December 1967; Horatio Bridge Collection, Box M18, Clippings File, Bowdoin College.

⁴⁹ Horatio Bridge, *Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 30. Russwurm was also a member of this club.

he corresponded with Cheever, Stowe, and Fessenden on an open and friendly basis throughout his life.

After leaving Bowdoin, Bridge studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1828. He spent several years practicing law in Maine. He also took an interest in local business, and together with his brothers, he built a mill-dam across the Kennebec River in 1836. But shortly after the dam was completed, an enormous freshet broke through, wiped out his entire investment, and washed away the family home he had inherited. In light of his financial problems and his general dissatisfaction with life, Bridge decided to try for an appointment in the navy and he turned to his father's former law partner, Sen. Reuel Williams, for help.⁵¹

Williams had just been elected to the fill Ether Shepley's vacant seat in the U.S. Senate when Bridge asked him for a recommendation. Williams had taken a paternal interest in Bridge, whose father had died four years earlier, and was happy to help. He wrote to Secretary of the Navy Mahlon Dickerson, relaying Bridge's desire for an appointment as purser, and giving him a strong recommendation. Williams cited Bridge's influential family connections, liberal education, knowledge of French and Spanish, and described him as having "the manners & deportment of a gentleman [who] makes himself acceptable to all he meets," and as "high minded, honorable" and "generous." To explain why a young lawyer would want to give up his practice for a commission in the navy Williams wrote, "He has no family & wishes to see more of the world than his present opportunities and means would justify." Williams concluded by writing that he had "every disposition to aid Mr. Bridge" and attested that the applicant was a good Democrat, noting that "his political course entitles him to the favorable notice of the administration."⁵²

Bridge also asked another influential friend, Franklin Pierce, for a recommendation to the navy. Obliging, Pierce wrote to Secretary Dickerson, "I can recommend him with confidence as a man of talents and integrity, and a Gentleman in the broadest acceptance of

⁵¹ Willis, 444-458.

⁵² Reuel Williams to Mahlon Dickerson, 31 March 1837, Bridge-Maurice Papers, Box M19.1, Bowdoin College.

the term.”⁵³ Initially their efforts failed, and Pierce advised Bridge that his “friends must act together next Winter and not rest satisfied with a mere recommendation & request but urge your appointment with zeal and determination.”⁵⁴ Whether it was zeal and determination, or the occasion of a vacancy, Bridge’s campaign was eventually successful, and he received his commission on February 16th, 1838.

Following news of the appointment, Senator Williams wrote to advise Bridge on the importance of learning “the science of book keeping.”⁵⁵ It was February 27th, the day of their friend Jonathan Cilley’s funeral, and the advice about bookkeeping was more of an excuse to write. Cilley had been killed in a controversial duel with Representative William Graves, a Whig from Kentucky. Williams’ real purpose in writing Bridge was to express his anger and grief at the senseless killing. The death of the popular, outspoken young congressman riled his friends, who directed their anger at the Whigs. “Cilley was too promising and too independent to be allowed to remain in the way of the Whigs,” Williams wrote, “and his death is the result of more deep and general policy than has been, and perhaps may ever be, made public.”⁵⁶ For Bridge, who suffered from episodes of depression, the failure of the dam, the loss of his family’s home and his fortune, and the violent death of his friend Cilley were a lot to bear. After taking lodgings at Cilley’s Washington D.C. mess, and even sleeping in his dead friend’s room, it was a welcome relief to Bridge when the navy assigned him to the U.S. sloop *Cyane* in May. Attached to the Mediterranean squadron, *Cyane* sailed from Boston on June 24th, 1838 for a cruise that lasted nearly three years. It was during this time that Bridge had his first encounter with West Africa and the Liberian colonies.⁵⁷

Cyane only made one short cruise along the African coast during her three years on the Mediterranean station, but in just a couple of weeks she stopped at most of the Liberian settlements and her officers had a chance to tour such places as Monrovia’s public farm and the Wilsons’ school at Cape Palmas. As purser, Bridge had the opportunity to see a good deal

⁵³ Franklin Pierce to Mahlon Dickerson, 18 April 1837, Bridge-Maurice Papers, Box M19.1, Bowdoin College; Franklin Pierce to Horatio Bridge, 20 April 1837, Pierce Collection, M148, Bowdoin College.

⁵⁴ Franklin Pierce to Horatio Bridge, 2 May 1837, Pierce Collection, M148, Bowdoin College.

⁵⁵ Reuel Williams to Horatio Bridge, 27 February 1838, Horatio Bridge Papers, Box M18, Bowdoin College.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ *Cyane* returned to Norfolk on 16 May 1841. *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships* (online), Department of the Navy, Naval Historical Center, www.history.navy.mil/danfs (September 9, 2007).

of the colonies and he was favorably impressed. Before leaving, he made a donation to the Ladies Benevolent Society of Monrovia, a charity that provided the poor with clothing, soap, and other necessary provisions. The society made a particular point of thanking Bridge for his uncommon donation by publishing a notice in the *Liberia Herald*.⁵⁸

After giving him a break from sea duty, the navy assigned Bridge to the newly constructed *Saratoga* in 1842. When the department attached *Saratoga* to the new Africa Squadron, Bridge's good friend Nathaniel Hawthorne had an idea. Since leaving college, Bridge had maintained a keen interest in Hawthorne's professional success. He encouraged Hawthorne's writing, secretly staked the publication of Hawthorne's first published book, *Twice Told Tales*, and conspired with their Democratic friends Williams, Pierce, and Cilley to secure political patronage for the destitute author. Although a number of these endeavors had been successful, in 1843, newly married and expecting his first child, Hawthorne was experiencing "one of the most financially trying periods" of his life.⁵⁹ When he heard of Bridge's upcoming cruise to West Africa, Hawthorne had an idea to turn the assignment to their political and financial advantage.

Travelogues and published journals were a popular form of literature in the nineteenth century. They offered readers vicarious travel experiences to distant and exotic lands. They also fit with the popularity of natural science, and often included lengthy descriptions of flora and fauna and ethnographies of native peoples. In addition to their entertainment and educational value, these books also included details about local commerce, agriculture, climate, and geography that were of practical use to merchants and sailors. But despite the popularity of the genre, almost no such books had been published about West Africa, and that particular part of the world remained a mysterious and exotic place in American minds.

The popularity of earlier books about Africa written by the Scottish explorers Mungo Park and Hugh Clapperton had proven that readers were interested in the continent.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *African Repository*, 15 October 1844, 312.

⁵⁹ Peter Brancaccio, "'The Black Man's Paradise': Hawthorne's Editing of the Journal of an African Cruiser," *New England Quarterly*, March 1980, 23.

⁶⁰ Multiple editions of Park's books describing his travels in Africa were published in Britain and the United States. For example see: Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa, Performed in the Years 1795, 1796 and 1797, with*

Certainly, Hawthorne thought, an intelligent, college-educated naval officer like Bridge could offer something to interest the public. The new Africa squadron was, after all, a subject of some curiosity, and newspaper and magazines frequently published letters written by naval officers describing their travels. So, Hawthorne reasoned, why not commission his friend to write about what promised to be an exciting and adventurous mission.

Always willing to support his friend Hawthorne, Bridge liked the idea and readily agreed, but he stipulated that Hawthorne must take responsibility for editing and publishing his journals. At first they planned to publish the work as a series of articles in *The Democratic Review*, but before *Saratoga* had even sailed for Africa Hawthorne's plans had grown even more ambitious and he suggested the idea of publishing a book as well.⁶¹ The more Hawthorne thought about the project, the more excited and anxious he became. He wrote to Bridge, advising him on what and how to write, and reminding him not to forget the project. When *Saratoga* wrecked in the storm off Portsmouth, Hawthorne suggested to Bridge that "perhaps a description of the tempest may form a good introduction to your series of articles in the *Democratic*."⁶²

Hawthorne had originally conceived of this scheme as a means to help remedy his own financial troubles and Bridge insisted that Hawthorne receive all of the royalties and copyrights associated with the project. For this reason, they planned to publish the journals anonymously, crediting the author simply as, "an officer of the United States' Navy," leaving Hawthorne, who would be identified as editor, to take most of the credit. Their main goal was to help relieve Hawthorne's financial distress, something that worried them both. Hawthorne hoped to benefit directly from any profits, and perhaps indirectly. By publicizing the squadron

an Account of a Subsequent Mission to That Country in the Year 1805(London: 1805); Mungo Park, Icaaco, and James Rennell, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa : Performed under the Direction and Patronage of the African Association, in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797*(London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co. for the author, 1799); Mungo Park and John Whishaw, *The Journal of a Mission to the Interior of Africa : In the Year 1805*(Philadelphia: Published by Edward Earle. William Fry, printer, 1815). Also see: Hugh Clapperton, Richard Lander, and Abraham V. Salemé, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa, from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo*(Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Carey, 1829).

⁶¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne to Horatio Bridge, 25 March 1843, Hawthorne Collection, M18.1, Bowdoin College.

⁶² *Ibid.*

and the Liberian colonies, he might improve his standing in the Democratic Party and receive a long-sought political appointment.⁶³

But Hawthorne did not think only of himself. Although his interest in Bridge was secondary, he was sincere when he wrote to Bridge, "I should like well to launch you fairly on the sea of literature." In the coming months, as Bridge experienced another bout of depression, Hawthorne was sympathetic. When Bridge complained that life had lost its charm, that his enthusiasm for it had died, and that there was nothing worth living for, Hawthorne was understandably worried. He counseled his friend to fall in love, telling him that "you would be a boy again, with the deeper feeling and purpose of a man." And he hoped that working on this project would also give his friend's life some purpose. "It is not the profit to myself that I think about," he wrote, "but I hope that [the journals] may contribute to give your life somewhat of an adequate purpose – which at present it lacks."⁶⁴ If it succeeded, the project could improve both men's lives.

Bridge took Hawthorne's advice and sent him a written sketch from New York describing *Saratoga's* wreck, while Perry was making the final preparations to sail for Africa in June of 1843. Although Bridge was critical of his initial literary efforts, Hawthorne made it a point to encourage and reassure him, writing:

You must learn to think better of your powers. They will increase by exercise. I would advise you not to stick too accurately to the bare fact, either in your descriptions or narratives; else your hand will be cramped, and the result will be a want of freedom, that will deprive you of a higher truth than that which you strive to attain. Allow your fancy pretty free license, and omit no heightening touches merely because they did not chance to happen before your eyes. If they did not happen, they at least ought – which is all that concerns you.⁶⁵

In order for the project to continue, Bridge needed to develop confidence in his abilities.

Hawthorne offered his friend a few lessons in travel writing to help things along. Most importantly, he advised Bridge to record his impressions in his journal while they were still as fresh as possible, and to avoid the temptation to pass over trivial details, which often turned

⁶³ Patrick Brancaccio, "'The Black Man's Paradise': Hawthorne's Editing of the Journal of an African Cruiser," *New England Quarterly*, March 1980, 23-41.

⁶⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne to Horatio Bridge, 3 May 1843, Hawthorne Collection, M85.1, Bowdoin College.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

out to be the most interesting bits. Hawthorne reassured his friend that as editor, he would arrange these observations, taking care to “put them in their proper places and make them come in with due effect.” The more raw material that Bridge provided, the more that Hawthorne would have to work with.

Bridge's 1844 letter to a “lovely and minded lady,” relating the excitement at Little Berriby, shows that he took Hawthorne's advice to heart.⁶⁶ Thrilled by the exciting tales of natives and skirmishing that Bridge described, Hawthorne replied, “We read your letter with very great interest.” Hawthorne wrote to his friend:

You have had great luck, certainly, in having actually fought through a whole war; but I hope that you will now be content to rest upon your laurels. The devil take these copper slugs!⁶⁷

Although Hawthorne's response was somewhat melodramatic, he was genuinely concerned for his friend's well being. He cautioned Bridge, writing that “as your station, I believe, does not call you to the front of the battle do pray be advised to stay on board ship, the next time, and think how much preferable is a sluggish life to such a slug-gish death as you might chance to meet on shore.” Hawthorne appreciated the cause of the journal, as well as that of the navy, but he did not think that either was worth risking his friend's life over:

A civilized and educated man must feel somewhat like a fool, methinks, when he has staked his own life against that of a black savage, and lost the game. In the sight of God, one life may be as valuable as another; but in our view, the stakes are very unequal.⁶⁸

Hawthorne reacted to Bridge's letter with mixed emotions. He reveled in the excitement and understood that such accounts made for great reading and consequently good sales. He also believed that these exciting adventures had cured his friend's despondency. But Hawthorne

⁶⁶ *African Repository*, April 1844, 117-124. Richard Hall is probably correct when he identifies the lady as Mary Stewart Minor (wife of the Rev. Lancelot Minor.) Hall, *On Afric's Shore : A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834-1857*, 568, n.4. Mrs. Minor had been in Africa with her husband and had returned to the United States in 1844. (Her family lived in Baltimore.) But Bridge also wrote to Sophia Hawthorne (Nathaniel's wife) recounting similar details, as Hawthorne's reply acknowledges. Bridge may have sent similar letters or copies of the same letter to the two women. In either case, the text of this letter published in the *Repository* is very similar to the version that the two men later published in the *Journal* and shows that Bridge wrote more of this section of the *Journal* than his manuscript journal suggests. In his analysis of the collaboration between author and editor, Brancaccio explains that it is impossible to tell how much each man contributed. Patrick Brancaccio, “The Black Man's Paradise: Hawthorne's Editing of the ‘Journal of an African Cruiser,’” *New England Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (1980). Because the original manuscripts are largely missing, this is for the most part true. But this letter shows that Bridge was responsible for more than perhaps Brancaccio gives him credit, and also that the “original” manuscript is most likely to be a combination of the journal, letters and other papers that Bridge sent to Hawthorne and others.

⁶⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne to Horatio Bridge, 1 April 1844, Hawthorne Collection, M85.1, Bowdoin College.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

did not think that the risk was worth the reward. He worried for Bridge's safety and he questioned the honor of the mission. He confided in Bridge, "I really do consider the shooting of these niggers a matter of very questionable propriety; and am glad, upon the whole, that you bagged no game upon either of those days." In a reference to the recent birth of his daughter Hawthorne concluded that "it is a far better deed to beget a white fellow creature, than to shoot even a black one."⁶⁹ Hawthorne had no love for the black man, but he felt that the navy's actions at Little Berriby cheapened the white man's claim to superiority based on civility and honor.

Hawthorne was not the only person who had misgivings about the details that Bridge related in his letter. The abolitionist newspaper the *Cincinnati Weekly Herald*, which opposed the squadron, Liberia, and colonization in general, took issue with Bridge's celebratory attitude, and even questioned whether or not the *Mary Carver* had been attacked. The *Weekly Herald* referred to the *Mary Carver* murders as "alleged" and argued that "what became of the crew, it is impossible to say." Dismissing the reports of the murders as unsubstantiated rumors, the paper criticized Americans for taking them "as trust-worthy" when "no positive evidence however has yet been produced, as to the manner of their destruction, or the actors in the distressing affair."⁷⁰

The *Weekly Herald* reminded its readers that the supposed purpose of the navy's palaver at Little Berriby had been to find the guilty parties: "the very object of the Commodore in landing, was to find out, who were the perpetrators!" But Bridge's letter clearly revealed that the Americans had already determined that Crackow's people were guilty before they held any palavers, and that they had only organized the palavers to find evidence to support their existing beliefs. The *Weekly Herald* seized on this point. Bridge had written

⁶⁹ Ibid. It should be noted that the word "nigger" appears in Hawthorne's original letter, and that the quotation given here is accurate. It appears that some subsequent copied versions were edited, changing the word to "negroes," presumably for published collections of his letters and papers, etc. For example, the letter is reprinted in Bridge's own *Personal Recollections* using the word "negroes" and it may be that Bridge himself edited the text.

⁷⁰ "The Colonies on the Coast of Africa - Action of the Government - Treachery to the natives," *Cincinnati Weekly Herald*, 1 May 1844.

that the interpreter was “himself, one of the leaders in the outrage,” and the paper asked, “How did he know that?”⁷¹

In his letter, Bridge made a number of callous and boastful remarks including references to “bagging a boy” and his desire to shoot someone, that offended anti-slavery proponents. Bridge described how the interpreter “ran for his life, but lost the race, for Captain Tattnell, a keen sportsman, shot him with his rifle, and he fell dead, a few steps from the gate.”⁷² This cold attitude and disregard for human life appalled the *Weekly Herald*. After chastising the *African Repository* and the ACS (a supposedly missionary-like organization) for praising Bridge’s letter as “spirit-stirring,” “interesting,” and “racy and pleasant,” the *Weekly Herald* offered its own review, printing: “We confess we are sickened at this account of the conduct of the United States Squadron.” Presenting its version of events, the newspaper described the entire Little Berriby affair as a sham in which the Americans had dishonorably deceived the Africans by inviting them to a palaver under the guise of holding peaceful talks. Then, according to the *Weekly Herald*, under some phoney pretense, the Americans had used an “imaginary alarm” as an excuse to break up the palaver and start shooting people.⁷³

Without knowing any personal details about the slain captain, the *Weekly Herald* speculated that Farwell had been killed as punishment for his own crimes. In effect, the paper implied that Crackow’s story was credible. Suggesting that there had been no reason for Perry to seize Crackow, “against whom no charge is brought,” the article impugned the Americans for what it described as “one of the most perfidious and brutal transactions that have ever disgraced the intercourse of civilized men with savages!” The paper concluded its attack by calling on Congress to investigate Perry for his role in the destruction of Little Berriby.⁷⁴

When the barque *Latrobe* arrived at Baltimore later that month, carrying “very interesting and highly important intelligence” from the colony, the ACS finally had Roberts’ version of events, which they used to help defend the squadron against the abolitionists’

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *African Repository*, April 1844, 121.

⁷³ “The Colonies on the Coast of Africa – Action of the Government – Treachery to the natives,” *Cincinnati Weekly Herald*, 1 May 1844.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

attacks. Relieved, the ACS commented that “we have seldom received more gratifying intelligence of the health, improved condition, and cheering prospects of the colony,” and rushed the May issue of the *African Repository* to print.⁷⁵

Roberts’ report told a long and detailed story of the squadron’s cruise down the coast that added perspective to the other reports already in circulation, which had virtually all come from the squadron’s officers. So far, the only source outside the navy had been Russwurm, but he had not been at Little Berriby and he had written a limited account of those events. Roberts, on the other hand, had taken an active part in the events at Little Berriby, and although he had a political interest in the outcome, as the only correspondent not serving in the armed forces, he provided a valuable perspective.

Roberts provided the ACS with a useful defense of Perry’s actions against the abolitionists’ attacks. He praised Perry’s handling of the palavers, writing that “no one could have managed them better.” He described Perry as having been successful “in every instance,” and although “firm and decisive” with the natives, he reported, Perry had not used any “unnecessary threats or menaces.” In the governor’s estimation, Perry had treated the natives kindly and “heard what they had to say.” Perhaps most importantly, he reported that Perry had given them fair warning of what they could expect in the future.⁷⁶

The Squadron Mission Continued

While Americans debated the attack on Little Berriby, Perry’s squadron went on with its work, oblivious to the attacks leveled against it back in the United States. Perry had to fulfill the increasing number of duties assigned to him with insufficient resources while protecting his men. He spent the remainder of his command balancing the squadron’s obligations to cruise the coast, gather information, protect and aid Liberians and Americans, conduct relations with his counterparts in the British navy, and police criminal activity, while working hard to provide his men with the basic necessities: provisions, supplies, and adequate rest and health precautions. Given the broad scope of his mission and the limited resources at

⁷⁵ *African Repository*, May 1844, 129.

⁷⁶ Joseph Roberts to Ralph Gurley, 23 December 1843, *African Repository*, May 1844, 144.

his command, Perry accomplished as much as could have reasonably been expected of him. Towards the end of his service on the African station, an exhausted Perry anxiously looked forward to returning home to the United States.

In January of 1844, after spending a short time at the Cape Verde Islands, *Saratoga* sailed to Madeira, where her officers enjoyed a respite from the coast's arduous climate. This break was an essential part of Perry's plan to preserve his men's health. Bridge planned to enjoy this break, and noted in his journal, "my remarks on Madeira will be thrown together without the regularity of a daily journal; for our visit to the island proves so delightful, that it seems better worth the while to enjoy, than to describe it." He ended up writing mostly about horse races, gambling, and the wine.⁷⁷ But the squadron still had a great deal of work to accomplish and could not afford to take too much time off. While *Saratoga* and *Macedonian* refreshed themselves, *Decatur* sailed the northern half of the squadron's cruising ground, between the equator and Monrovia, and *Porpoise* cruised the southern half, sailing as far as Accra and the Gold Coast. *Porpoise* was expected at Monrovia sometime in mid-January, and from there Perry instructed her to cruise in the vicinity of the Liberian coast, from Gallinas to Grand Berriby.⁷⁸

As commander, Perry had little time to relax; he spent his time doing paperwork, issuing new orders, and writing reports for the Navy Department. The problems of adequately provisioning the squadron and managing budgets continued to take up most of his time. He had expected to find the storeship *Consort* waiting for him at Porto Praia in January, but she had not arrived. Consequently, *Macedonian* was forced to make a trip to the coast. Perry visited the ports of Gambia and Gorée in search of provisions but was largely unsuccessful; the failure underscored the importance of establishing a more regular system for provisioning the

⁷⁷ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 87-94. Historians have criticized Perry for wasting so much of the squadron's time cruising back and forth to these islands far from the coast and the slave marts in particular, but Perry firmly believed that these breaks were necessary and chose the closest healthy locations available. He based these beliefs not only on his own observations and experience, but on the general beliefs of his day and the advice he received from his medical advisers and other knowledgeable persons. He could have foregone this precautionary practice, as the British did, and would have undoubtedly suffered the same consequences of poor health and high death rates that they did. But unlike the British, Perry had to worry about the difficulties of managing a small, underfunded squadron and navy in a democratic country. Public support for the squadron and the navy in general, and consequently future funding and enlistments, depended upon his mission's success. If the public perceived the squadron to be a debilitating and deadly assignment they would likely withdraw the little support they had reluctantly bestowed upon it.

⁷⁸ Matthew C. Perry to Joel Abbot, 22 December 1843, S. Doc. 150, 53-54.

squadron. Fortunately, by the time *Macedonian* returned to Porto Praia, *Consort* had finally arrived. Still, she only delivered enough provisions to supply the squadron until mid-May, and concerns about feeding and supplying the thousand men assigned to his squadron continued to preoccupy Perry throughout the remainder of his command.⁷⁹

The Navy Department hoped to resolve this provisioning problem by establishing a station or depot somewhere in Liberia, possibly at Fishtown, and pressed Perry to complete a survey of that harbor as soon as possible. Secretary Henshaw also instructed Perry to “extend your friendly aid to the settlements of Liberia, in protecting their rights against the encroachments of the native tribes, and in their negotiations with those tribes for extending the bounds of their territory.” But he also reminded Perry that “while the US Government does not claim any jurisdiction or control over this settlement... it cherishes... the liveliest interest in its growth, welfare and prosperity.”⁸⁰ The administration believed that Liberia’s success and expansion would serve American diplomatic and economic interests in the region, and creating a supply depot in the colony seemed like an ideal way for the United States to support and benefit from Liberia while still avoiding direct responsibility for the colony.

Perry assigned Lieut. Thomas T. Craven, *Porpoise*’s new captain, to make the survey of Fishtown harbor, but he also instructed Craven to occasionally interrupt the work and visit other places within *Porpoise*’s cruising ground. The department wanted the survey completed as quickly as possible but Perry had to spread out his limited resources in order to perform all of the squadron’s various duties.⁸¹ Perry made the survey a priority in order to satisfy the department, but he had already rejected the idea of establishing a supply depot in Liberia and never seriously considered using the port at Fishtown.⁸²

Initially, Perry had recommended that the department set up a small experimental depot for provisions and supplies at Monrovia. But he doubted that goods could be stored there

⁷⁹ In an eight week period the squadron consumer approximately 32,000 lbs. of beef, 24,000 lbs. of pork, 8,000 lbs. of flour, 4,000 lbs. of pickles, 49,000 lbs. of biscuits, and 7,000 lbs. of sugar, among many other things. “Estimate of articles of provisions for the supply of one thousand of the African squadron for eight weeks,” 18 May 1844, S. Doc. 150, 95.

⁸⁰ David Henshaw to Matthew Perry, 22 January 1844, NASPNA-DA.

⁸¹ Matthew Perry to Joel Abbot, 22 December 1843, Matthew Perry to Thomas Craven, 3 January 1844, S. Doc. 150, 53-55.

⁸² Matthew Perry to Hon. Secretary of the Navy, 17 May 1844, S. Doc. 150, 92-94.

for any length of time without rotting in the tropical climate. Instead, he preferred to use a permanent storeship where goods would remain under his close control, safe from the swarms of insatiable ants that covered Liberia, and free of port and landing duties. Perry wanted to support the colonies but he did not believe that they were capable of providing the squadron any reasonable quantity of supplies, and considering the time that he spent worrying about supplies, he certainly would have taken advantage of any useful services they had to offer. By May of 1844, Perry decided against the prospect of a Liberian depot altogether, explaining to Henshaw that the mortality rate on the coast was too high:

The department will be aware, from my former communications that I entertain great interest in the advancement of the American settlements upon this coast. But I should be unfaithful to my duty, did I withhold the opinion that the establishment of a naval depot, or general rendezvous for refreshment and refitment, at any point upon the coast within the limits already mentioned, (from Gambia to the equator,) would result in the most serious consequences, and, so far from benefiting the settlements, would, from the certain destruction of human life, produce throughout the United States and unfriendly feeling towards the Colonization Society.⁸³

Such a depot, Perry reasoned, would require men to spend more time on shore, exposing them unnecessarily to the mysterious dangers of the climate. Americans had noticed that cleared land was less dangerous, and Perry reported that as long as the land remained largely uncleared there was no place on the entire western coast of Africa suitable for a naval depot. The inevitable cases of fever that would result from use of such a depot, he feared, would greatly dishearten his men and cause excessive inefficiency on board ship. His primary concern continued to be for the men's health, and he would not risk it unnecessarily.

In addition to fostering the Liberian colonies, the Navy Department also wanted Perry to provide the government with information about the state of trade, commercial traffic, and scientific data about sailing conditions and weather in the region.⁸⁴ Perry had already ordered his officers to meticulously record as much information as possible about every vessel that they sighted, and now the navy's new Hydrographical Department, part of Upshur's project to modernize the navy through scientific study, wanted detailed reports of weather, cloud

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Perry resented having to perform this chore, as it should have been done by a U.S. consul or commercial agent, but since the government had not established any such post, the burden fell on him. Matthew Perry to David Henshaw, 29 January 1844, S. Doc. 150, 101-103.

formations, the “moon’s age,” and “every information connected with the navigation of this part of the world.”⁸⁵ This commercial and scientific information about West Africa could be very useful to the navy and to the government in determining the extent of American participation in the slave trade, the potential for legitimate commerce, and for improving the performance of future squadrons. The U.S. government was cautious about developing its policy in West Africa, it wanted more information before it acted, changed its policy, or invested additional resources in fostering legitimate trade or suppressing illegitimate trade.

After more than a month at Madeira, *Saratoga* sailed for the coast to relieve *Decatur*. After the Little Berriby raids, *Decatur* had cruised the coast from Cape Palmas to the Gabon, and now Perry expected her at Porto Praia. *Decatur* was due to replenish her stores and take a break from the coast, now it was *Saratoga*’s turn to cruise that same coast.

In addition to administering the squadron, assisting the colonies, and fulfilling the department’s demands, Perry also had to act as diplomat and deal with the British West Africa squadron. The earlier palavers had given him an excuse to put off dealing directly with either the British or the slave trade, but now that he was spending more time at Porto Praia, Perry could not avoid meeting his British counterpart Commodore John Foote.

Perry had reported finding no evidence of American involvement in the slave trade and Foote was trying to prove him wrong. But the British and Americans had very different standards of proof; what the British considered to be overwhelming grounds for suspicion fell far short of the high standard of evidence that skeptical Americans required. Americans continued to stick to the letter of the law and discounted much of the circumstantial evidence reported by the British, and Perry preferred not to debate Foote on the subject. Perry did not want to get involved in the diplomatic dispute over the abuse of the American flag and the right of search, and he told Foote as much when they met in Porto Praia. Perry preferred to limit his role in this controversy; he would represent aggrieved American merchantmen, like the *Rhoderick Dhu*, whose captain had recently complained of being wrongly searched and

⁸⁵ Matthew Perry to Hon. Secretary of the Navy, 18 May 1844, Matthew Perry, “Circular to Masters,” 26 July 1844, S. Doc. 150, 95-97.

abused by the British navy, and present their claims to the British navy. But he wanted to leave the rest for the politicians and diplomats to work out.⁸⁶

But Foote refused to leave these matters to diplomats, and he forced Perry to get involved. The British navy had expected the U.S. squadron to do something about the slave trade and was disappointed that Perry's squadron had been on the coast for six months without capturing a single slaver. Foote was growing frustrated that the Americans considered suppression a low priority and he wanted that to change. In his answer to the *Rhoderick Dhu* complaint, Foote could not resist complaining to Perry about American complicity in the slave trade.⁸⁷ When the two commanders met at Porto Praia, Foote read his officers' reports of suspicious American activity aloud to Perry. Annoyed, Perry snapped at Foote, but the British commander persisted, and shortly after the meeting he sent Perry a stack of reports and other documents implicating Americans in the slave trade.⁸⁸

Forced to reply, Perry chastised Foote for drawing him into this diplomatic affair and then proceeded to defend the accused Americans, present counter evidence, and condemn the British as hypocrites. He repeatedly referred to recent parliamentary reports that described how Britons often purchased condemned slave ships at Sierra Leone auctions and then resold them to known slave dealers. And he pointed out that according to the British government, British merchants shipped three times as many goods to West Africa as the United States did and that many of those goods went to supply slave dealers.⁸⁹ Many Americans, including Perry, believed that the British should address their own complicity in the slave trade instead of unfairly focusing blame on Americans. Perry interpreted his squadron's role as a force to gather information and act as a deterrent; there was little more that he could reasonably do with the resources and orders he had been given. He did not see the slave trade as a predominantly American problem, and like many Americans, he resented British implications that it was.

⁸⁶ Matthew Perry to John Foote, 4 March 1844, S. Doc. 150, 79-81.

⁸⁷ John Foote to Matthew Perry, 6 February 1844, S. Doc. 150, 71-73.

⁸⁸ John Foote to Matthew Perry, 3 March 1844, S. Doc. 150, 74.

⁸⁹ Matthew Perry to John Foote, 4 March 1844, S. Doc. 150, 79-81.

Perry did not deny that some Americans participated in the slave trade, but he believed that their participation was generally limited to selling vessels and supplies to slavers. He reported:

I cannot learn, from all my inquiries, that a single American has for some years been engaged directly in the purchase and exportation of slaves from Africa. The only participation in this iniquitous traffic alleged against them, is the sale of their vessels and cargoes to slavers.⁹⁰

At least for the present, Perry believed that the problem of American involvement in the slave trade required a political or legislative solution. He still believed that laws needed to be changed before any naval action against the illicit trade could be successful. He did not believe that current U.S. laws gave him the requisite authority or power to interfere with these vessels. For example, Perry reported, evidence proved that an American, Capt. Thomas Hunt, had intended to sell his schooner, *Shakespeare*, to slave traders, but rather than trying to take matters into his own hands, Perry felt that all he could legally do was relay the information back to the United States. The evidence against Hunt, Perry wrote:

clearly proves his intention of selling his vessel to be employed as a slaver; and it is devoutly to be hoped that the evidence thus furnished not only in the case of the *Shakespeare*, but in that also of the *Illinois*, may lead to the legal trial of the masters and owners of these vessels; that, if found guilty, they may be signally punished and disgraced; and if innocent, that the reproach brought upon the American flag by their alleged agency may be removed, whatever be the result.⁹¹

Perry had already shouldered the burden of judging Africans' guilt and he did not want the responsibility for judging Americans too, especially when there was a reasonably good chance that courts in the United States would not support his decisions. Instead, he hoped that "the publicity of the investigation might possibly deter others from embarking on speculations of gain so disgraceful to themselves and to the flag." Perry feared that the illegal sales of American vessels to slavers were "not unfrequent," but he believed that he lacked the necessary resources to do much about it. Ultimately, the enforcement of U.S. laws regulating the sale of vessels abroad was the responsibility of authorities in the United States and naval

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Matthew Perry to Hon. Secretary of the Navy, 21 March 1844, S. Doc. 150, 82-83.

officers could not be expected to do more than gather evidence against unscrupulous American shipowners and businessmen.

In addition to reservations about his legal authority, Perry also worried about contradicting the government's policy. He had to balance competing concerns and did not want to expend too much time or too many resources combating the slave trade without explicit permission and direction from the navy. When Foote identified the slave mart at Ouidah as a place where Americans frequently transferred vessels to slavers, Perry felt that it was beyond his reach.⁹² Although the squadron's cruising ground extended to the Bight of Biafra, far beyond Ouidah, Perry was reluctant to send his vessels, already stretched thin, on extended missions so far from their base of operations.⁹³ Perry did assign his vessels to cruise the coast from Cape Palmas to the Gabon (where Wilson had begun building his new mission), but the department had ordered him to show the flag all along the coast, which meant that the squadron needed to keep moving. Vessels had to visit as many ports as possible and return to base to before exhausting their provisions; they could not afford to linger near far-off slave marts for very long. Perry was also pessimistic about his squadron's chances of making any headway against the established and enterprising network of slave dealers and informants that stretched along the coastline.

Realistically, Perry could not be expected to effectively combat such an established and wealthy foe with such a small squadron, especially considering the threat of deadly fevers and the constant shortage of provisions. Instead, he chose a more cautious course of action that fit with his orders and the limited means of his squadron, and did not risk embarrassing the United States. He suggested to the secretary "the expedience of extending, at the discretion of the commanding officer of the United States African squadron, the cruising ground of the vessels under his command, as far south as the most southern slave mart," perhaps

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Abel Upshur to Matthew Perry, 30 March 1843, NASPNA-DA, 381-385; Matthew Perry to Hon. Secretary of the Navy, 21 March 1844, S. Doc. 150, 82-83. When Perry suggested extended the cruising ground he indicated that it would be necessary to establish a temporary supply depot somewhere in Liberia to facilitate such long cruises. Given Perry's reluctance to establish such depots in Liberia and his understanding of the difficulties involved, it is clear that he felt extending the cruising ground required additional support and resources from the department.

hoping that such revised orders might be accompanied by expanded resources.⁹⁴ Although he already had the authority to go beyond the cruising proscribed ground if necessary, the incumbent problems of provisioning, the extra expense of extended cruises, and the numerous duties that his squadron was required to perform led him to seek explicit permission before ordering one of his vessels to patrol a distant slave mart or cruise south of the equator. Perry's conservative policy matched his orders, which stated that the government was not concerned that he effectively suppress the slave trade, and it avoided taking risks that might damage what little influence he had gained over the African peoples along the coast. Neither Congress nor the Navy Department had given him the resources or orders to do more, and Perry accepted these limited circumstances dutifully.

Perry doubted that the slow ships in his squadron had much chance of catching any vessel, let alone fast-sailing slavers. Rather than risk an embarrassing failure or jeopardize the health and safety of his men, he tried to improve the squadron and its performance by working within the bureaucracy of the Navy Department. The British and the French were busy improving their West Africa squadrons with newer and more modern vessels; the British were reportedly equipping thirty fast sailing vessels, including eleven steamers for the station, and the French were establishing coal depots at Gorée, Jarroway, and in the Gabon to support the steamers that they planned to send out. But the American squadron had neither steamers nor fast sailing ships. With an eye to the upcoming rotation of vessels, Perry complained to the department that both *Macedonian* and *Porpoise* were "extremely dull" sailers and suggested that the U.S. squadron should include only the fastest sailing ships and at least a couple of small iron steamers.⁹⁵

As Perry saw it, he had fulfilled his duty in regard to the slave trade. He had made inquiries and assessed the nature of the problem. He offered his suggestions to remedy existing problems and waited for the department's response. It was the government's

⁹⁴ Matthew Perry to Hon. Secretary of the Navy, 21 March 1844, S. Doc. 150, 82-83. The initial restriction of the cruising ground to the northern hemisphere followed current political restrictions. British international agreements stipulated different rules for the northern and southern hemispheres largely stemming from compromises between Britain, Portugal and Brazil. These largely limited early suppression activities to the north. And although they did not directly apply to Americans, they certainly influenced American policy.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

responsibility to supply the squadron with adequate resources, support, and enforcement powers. He earnestly hoped that “all Americans so engaged should be brought to condign punishment if possible,” but until the government made that possible he could only make the best of his situation.

The case of the brig *Uncas* reinforced Perry’s belief that he had little power to combat American participation in the slave trade. As instructed, *Porpoise* had taken a break from surveying Fishtown harbor to visit Monrovia. During this visit, Roberts informed Lieutenant Craven that the American brig *Crawford* was reportedly waiting at Gallinas to load a cargo of slaves. The following day, *Porpoise* sailed for Gallinas in search of *Crawford*. After three days at sea, she fell in with HMS *Ferret* cruising off Gallinas. Commander Josiah Oake told Craven how *Ferret* had briefly left Gallinas, leaving her pinnace behind to monitor the place. The men in the pinnace had observed a large ship flying Portuguese colors and rowed closer. The ship had fired on them, wounding several British sailors and severely damaging the little boat. After which, the sailors could only watch as the heavily armed vessel loaded a thousand slaves. Later, when *Ferret* returned, she gave chase but had been unable keep up with the fast sailing slaver.⁹⁶

With little hope of finding the *Crawford*, which may have been the same Portuguese vessel that *Ferret* had chased, Oake told Craven of another suspicious American vessel called *Uncas*, which had recently been seen anchored at the mouth of the Gallinas River. *Porpoise* took swift action. Craven reported, “I immediately made full sail, and about 5 P. M. I anchored within pistol shot of the *Uncas*, and immediately sent Lieutenant Chapman on board, to examine and inquire into her character.”⁹⁷ Lieutenant Chapman interviewed *Uncas*’s captain and crew and discovered a strange story. He learned that *Uncas* had been registered at New Orleans and from there had sailed to Havana where she had changed her crew before sailing for Gallinas. The new crew was Italian, except for one Dane and one American. While at sea, someone had murdered the American, first mate Joseph Richardson, and *Porpoise*’s officers thought it suspicious that *Uncas*’s crew accused the Dane of the crime.

⁹⁶ Josiah Tattnall to Matthew Perry, 11, 22 March 1844, S. Doc. 150, 109-112.

⁹⁷ Thomas Craven to Josiah Tattnall, 7 March 1844, S. Doc. 150, 112-113.

Other suspicious circumstances convinced Craven that *Uncas* was a slaver and that *Porpoise*'s arrival had prevented her from taking on a cargo of slaves. But Craven hesitated to seize the vessel because he had little evidence to support his suspicions. So, when *Uncas*'s captain expressed a desire to go to Monrovia and ship more men for his return voyage, Craven agreed. Using the pretense of securing her journey, Craven sent Chapman and seven men to take charge of *Uncas* and sail her safely to Monrovia. If *Uncas* was a legitimate trading vessel, this act would be explained as a simple courtesy; indeed, her captain had claimed that the murder and subsequent loss of men endangered the safety of his voyage. On the surface, *Porpoise* was merely providing assistance to a vessel in distress. But the temporary transfer of command to Chapman would also give Commander Tattnall, who was then at Monrovia, the chance to review the case. Unsure of what to do, Craven passed the responsibility for *Uncas* to a senior officer. Meanwhile, *Porpoise* returned to Fishtown to complete its survey.

The Americans found substantial circumstantial evidence to condemn *Uncas* as a slaver. She had the regular papers of a legitimate American trading vessel, but there were certain irregularities that both Craven and Tattnall found suspicious. *Uncas* had not been cleared at any American port, but she had been cleared at Havana, a port known for its involvement in the slave trade. More suspicious still, *Uncas* had been cleared for a voyage to Monrovia but she had sailed to Gallinas, another well-known slaving port, and landed her cargo there instead. And generally speaking, *Uncas* matched the description of a slaver in every way. After reviewing the case, Tattnall became convinced that *Uncas* was probably a slaver and that her captain was lying about the circumstances of the murder.⁹⁸

But Tattnall was also cautious and he agreed with Craven that they did not have enough evidence to justify seizing *Uncas* as a slaver. She had not boarded any slaves and Tattnall had no direct evidence that she ever intended to. Tattnall had all but decided that he must release *Uncas* when her captain suddenly announced that the voyage was over. *Uncas*'s captain declared that he was afraid to sail back to the United States because he had no officers, and the Dane (who was still on board) was threatening to use his knife if he had to.

⁹⁸ Josiah Tattnall to Matthew C. Perry, 11, 22 March 1844, S. Doc. 150, 109-112; Matthew C. Perry to Hon. Secretary of the Navy, 18 May 1844, S. Doc. 150, 108-109.

The captain's decision gave Tattnall an excuse to resume temporary charge of *Uncas* and Lieutenant Chapman and his crew sailed *Uncas* to New Orleans where the authorities could take responsibility for sorting out the case. Meanwhile, Tattnall delayed *Saratoga's* cruise to the leeward in the vain hope of finding the *Crawford* somewhere near Gallinas.⁹⁹

When Perry received Tattnall and Craven's reports, he agreed that "there was very little doubt that the *Uncas* was intended to take a cargo of slaves from the coast." He supported Tattnall's decision to forgo seizure and send *Uncas* back the United States for a final decision. Like his British counterparts, Perry blamed the officials at Havana for supplying slavers with legitimate papers and allowing them to operate with impunity. "It would seem," he wrote:

that there must be some connivance on the part of the authorities of Cuba in allowing slaves to be openly landed on that island. And there is certainly a want of proper vigilance at Havana, and perhaps at the ports of the United States, in permitting the execution of the contracts [ship's papers] referred to above, and in suffering a vessel to clear as the *Uncas* did from New Orleans.¹⁰⁰

Perry's comments echoed complaints that the British had been making for years. Perry felt that there was little he could do because the root of this problem was back in the United States and Cuba. Like Craven and Tattnall, Perry passed the responsibility on.

Perry still believed that most of the men involved in the slave trade were foreigners, but admitted that a few Americans must be involved. "Most of the miscreants are foreigners," he reported, "but there are doubtless some Americans who lend themselves indirectly to the nefarious traffic." Perry believed that it was a "consideration of the highest importance," that these Americans should be prosecuted in the courts "upon the least shadow of suspicion."¹⁰¹ But he felt powerless to prevent Americans from selling their vessels to slavers or otherwise participating in the slave trade. His squadron was too small to perform so many duties in such a large territory. "It will be utterly impossible," he wrote, "for the few vessels of the American squadron, having in view the various duties assigned to them, to detect all these

⁹⁹ Josiah Tattnall to Matthew C. Perry, 11, 22 March 1844, S. Doc. 150, 109-112.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew Perry to Hon. Secretary of the Navy, 18 May 1844, S. Doc. 150, 108-109.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

abuses, scattered as the slave marts are along an extent of coast of 2,500 miles.”¹⁰² Three or four slow-sailing vessels could not possibly fulfill so many duties and make a direct, effective stand against American participation in the slave trade. At best they could hope to interfere with a few vessels like the *Uncas*, but even then, the lack of hard evidence made the prospect of successful prosecutions seem slight.

This matter required direction and policy from a higher level. Perry did not make any specific recommendations, but he did imply that the government should make a greater effort to prevent slavers from obtaining papers from legitimate authorities in the United States and Cuba. He believed that it was “a consideration of the highest importance” that Americans who participated in this scheme “should be legally proceeded against in the courts, upon the least shadow of suspicion.”¹⁰³ He believed that if the United States prosecuted these frauds more vigorously and reduced the proliferation of false papers, that then the squadron would be empowered to do more to police American participation in the trade. But until the government made solving this problem a priority, there was little that his squadron could do.

Resigned to these limitations, Perry continued to focus on the daily responsibilities of his command. He stayed close to Porto Praia, visiting Madeira, Tenerife, and the Canary Islands, while awaiting the arrival of the next storeship and dealing with disputes between American merchants and Spanish colonial authorities. About this time, Commander Foote received an enhanced directive from the British government, reminding him that his squadron’s primary purpose, “above all others,” was to suppress the slave trade. The British admiralty advised Foote to pursue an understanding with Perry and to work more closely with the American squadron, if possible, by practicing joint cruising whenever it should work to their advantage.¹⁰⁴

The Webster-Ashburton treaty allowed for cooperation between the British and American squadrons. Their cruisers had occasionally shared information, for example when *Porpoise* and *Ferret* were both at Gallinas, but neither Perry nor Foote seemed to have

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ John Foote to Matthew Perry, 15 May 1844, and “Instructions for Captain John Foote,” S. Doc 150, 114-117.

seriously considered implementing a policy of joint cruising. Perry supported the idea in theory and had ordered his officers to cooperate with the British from the start, but the limitations of his small squadron made him doubt the practicality of joint cruising. He explained to Foote:

I fear, from the small number of vessels composing the American squadron, and considering their various duties, and the great extent of their cruising ground, that the co-operation by joint cruising has been, and will continue to be, less effective than might be desired. I shall, however, continue so to arrange the movements of the vessels of my command as to enable them to act in concert, whenever it can be done, with those of Her Britannic Majesty.¹⁰⁵

But it was highly unlikely that Perry would be able to coordinate movements with the British considering his orders to show the American flag at as many places along the coast as possible. The American vessels had to keep moving and Perry had to carefully coordinate long cruises allowing for the timely resupply of vessels. Joint cruising and cooperation required greater flexibility of time and resources than Perry could afford.

At the end of May, *Macedonian* left the Cape Verde Islands and returned to Monrovia for the first time since the Little Berriby mission. While there, Perry planned to meet with his squadron and issue further cruising orders. *Saratoga* was already waiting, she had just returned from a long cruise to the Gabon, making a quick return passage because of an outbreak of fever on board. *Saratoga* remained at Monrovia for some time while doctors tended the sick, she did not sail for Porto Praia until July.

Fleet surgeon Dr. Du Barry now reported that the squadron's overall health was beginning to decline. Although *Saratoga* was the only ship that had experienced a significant outbreak of fever, all of the men in the squadron had noticeably weakened. Many of them suffered from rashes and skin sores caused by Perry's strict regulation requiring them to wear flannel next to their skin at all times.¹⁰⁶ Du Barry noticed that these skin irritations healed easily at Cape Verde or Madeira, but on the coast the climate seemed to retard nature's progress and none of his treatments helped. Ulcers in particular took a long time to heal. Du Barry reported that in the north "all diseases were speedily checked," but on the coast "the

¹⁰⁵ Matthew Perry to John Foote, 20 May 1844, S. Doc. 150, 118.

¹⁰⁶ Perry had issued several orders designed to prevent cases of fever. One regulation required the men to always wear a layer of flannel clothing next to their skin, despite the hot climate. Although the cause of fevers was misunderstood, this precaution was effective at protecting men from mosquitoes.

healing powers of nature seem to be entirely prostrated.” These findings and the outbreak of fever following *Saratoga*’s third cruise on the coast confirmed his earlier beliefs and he repeated his recommendation that vessels, officers, and men employed on the African station should be changed frequently.¹⁰⁷

Dr. Du Barry could not explain the fever outbreak on board *Saratoga*; none of the men initially afflicted had been exposed to the suspected causes. With few clues, he surmised that the men had become “saturated with the impure air of the coast” and debilitated by constant drains to their systems.¹⁰⁸ In this condition, he concluded, they were predisposed to fevers and the least cause was likely to infect them. Since people never fully recovered from an attack of fever, Du Barry insisted that eighteen months was the maximum time any man should be kept on the station. Perry had already begun writing to the secretary in April, to respectfully remind him that Upshur had promised to rotate the squadron every eighteen to twenty-four months, and now the matter seemed urgent. *Porpoise* had already been on the coast for fifteen months and *Saratoga* for twelve, the doctor’s report made Perry anxious for news of their replacements.¹⁰⁹

By the time *Decatur* and *Porpoise* arrived at Monrovia later in June, *Macedonian* had already sailed to the leeward. Perry left orders for the rested and resupplied *Decatur* to cruise the coast as far south as Benguela. He had finally received explicit authorization from the Navy Department to extend the squadron’s cruising ground south of the equator. This authorization also gave him more solid ground on which to base an investigation of slaving activity near the Bight of Benin at Ouidah and Lagos. To save time, Perry ordered Abbot to skip the Gold Coast (both *Decatur* and *Saratoga* had recently visited that area and had found little American or slave trade activity there.) Instead, he instructed Abbot to sail along the coast from Cape Palmas to Grand Berriby, and then from there, to take the most expeditious route to Cape St. Paul’s, to touch at “Quitta, and the slave marts of Little and Great Popo, Whydah, and Lagos,” and then to sail south of the equator, skipping the Gabon, and “touch at

¹⁰⁷ Edmund Du Barry to Matthew Perry, 14 June 1844, S. Doc. 150, 126.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Matthew C. Perry to Hon. Secretary of the Navy, 14 April 1844, S. Doc. 150, 83-84.

and communicate with all the principal slave and trading marts” as far south as Benguela.¹¹⁰

The freshly rested *Decatur* was the most well-suited, healthy, and fast-sailing of Perry’s squadron, and although Abbot was unlikely to catch any American slavers, he would be performing a valuable service nonetheless. No American naval vessel had ever visited portions of the western African coastline south of the equator, and *Decatur* would act as an important first envoy, showing the flag, and introducing the U.S. navy to the region.

Meanwhile, *Porpoise* continued to concentrate of the stretch of coastline from Cape Palmas to Gallinas. After finishing the survey of Fishtown harbor, and visiting nearly every port along the windward coast, *Porpoise* had gone to Porto Praia where Craven informed Perry that the former problems along the coast seemed to be resolved. In particular, he reported that the Little Berriby people had gone inland to make farms with the hope of winning Perry’s permission to return to the beach. But their old enemies had since killed all but a four or five of them and so there was no longer any reason for the Americans to be concerned with that neighborhood. Craven concluded that “the signal chastisement inflicted upon them appears to have produced a most salutary effect upon all the neighboring tribes – all the natives professing a sincere regard for the white man, and promising to aid him in his traffic, and co-operate against all who may in any way molest or injure him.”¹¹¹ After resupplying at Porto Praia, *Porpoise* returned to the windward coast for yet another cruise.

Perry ordered *Porpoise* to watch the slave mart at Gallinas. In the vicinity of Monrovia, she would be accessible if the Liberians should need any assistance. Perry was trying to use his limited resources as efficiently as possible. He also ordered Craven to communicate with the ranking British officer in that quarter to discuss possible cooperation, but Perry cautioned Craven to be mindful of his standing orders and not concede any rights:

I hardly need remind you that, in making any arrangements for joint cruising, you must be governed by the spirit as well as the letter of the instructions already in your possession, being careful not to waive any right of the American flag. It is thought that mutual co-operation may be effected without departing from the strict construction of your orders.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Matthew Perry to Joel Abbot, 12 June 1844, S. Doc. 150, 124-125.

¹¹¹ Thomas Craven to Matthew Perry, 24 April 1844, S. Doc. 150, 107-108.

¹¹² Matthew Perry to Thomas Craven, 11 June 1844, S. Doc. 150 123-124.

This arrangement was the best Perry could do to coordinate joint cruising. Perry sincerely hoped that *Porpoise* would “be able to prevent the desecration of the American flag to the vile purposes of the foreign slave trader,” at least in this one neighborhood, but the strict protection of American rights always came first.

Perry had tried to do his best to adequately meet the competing duties of his squadron. The American squadron now had one vessel assigned to each of the two most notorious slaving centers on the western coast of Africa: *Decatur* was cruising the coast near Ouidah and Lagos, and *Porpoise* would watch for slavers at Gallinas. *Macedonian* made a short cruise to the equator and then returned to Porto Praia to rendezvous with *Saratoga*.¹¹³

Prior to the fever outbreak, *Saratoga* had spent four months on the coast, cruising from Monrovia to the Gabon. The cruise had not been particularly interesting: she had assisted a couple of American merchantmen and visited several European forts, but it was dull and tiresome work. She only met six American trading vessels during the entire cruise (compared with eight European cruisers). Tattnall had been surprised by how little Americans shared in the trade along the Gold Coast and this discovery had made *Saratoga*’s cruise seem somewhat pointless. There were no American colonies, no slave marts, and only a few miserable mission stations along this coast; there was nothing for *Saratoga* to do but visit European outposts and exchange dinner invitations. Tattnall’s exasperation with this monotonous and “wretched coast” was notable when he reported to Perry that “any ten miles” of it was “an unhappy likeness of the whole fifteen hundred.”¹¹⁴

Rev. John L. Wilson would have been disheartened to read Tattnall’s report of this cruise. He had interpreted *Saratoga*’s visit to his new mission quite differently. 1843 had begun as a difficult year for Wilson; his wife had been in the United States visiting her family while he had quit Cape Palmas for good and struggled to establish a new mission in the Gabon. He had deliberately chosen the remote location so that he could work unmolested by colonial authority, but his isolation also made it more difficult to get supplies and support. And his troubles with the colony still haunted him. Wilson’s conflict with Russwurm had escalated into

¹¹³ Matthew Perry to Hon. Secretary of the Navy, 18 May, 13 June 1844, S. Doc. 150, 106, 119-120.

¹¹⁴ Josiah Tattnall to Matthew Perry, 9 June 1844, S. Doc. 150, 120-123.

a public battle between the ABCFM and the MSCS waged in print. As the attacks escalated, opponents began criticizing the ABCFM for appointing Wilson, a slave-owner, to work as a missionary in Africa. The criticism wore on Wilson and he described feeling persecuted. He complained that every side seemed to be against him. The missionary felt as though colonizationists, abolitionists, slave owners, and the British were all accusing him of plotting against them. He just wanted to be left alone to run his mission, but he could not manage to stay out of the public eye.¹¹⁵

Towards the end of 1843, things began looking up for Wilson and his mood brightened. His wife returned safely to Africa, he finally liberated the last of his slaves in the hope of quieting that controversy, and Perry had arrived on the coast promising to render missionaries any assistance within his power. Wilson had plenty of reasons to be optimistic.

Decatur was the first squadron vessel to visit Wilson at his new mission in the Gabon. Wilson was pleased to see the Americans and hoped that it would be the first of many visits. He proudly reported to Commander Abbot that his mission maintained amicable relations with its native neighbors, but suggested that the area would benefit from the presence of the American navy. Wilson argued that cruisers would help foster legitimate commerce and curb the local slave trade, something he particularly disliked.¹¹⁶

Wilson worried about the direction of development in the Gabon. An increase in trade would help support his missionary goals, but the right people needed to control that trade lest he lose his position of power to another colonial authority like he had at Cape Palmas. The French were already planning to build a settlement nearby. The local inhabitants professed opposition to the French plan and Wilson encouraged their resistance. He hoped that Abbot and the Americans would intervene on the natives' behalf and stop the French, he had moved to the Gabon to escape subjection to colonial authority. He also worried that a French settlement would attract Catholic missionaries to the neighborhood, a potentially serious

¹¹⁵ Du Bose, 97-103.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 138-139, 147-148.

threat his dominance over the area. But Abbot saw no cause for concern and *Decatur* left the Gabon after only a few days.¹¹⁷

When *Saratoga* visited Wilson's mission four months later, the missionary's situation was far less comfortable. Tattnall reported that a recent treaty between the French and the local people had "greatly embarrassed" Wilson. The natives were disputing the treaty, which purported to cede jurisdiction of their land to France, claiming that the French had used alcohol to trick them into making the agreement. They refused to acknowledge the treaty, and Wilson, who feared French encroachment, was supporting them. Wilson hoped that the Americans would intervene on the natives' behalf, but Tattnall declined to get involved and gave no opinion on the matter, which did not really concern American interests. He did visit the French naval commander to ensure Wilson's safety and came away satisfied that the French entertained "the greatest regard for and the kindest intentions towards the missionaries." Given these assurances, Tattnall did not think that Wilson had anything to worry about.¹¹⁸

Tattnall advised Wilson "to keep perfectly quiet, to take no part in the dispute, and to tacitly await the result," but Wilson had difficulty following this advice. Wilson asked the American commander what he should do if the French attacked the place; he specifically wanted to know what help he could expect from the Americans. Tattnall suggested that if the French did attack, that Wilson should raise the American flag over his mission and notify the French commander that it signaled the location of American lives and property. He also advised Wilson that, if the French offered him shelter on board one of their ships, he should refuse to abandon the native pupils living at the mission. But Tattnall doubted that the mission was in any danger. He reported:

I am sure that whatever course the French commander may see fit to adopt will be marked by consideration and kindness for our self-banished countrymen. The known kindness and courtesy of the French, and the high claims of these self-banished families on a Christian officer, are sufficient guarantees.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Joel Abbot to Matthew Perry, 18 April 1844, S. Doc. 150, 105-106.

¹¹⁸ Josiah Tattnall to Matthew Perry, 9 June 1844, S. Doc. 150, 120-123.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

When Perry read Tattnall's report he concurred, he supposed that through the nature of their work the missionaries were naturally tempted to sympathize with the natives, but he had confidence in the good will of the French.¹²⁰

Perry planned that the next vessel to sail leeward would have special orders to touch at the Gabon and check on Wilson's mission. Before receiving Tattnall's report, he had ordered *Decatur* skip the mission on her latest cruise to Benguela, so Wilson would have to wait for some time before he saw another American cruiser. In the meantime, Wilson had trouble keeping out of the dispute between the French and the natives; he gave his tacit, if not open support, to the natives. He and his fellow missionaries petitioned the French and British governments, and even met with the French governor of Senegal, seeking assurances of the Gabon's independence. But their efforts were fruitless.¹²¹

When the French attacked the natives at the Gabon in July of 1845, Wilson followed Tattnall's advice and raised the American flag over his mission. But instead of protecting the mission, the flag-raising prompted the French to direct their fire at the mission. Wilson promptly lowered the flag, thinking that perhaps the French had misinterpreted it as an act of defiance. This confusion reflected Wilson's failure to reach an understanding with the French.¹²² Although he survived the attack, a frustrated Wilson was once again living under colonial rule. He wrote to the United States describing the need to reinforce his mission with the expectation that the French, now securely in control of the area, would certainly import their own Catholic missionaries to challenge his influence over the natives. And he talked about moving further south, perhaps to Cape Lopez or Cape St. Catherine, and starting over once again; both places, he noted, were beyond French jurisdiction.¹²³

¹²⁰ Matthew Perry to John Mason, 18 November 1844, S. Doc. 150, 137. The squadron's orders and Perry's and the other squadron officer's handling treatment of American missionaries in West Africa contradict Edward Crapol's argument that the Tyler administration's policy gave special protection to missionaries as the front line of U.S. expansion and his argument that Tyler's foreign policy was driven by his overwhelming desire to protect slavery. Crapol. Perry's orders did not instruct him to give special attention to missionaries beyond the normal protection that they, like any American citizens, were entitled to. In the case of Wilson's mission at Gabon, neither Perry nor his officers exerted themselves to protect or defend Wilson precisely when he was trying to expand the U.S. sphere of influence to the Gabon. To the contrary, the squadron officers were content to let the French move in and control the Gabon as long as they did not injure or molest Wilson. Although Crapol is primarily concerned with missionaries in the Pacific, events in West Africa show that foreign policy was more complicated than Crapol suggests.

¹²¹ Phillips, 223.

¹²² Du Bose, 164-166.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 144.

Meanwhile, *Porpoise* cruised the windward coast near Gallinas for four months before returning to Porto Praia in mid-October. During the cruise, Craven visited Theodore Canot's factory at New Florence. Canot had moved to Cape Mount and begun building the village of New Florence (named for his birthplace) with the hope of establishing a legitimate trading business under British protection. But the British had failed to uphold their end of the bargain and Canot struggled to keep his enterprise in going. The Liberian government had been friendly to him at first, but suspicions dogged Canot, and he could not escape his reputation as a slave trader. Canot steadfastly denied that he ever personally shipped another cargo of slaves after leaving New Sestros, but it did not help that he occasionally assisted other slave traders with their business.¹²⁴

Craven refused to believe that Canot was engaged in legitimate business. Although Canot was very hospitable to the American officers who visited him that July, Craven remained unconvinced. Canot was busy constructing his new village, but instead of believing that these new buildings would be used as warehouses (as Canot described), Craven saw future barracoons. He could not imagine these buildings filled with barrels of palm oil, but he did estimate how many slaves they might hold. Craven was also suspicious of Canot's new shipyard. Although there was a decided want of seaworthy vessels on the coast for both legitimate and illegitimate trade, Craven was sure that the new clipper Canot was building would be used to ship slaves.¹²⁵

Canot described the state of the local slave trade to Craven in detail. He informed the lieutenant that a Spaniard named Castro, who had arrived some months earlier as a passenger on board *Uncas*, was now at nearby Sherbro serving as agent for a large factory that had six hundred slaves waiting to be shipped. Canot also reported that there were some two thousand slaves waiting at Gallinas and eight hundred at New Sestros. But instead of taking this information as helpful cooperation or a sign of good faith, Craven interpreted it as bragging.

¹²⁴ Canot and Mayer, chapters 62 - 73 passim.

¹²⁵ Thomas Craven to Matthew Perry, 16 October 1844, S. Doc. 150, 130-132. Craven's suspicious mind and record of pursuing slavers during his brief time in command of *Porpoise* challenges the claim that the squadron's officers did not aggressively pursue slavers. Thomas Craven came from a Washington D.C. naval family, was the same age as Eben Farwell, and went on to a distinguished naval career, reaching the rank of Rear Admiral.

Craven described Canot as “very communicative,” reporting that he “made no concealment of the interest he felt in the success of those already engaged in the traffic in slaves.”¹²⁶ But if Craven’s perception was correct, and Canot did feel a strong interest in the success of the local slave trade, then why did he share these details with Craven? Canot was angry with the British for abandoning him and probably blamed them for his business troubles; he may have been contemplating a return to the slave trade and probably expressed hopes for his former associates’ success. But his remarks were the outbursts of an angry and frustrated man who had lost whatever prestige and respect that his former illicit success had brought him. He could only afford to brag to Craven about the slavers’ business because he was no longer personally invested in it; it was precisely because Canot had quit the trade that he could afford to talk so openly about it. Craven’s skepticism was natural but it was unlikely that Canot was openly building up a new slave factory. And if he was trading in slaves at Cape Mount, Craven found no real evidence of it.

During the remainder of her cruise, *Porpoise* visited the slaving ports of Sherbro, Gallinas, and New Sestros. She fell in with a couple of British cruisers who shared what little information they had. Craven learned that the British had captured the American vessel *Cyrus* with a cargo of slaves somewhere near the equator. She had thrown her flag and papers overboard, but the British had discovered the name “Cyrus, of Philadelphia” on the stern under a coat of black paint.¹²⁷ *Porpoise* attempted to locate a suspicious American schooner that had been spotted off New Sestros, but her efforts proved unsuccessful. The British were not having much luck in the area either. Although they believed that more than three thousand slaves had been exported from this part of the coast in the last ten months, they had not captured a vessel there in over a year. The closest that *Porpoise* came to catching any slavers was when her officers boarded the American bark *Adario* and found the captain of a recently condemned Spanish slaver on board. But time was short, *Porpoise* needed to return north, and Craven

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ S. Doc. 150, 139-140. A Mr. Dumas gave an account of the seizure of the *Cyrus* to a newspaper which apparently accused the British captain Bosanquet of HMS *Alert* of some wrongdoing. This article reached Perry in November and he was obliged to write to Commodore Jones (who had replaced Foote) for an answer. Perry did not give much credit to a newspaper report but suspected that this vessel had been sold and had no right to protection by the U.S. flag. Perry also reported to the department that this was the only case of potential British abuse of the U.S. flag that he had heard of during his time on the station.

could not afford to watch the suspicious vessel. So, having done her best to prevent the abuse of the American flag, *Porpoise* ended her final cruise on the coast and sailed for Porto Praia at the end of September.¹²⁸

Decatur's cruise south to Benguela was equally interesting. Along the way, she stopped and showed her flag at numerous places, many of which had never seen an American man-of-war before. *Decatur* visited many vessels near the Bight of Benin, where Abbot reported that four or five were American and at least two appeared to be Spanish slavers. Abbot chased one suspicious vessel "several times," knowing that he had no power to search or seize her, but hoped that a British cruiser would appear to take over. Abbot later learned that HMS *Sea Lark*, "a celebrated fast sailor," had recently been chasing the same vessel without any luck. Abbot tried to take solace in the fact that although he had little power and no real chance of overhauling these fast-sailing slavers, he could at least cause them some small delay or inconvenience.¹²⁹

Decatur also met and visited many vessels at Lagos, including some American, French, Brazilian, and Genoese. They had all carried out cargoes of trade goods from Brazil, but Abbot doubted whether most of them intended to ship a cargo of slaves in return, perhaps the Brazilian one did, he thought. He also planned to stop at the slave port Cabinda, but after consulting with a British officer just returned from that place, he concluded that the visit would not be worthwhile, and being pressed for time, he decided to forego it.¹³⁰

With light winds, *Decatur* made very slow progress sailing against the current to Benguela. At Ambriz, where a group of Salem merchants had a good share of the trade, the local American factors were pleased to see her. Abbot agreed to fire a salute in order to convince the skeptical natives that *Decatur* was truly a man-of-war. It was a small but useful service to the American merchants. He also intervened to prevent a mutiny on board a Salem merchantman, trading one of his best men for one of its troublemakers. Everywhere *Decatur* stopped people commented that she was the first American man-of-war to visit that part of the

¹²⁸ Thomas Craven to Matthew Perry, 21 October 1844, S. Doc. 150, 133.

¹²⁹ Joel Abbot to Matthew Perry, 6 November 1844, S. Doc. 150, 140-146.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

coast. She was such a novelty that at one Portuguese fort, the officer in charge refused to believe she was American, and was convinced that the British were playing a trick on him.

Abbot discussed the slave trade with all of the people that he met along the way. They told him that since the squadron had been appointed, not one American vessel had been known to ship a slave cargo from these parts. But they did report that there were many cases of American vessels delivering cargoes of slave goods on freight to slave merchants, and some of these had "evident previous arrangements for the sale of their vessels." Recalling the case of the *Uncas*, Abbot made little effort to interfere with these vessels. He explained, "I understand that her case was not considered marked enough to justify a prosecution; therefore, I feel confident that no case has occurred within my reach of action that would have justified me in making a seizure or detention."¹³¹ With such an apparently high standard of proof, Abbot, like other American officers, felt that there was little he could do about this particular problem. After reaching Benguela in late September, *Decatur* began her long cruise back north. Making only a few stops near Berriby, Cape Palmas, and Monrovia, she "hastened back" to Porto Praia, arriving there in early November.

Perry collected the names and circumstances of all of the Americans connected to or implicated in the slave trade from his officers and reported this information to the Navy Department. In these reports, Perry repeated his laments that U.S. customs officials were not preventing illegal sales of American vessels and were allowing suspicious vessels to obtain legal papers. He was not just making excuses when he wrote, "It is difficult to establish any positive proof against them out here, being prepared, as they always are, to evade detection by the most ingenious sorts." Perry also complained that the mixed court at Sierra Leone set captured slave crews and masters free, without inflicting any punishment on them, only condemning their property. If only the Europeans would strengthen their laws and make slave trading a capital crime like the United States had, Perry reasoned, "the traffic would be annihilated in a year."¹³² From his perspective, there was little that the U.S. navy could

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Matthew Perry to James Mason, 22 October 1844, S. Doc. 150, 132.

accomplish against the slave trade until the American and British governments addressed these issues.

Meanwhile, relief started arriving on the African station. During the fall of 1844, the old vessels completed their final cruises of the coast and visited Porto Praia for the last time before returning home, while new vessels arrived fresh from the United States to take their places in the squadron. USS *Truxton* arrived at Porto Praia on September 27th, followed by USS *Preble* on October 19th. *Porpoise*, already at Porto Praia reprovisioning, was subsequently relieved and sailed for the United States on October 23rd. Perry sent *Truxton* and *Preble* to the coast. *Decatur* reached Porto Praia in early November, she was scheduled to be relieved as well, but something had happened and Perry had to send her back to the coast instead.

Perry had sent *Preble* to visit Gorée and the Gambia, ordering her captain, Thomas Freelon, to make a report on the state of American trade in that quarter. Perry had also instructed Freelon to investigate reports of a disturbance between natives and Portuguese at Bissau, and to offer assistance to Americans who had merchandise warehoused there. It was supposed to be a short cruise and Perry did not expect *Preble* to be gone long. When *Preble* did not return as expected, he sent *Decatur* to complete the job and to inquire about the missing *Preble*.

Both cruisers returned to Porto Praia in late November. Perry learned that fever had broken out on board *Preble* at Bissau and that some forty men, including the captain, were ill. They had disregarded Perry's strict sanitary regulations with devastating results. Perry sent *Decatur* back to the United States, the newly arrived USS *Yorktown* to the coast, and the disabled *Preble* to Porto Grande. *Macedonian* followed so that Perry could personally oversee the medical treatment. When he learned that the American property under threat at Bissau was consigned to a notorious slave dealer he was perturbed that so many Americans had been taken ill in the effort to protect these shady interests. It frustrated and annoyed sailors to risk their lives for Americans who did not necessarily deserve their help.¹³³

¹³³ Matthew Perry to James Mason, 30 November 1844, S. Doc. 150, 147-148.

Saratoga had been at the Cape Verdes recovering from her fever outbreak since July and her men were well rested, so in late September, when Perry received a report from Commander Foote identifying the American brig *Imogene* as a slaver, he sent *Saratoga* to the coast to investigate. Coincidentally, *Imogene* arrived at Porto Praia and Perry personally examined the vessel, her captain, and her papers. His investigation thoroughly satisfied Perry that *Imogene* was a legitimate merchantman and that Foote had been mistaken. Perry believed that this type of mistake was fairly common, British accusations against *bona fide* American vessels were often erroneous, in contrast to accusations against vessels that unlawfully displayed the American flag.¹³⁴

Missing *Imogene* on the coast, *Saratoga* made a short cruise to Monrovia and Sierra Leone before returning to Porto Praia to be relieved. She arrived at Norfolk on November 22nd, just a few days after *Porpoise* reached New York. By December, Perry's flagship *Macedonian* was the only original squadron vessel left on the station. Perry was waiting to be relieved by the USS *Jamestown* and his replacement Commodore Charles Skinner. Skinner finally arrived the following spring, and *Macedonian* was back in New York by the end of April, 1845.

Perry's squadron performed well and accomplished a great deal during 1844, especially considering its limitations. When evaluated in terms of its intended mission, Perry's squadron was a success. It continuously cruised the coast of western Africa from Sierra Leone to the Gabon, and ventured as far south as Benguela. The squadron's officers surveyed all aspects of the coast from its topography to the economic, political, and social conditions. They amassed a wealth of new, updated, and valuable information that could be used to help shape future policy and guide future squadron commanders, not to mention inform the American people about a relatively unknown part of the world. Perry's squadron assisted a vast number of American merchants, colonists, and missionaries along the coast and it showed the American flag at nearly every port from Sierra Leone to Benguela. The squadron inspected numerous vessels for signs of illegal activity and chased several suspicious merchantmen. Although they commanded slow sailers, the American officers did their best to enforce U.S. law as they

¹³⁴ Matthew Perry to James Mason, 28 November 1844, S. Doc. 150, 146-147.

understood it, and their actions signaled the beginning of a new American policy in West Africa.

Perry's squadron may not have captured any slavers, but it did accomplish a great deal. It laid important groundwork for the new American naval station in West Africa, it improved U.S. relations with the British navy, and it protected American merchantmen from abuse. It also improved Americans' image along the coast. By punishing the people of Little Berriby, dealing with other Africans in a firm manner, and generally demonstrating strength and force of arms along the coast, Perry's squadron changed Africans' perception of the United States. Americans wanted to be respected as equals among the great nations of the world and Perry's squadron helped demand respect for Americans abroad from both the British and African peoples. By the end of his command, Perry had fulfilled the mission that Upshur had given him, while protecting the health of his men. Perry considered the mission a success, and when Americans back home heard the full story of his command they were inclined to agree.

Journal of an African Cruiser

When *Saratoga* returned to the United States in November of 1844, Horatio Bridge resumed a more regular correspondence with Nathaniel Hawthorne and the two friends set to work finishing their book. The squadron's return did not receive much attention in the press. The vessels arrived individually at scattered ports, and Perry had yet to arrive. The reports that the individual vessel commanders Tattnall, Abbot, and Craven made were of little interest to the general public. 1844 had been a busy and relatively successful year for the squadron, but it was not particularly newsworthy, especially compared with the destruction of Little Berriby or the dramatic events unfolding in the American south-west. Bridge and Hawthorne were the only people actively interested in publicizing the squadron's story. They worked hard to finish their book quickly, to tell the squadron's story, but mostly to make money and curry favor with the Democratic Party.

Now that Democrat James K. Polk had been elected president, Hawthorne had new hope for a political appointment. He confessed, "I have been greatly bothered by pecuniary

difficulties, and am so still, but hope unweariedly for better things.” One of those better things was Bridge’s journal and he declared, “I am determined to make a book out of the journal.”¹³⁵ Bridge and Hawthorne believed that the journal, with its positive depictions of the squadron and the Liberian colonies, would find favor with Democrats. Bridge took dramatic license when recounting the squadron’s military action in the journal, but he described the colonies and their prospects in an honest and frank manner. The journal reflected his support for colonization and the two friends hoped that it would help earn Hawthorne a political appointment in the new administration.

Over the winter, Hawthorne reported steady progress on the book. He pieced together Bridge’s letters, journal entries, and other materials. In January, he wrote to his friend requesting copies of the *Liberia Herald*, sketches, and “remarks as to the practicability or the American Squadron taking prizes – and anything else that you deem it desirable to publish.”¹³⁶ Although Bridge had written his opinions on a number of subjects in his journal, his work was largely descriptive and short. He focused mostly on the curiosities of shipboard life and descriptions of the places that he visited. He actually wrote very little about the squadron’s (or even *Saratoga*’s) activities, and he totally ignored the slave trade.

At Hawthorne’s request, Bridge added some brief comments about the slave trade; these remarks appeared at the very end of the book, almost as a post script. He could hardly avoid writing something about the subject. As he admitted, “it will not have escaped the reader’s notice, that the foregoing journal of our cruise records not the capture of a single slave-vessel, either by our own ship or any other belonging to the American squadron.”¹³⁷ But Bridge actually downplayed the squadron’s efforts against the slave trade and made it appear less active than it was. For example, although *Saratoga* had been involved in detaining *Uncas*, Bridge did not even mention the incident or the vessel. He briefly referred to the *Crawford*, but said nothing about the efforts *Saratoga* made to find her. He clearly wanted to avoid

¹³⁵ Nathaniel Hawthorne to Horatio Bridge, 29 November 1844, Hawthorne Collection, Copybook of Letters, M18.1, Bowdoin College.

¹³⁶ Nathaniel Hawthorne to Horatio Bridge, 19 January 1845, Hawthorne Collection, Copybook of Letters, M18.1, Bowdoin College.

¹³⁷ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 177.

writing about the slave trade, but Hawthorne's editorial judgement took precedence and he included a few brief remarks.

Compelled to write something about the slave trade, Bridge concluded that the U.S. government's policy regarding the right of search, and its failure to make any reciprocal agreements with other nations, made it impossible for the squadron to do anything about the slave trade. He argued that American vessels consigned to Spanish slave dealers were protected by surreptitiously obtained legitimate papers, and once sold, the Spanish or Portuguese flag protected the same vessels from American interference. Short of catching the illegal sale in the act, which of course would be virtually impossible, Bridge felt that the squadron was powerless.¹³⁸

In April, Hawthorne announced that Wiley and Putnam had accepted the book as part of its new series: the *Library of American Books*.¹³⁹ Although he had long since decided to publish the journal as a book, in keeping with his original plan, Hawthorne had excerpts printed in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* to help promote the book, encourage sales, and make a favorable impression on Democrats. In the spring of 1845, as the book and articles went to press, Hawthorne was actively trying to obtain an appointment to the Post Office. His publishers, Evert Duyckinck and John L. O'Sullivan, championed his cause with the party. Several years earlier, Cilley had introduced Hawthorne to O'Sullivan in the hopes of finding him a political appointment, and O'Sullivan wanted to honor Cilley's memory by finally accomplishing that goal.¹⁴⁰

Two articles, excerpts from Bridge's book, appeared in the *Democratic Review* in May and June of 1845. The first one followed Bridge from Monrovia to Cape Palmas and then back to Porto Praia, and was predominantly a description of his adventures exploring the Cape Verde island of St. Antonio. The second article described *Saratoga's* visit to Accra.¹⁴¹ Wiley

¹³⁸ Ibid., 177-179.

¹³⁹ Brancaccio: 31. Other titles in the series, which was designed to promote American authors in the United States and Britain, included Poe's *Tales and The Raven*, Hawthorne's *Mosses from the Old Manse*, and Melville's *Typee*.

¹⁴⁰ John L. O'Sullivan to Henry A. Wise, 24 November 1843, Copy of original letter belonging to Maine Historical Society located in Hawthorne Collection, M85.1, Bowdoin College.

¹⁴¹ "Journal of an African Cruiser: A chapter from a forthcoming book," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, May 1845, 16, no. 83 (1845): 482-492; "Further Passages from Journal of an African Cruiser," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, 16, no. 84 (1845): 533-536.

published the book, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, later that summer. It received positive reviews, with one reviewer writing: "This journal is freshly and cleverly written, and touches on a scene little hackneyed by journalists or travellers."¹⁴² It also seemed to be popular abroad. Wiley and Putnam sent five hundred copies to Britain, and Duyckinck reported that the English notices were "bounteous in praise," claiming that no American book had been so well noticed in a long time.¹⁴³ Although initial sales were slow, Hawthorne and his publisher were confident that the book would be a success.¹⁴⁴ They exhausted the first printing of two thousand copies by October and ordered an additional thousand.

Reviews praised Bridge for maintaining a high degree of frankness in his descriptions, but critics were not necessarily persuaded by his evidence. One reviewer suggested that Bridge's "sanguine expressions" on the state and prospects of Liberia were "certainly not borne out by the facts and examples he adduces." The reviewer also felt that Bridge's defense of the navy lacked conviction, commenting: "You see at once that, though stoppage of the slave trade was the colorable motive of the cruise, all the principle exertions discoverable in the course of it, were exclusively directed to the furtherance and protection of American commerce and American interests in Liberia."¹⁴⁵ By omitting most of the squadron's work relating to the slave trade from the *Journal*, Bridge actually gave the impression that the squadron had done much less than it really had. This may have pleased some Democrats who opposed using the squadron to combat the slave trade, but it also provided opponents and abolitionists with evidence, albeit misleading, to use against the squadron.

Not surprisingly, the *African Repository* showered the *Journal* with praise and ongoing attention, printing: "Rarely have we met with a book of travel, the perusal of which has interested us more." The *Repository* described the book's style as "graphic and enticing," and not weighed down by dry detail or labored essays on trifling topics, "on the contrary, his statements of occurrences and short and natural; his remarks on men and things are candid; his

¹⁴² *Littell's Living Age*, 4 October 1845, 21-24.

¹⁴³ Edward Duyckinck to Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2 October 1845, Hawthorne Collection, Copybook of Letters, M18.1, Bowdoin College.

¹⁴⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne to Horatio Bridge, 19 August 1845, Hawthorne Collection, Copybook of Letters, M18.1, Bowdoin College.

¹⁴⁵ *Littell's Living Age*, 4 October 1845, 21-24.

conclusions are well drawn; his inferences show a well balanced mind; and the whole is pervaded with an air of modesty and unpretention, which in these times is truly refreshing and delightful.”¹⁴⁶ The book was particularly important, the review noted, because it bore “impartial testimony (whether favorable, or the contrary,) to the present condition of Liberia.” The *Repository* concluded that the book presented an honest assessment of the colonies.

The ACS believed that the *Journal* provided strong testimony that Liberia would ultimately succeed. The *Repository*’s review quoted extensively from the book’s conclusion, which found that the condition of the colony had improved over the course of *Saratoga*’s fourteen-months on the station, citing these observations as evidence of the colony’s progress and future potential. Consequently, the *Repository* continued to promote the book throughout the year, publishing additional excerpts in its November and December issues.

Bridge sent Perry a copy of the *Journal* as soon as it was published. Perry was pleased with the book and praised the purser’s efforts. He even encouraged Bridge to expand the slim volume, writing to him:

I have been much pleased in its perusal; the style is excellent and the events of your cruise though briefly recorded are yet described with simple and interesting precision. The materials in your possession might easily and without any loss of interest to the reader have been extended through another volume and it is to be hoped that in another Edition, which will doubtless be called for you will enlarge your narrative.¹⁴⁷

Bridge’s account was more than just flattering to Perry; it helped to publicize the squadron’s mission in a positive light and could help to promote continued support for the department. But perhaps Perry wished that Bridge would expand his account so as to give a more accurate account of the breadth of the work that the squadron had actually done.

In the end, the *Journal* was a success for both of its authors. Hawthorne received the political patronage he sought, Bridge went on to have a long and successful career in the navy, and the *Journal* itself became the unofficial account of Perry’s squadron. The *Journal* has also had a lasting impact on our historical understanding of Perry’s command of the Africa squadron. Historians have relied on it heavily, usually with an uncritical eye, and although

¹⁴⁶ “Journal of an African Cruiser,” *African Repository*, August 1845, 247-253.

¹⁴⁷ Matthew Perry to Horatio Bridge, 1 August 1845, Bridge-Maurice Papers, M19, Bowdoin College.

Bridge embellished his account for dramatic effect, the information he included was largely accurate. But it is perhaps what he left out that has had the greater impact. His omission of *Saratoga* and the other vessels' work beyond the palavers, especially actions relating to the slave trade, created a misperception about the squadron that has endured.

Conclusion

At the beginning of 1844 Americans were anxious for news of the Africa squadron and its effort to avenge the *Mary Carver*, but with the end of that saga and no new dramatic events to keep their attention focused on that part of the world, they quickly lost interest in the squadron and in West Africa generally. Americans barely noticed when the vessels in Perry's squadron began returning to the United States at the end of 1844. The Africa squadron now seemed to rank least in importance among the navy's six squadrons, and it received little attention in Secretary Mason's Navy Department report for 1844. In summarizing the squadron's activities that year, Mason focused on Perry's success protecting the men's health.¹⁴⁸ In just one year, the Africa squadron had gone from the most controversial and exciting squadron in the navy to the least interesting or noticed one.

Mason reported that the Africa squadron seemed to have "exercised a favorable influence in preventing the slave trade," or rather, on American participation in the trade.¹⁴⁹ But he ignored Perry's complaints about U.S. customs officials and American complicity in the slave trade, instead he merely repeated the suggestion that other nations could eliminate the trade by declaring it a capital crime like the United States. Tyler seized on this particular remark for his own annual message. The president reported to Congress that the Africa squadron had been conducted with all due attention to the object which led to its organization, and he made a particular point to mention Perry's success at maintaining good

¹⁴⁸ John Mason, "Report of the Secretary of the Navy," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 28 Cong., 2 Sess., December 1844, 13.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Canney points out, the Parliamentary Report of 1845 suggested that the number of slaves exported steadily increased during these years. Canney, 68.

health. Other countries, he argued, should follow the U.S. example and make slave trading a capital crime.¹⁵⁰

In December of 1844, Mason and Tyler could dismiss the squadron and overstate its impact on the slave trade in part because Perry had yet to return and it was too early to assess his squadron's impact on that trade in any meaningful way. Most Americans had little, if any, remaining interest in the slave trade or the squadron and were happy to accept such placating remarks at face value. When Perry did return to the United States in April of 1845, he received little attention. He submitted his final reports to the Navy Department and received a token acknowledgement in the press. But Americans had little interest in his recommendations for improving the squadron or making it more effective. The highlight of his report remained the overall good health of the squadron under Perry's command; his comments about the slave trade and abuse of the American flag received little notice. Officially, the Navy Department claimed that the slave trade was on the decline and chose to ignore the receding issue of flag abuse now that the subject no longer posed an immediate problem for relations with Britain.¹⁵¹

Circumstances had changed significantly since Daniel Webster and Lord Ashburton had made their treaty just a few years earlier. A new administration with new priorities had moved into the White House. Tyler was gone, Upshur was dead, and Texas and Mexico dominated the American political agenda. Colonizationists had more serious problems to worry about than a small naval squadron: rumors were circulating that Liberia planned to declare its independence from the ACS. American merchants in West Africa had as much protection as they needed. As far as most Americans were concerned, the squadron had resolved whatever problems they may have had in West Africa and the place no longer required their attention; the squadron had served its purpose.

Historians have judged Perry's squadron a failure because it failed to capture slavers. Relying on statistics of captures and unbalanced primary sources, especially Bridge's *Journal*,

¹⁵⁰ John Tyler, "Message of the President," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 28 Cong., 2 Sess., December 1844, 20. In another report to the Senate made shortly after, in which Tyler focused on the slave trade and Brazil, he blamed the British for the problems, mainly as they supply trade goods (Manchester cottons, etc.) and the system of apprenticeships in the West Indies for encouraging the slave trade. John Tyler, *Journal of the Senate*, 28 Cong., 2 Sess., 20 February 1845, 193.

¹⁵¹ "The African Squadron," *Boston Daily Atlas*, 8 May 1845.

historians have not studied the work the squadron did in 1844 closely. The conclusion that Perry's squadron failed focuses too much on superficial results without looking at the bulk of the work that the squadron performed. It is unfair to conclude that because the squadron only captured one questionable prize that it had no impact on the slave trade.

Perry's squadron accomplished a great deal with its limited means. It made an extensive and valuable study of the coast, including many places that no U.S. naval vessel had ever visited before. It formally cooperated with the British for the first time. Perry obtained pledges and treaties from several African towns and headmen not to engage in the slave trade, a suppression tactic advocated by many people at the time. The squadron showed the American flag throughout the region, announcing to slave traders that the time when the American flag could be abused with impunity was ending. And the squadron assisted American merchants, colonists, and missionaries, all of whom were expected to help civilize Africans and transform the coast into a lawful place organized around legitimate trade.

Perry and his officers could have confronted the slave trade more aggressively, but it was likely that they would have achieved the same results, or worse. They should not be faulted for a cautious, conservative approach to their mission, especially considering the perceived dangers and Americans' general lack of knowledge about the places and people they encountered in West Africa. Any serious criticism for the U.S. failure to achieve more significant results in suppressing the slave trade or abuse of the American flag should be directed at President Tyler, Congress, and the American people. The lack of political will to make a more serious effort to suppress the slave trade or to enforce the relevant American laws against it, both at home and abroad, created the limited circumstances in which, as many at the time commented, the squadron was doomed to "fail." Perry's squadron did not fail, it accomplished its purpose, but it was certainly hampered by these constraints and only succeeded as far as it was intended to, as far as its circumstances would allow.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSIONS

William Farwell dictated his last will and testament on December 21, 1846, and died later that week. Farwell directed that his estate be divided in half between his wife Betsy and his youngest son Albert. He willed five dollars to each of his other children; Eben Farwell's two boys split their father's share.¹ After her husband's death, Betsy Farwell moved to Orono, Maine where she spent her remaining days with her daughter Jane. When Betsy died in 1856, she was buried next to her husband in the family cemetery on the old Riverside farm.

The Farwell's eldest daughter Margaret, and her husband George Tower, took over the family farm, until they sold it in 1874. James Dumeresq Farwell gave up the seafaring life and moved to California where he prospered as a ship chandler.² Eben Farwell's widow Laura and his two sons continued to live in the house he had built for them, until 1849 when Laura sold it and moved in with her father in Augusta.³ When Joseph Abbott died the following year, Laura bought his house and continued to live there with her youngest son Joseph for several years. Meanwhile, she sent her older son William live with her sister in Holyoke, Massachusetts. Eventually, after the boys were grown, Laura married a schoolteacher named George Ewing and moved to Holyoke, where she lived until the age of eighty.⁴

The Farwell family changed with the times and so did Vassalboro. Manufacturing swept over the town, and woolen mills reshaped the little farming community. Manufacturers advertised for laborers in Ireland, and large number Catholic workers from Ireland and southern New England immigrated to Vassalboro. Maine enacted prohibition, and the railroad reached Augusta. The town changed dramatically in the years immediately following Eben Farwell's

¹ William Farwell Probate file, Kennebec County Probate Court, Augusta, Maine.

² Farwell, Abbott, and Wilson.

³ Laura sold the house to John Nowell of Vassalboro for \$1,360. Deeds 166: 504-505, Kennebec County Registrar of Deeds, Augusta, Maine; Eben Farwell and Children Probate file, Kennebec County Probate Court, Augusta, Maine.

⁴ Joseph R. Abbott Probate file, Kennebec County Probate Court, Augusta, Maine; Massachusetts Vital Records, Holyoke 1850-1895; Deed 201: 160, Kennebec County Registrar of Deeds, Augusta, Maine; Eben Farwell and Children Probate file, Kennebec County Probate Court, Augusta, Maine.

death, and this rapid change, including the influx of new immigrants, made it easy for Vassalboro to forget him.⁵

Although most of the Farwells left Vassalboro, one constant remained – Eben Farwell’s Greek Revival house. It was not the largest house in the county, but it had a striking presence, sitting on a hill overlooking the River Road, and it inspired curiosity. As the years went by, rumors about the house and its original owners circulated through the community. In 1891, just thirteen days after Laura Farwell died, an old woman named Mrs. Hanson, who claimed to have known Laura, told her daughter a story of how one night, many years before, after Laura had locked up the house and gone to bed, she had been awakened by the sound of her husband Eben’s footsteps downstairs. Startled at his unexpected arrival, Laura had gone downstairs to meet him, but she could not find him or anyone else in the house. According to Mrs. Hanson, Laura later calculated that she had heard the mysterious footsteps on the same night that her husband had been killed.⁶ By 1891, the Farwell’s story had been transformed into a tragic romantic legend in Vassalboro.

In the 1940s, Vassalboro resident Forest Brown told another story about the Farwells. Margaret Tower, Eben’s sister, had sold their parent’s farm to Josiah Brown in 1874, and his nephew Forest had inherited it in 1912. In 1940, when Earl Hutchinson bought Eben’s Greek Revival house next door, Brown told his new neighbor about the house’s original owner – Captain Farwell the slave trader. According to Brown, after having built the house, Captain Farwell had returned to Africa on yet another slaving voyage. But this time, Farwell never returned, because, as Brown told it, some would-be slaves had attacked him and chopped off both of his hands to punish him for his crimes.⁷

Later, after the Hutchinsons moved away, Eben Farwell’s house sat empty and neglected for several years, the perfect subject for romantic tales. Building on the existing legends, an anonymous author wrote:

⁵ For a history of Vassalboro see: Robbins.

⁶ Mrs. Hanson to Dr. James Spalding, 16 April 1891, James A. Spalding Collection 1487, Box 4, Maine Historical Society.

⁷ Peter Hutchinson to the author, 17 February 2003. Peter, Earl Hutchinson’s son, remembers hearing Brown tell these stories when he was a child living in the house.

Not the oldest but by far the most picturesque house in the town of Vassalboro is the old Captain Farwell homestead. It rises from a hill like an Athenian temple, with white pillars gleaming among the trees... In other respects it is like the ancient temples because no longer being a home of anything but rats, it has taken on a deserted air.⁸

With its ragged lawns, overgrown driveway, and cracked pillars, Eben's house reached full blown mythic status in Vassalboro. The story continued:

Captain Farwell was a sailor who built this home for his bride. He, himself, was more pirate than sailor for his occupation was to capture negroes in Africa and transport them to the States to be sold into slavery. Perhaps his forgotten bride on the Kennebec, far distant from the sea, mourned for him when he received his just deserts. The old inhabitants tell that once while he had left his ship and was searching for natives, he was captured, and – they lower their voices as they tell this – they, the natives, cut him into inch pieces and burned him.

The mystique of the big, abandoned, decaying house perched above the road was meshed with the story of the old slaver into a romantic ideal of cosmic justice. The author ended their story by suggesting that “perhaps it was because it was built with ill-gotten gains that the old house stands aloof.”

The legend of Captain Farwell the slave-trading pirate took yet another strange turn when local high school teacher Carolyn Van Horn included his house in a collection of New England stops on the Underground Railroad. In a 1995 interview, Van Horn told the *Kennebec Journal* a revamped version of the Farwell legend, emphasizing the slave trader's “heartbroken” widow. This article revived the legend and transformed it into a tale of poetic justice that also redeemed the town of any guilt. As Van Horn explained, “It's really ironic that Capt. Farwell was supposedly a slave trader and his house should be used as a haven for slaves escaping to Canada on the Underground Railroad.”⁹

There is no evidence to support any of these legends, they are just stories grown out of bits of distorted fact. Eben Farwell was not a slave trader, and there is no evidence that his house was ever used to hide escaped slaves. But perhaps what is most interesting is that although the actual story of Eben Farwell and his house was just as dramatic as any of these

⁸ Unsigned manuscript found in the private collection of the late Richard Hunter, former owner of the Farwell house, Vassalboro, Maine. The author examined a copy of the manuscript that was kept in the house by the current owner, Forest Hunter (2004).

⁹ “Underground Railroad,” *Kennebec Journal*, 7 May 1995.

tales, it has been completely forgotten. When the Farwell family dissipated and the town failed to champion its lost son, the big, mysterious house on the hill was the only reminder left behind. Perhaps the irony, if there is any in this story, is that Eben Farwell built the house to symbolize his successful career as a legitimate merchant sea captain, but instead it has been largely responsible for perpetuating the legend of Eben Farwell the slave trader.

Americans' memories of the *Mary Carver* affair lingered for a brief time, kept alive by those same self-interested missionaries and colonists. In 1850, the *Episcopal Recorder* published an article written in Cape Palmas, specifically addressed to children. It recounted the *Mary Carver*'s story and passed along the tale of the treacherous and cowardly natives to the next generation. The article depicted Perry as a hero, but the true hero of the story was the missionary. The story used the *Mary Carver* to demonstrate that the natives' "hearts are very wicked and corrupt, and nothing but the Spirit of God can change them, and cause them to leave off forever crimes which they have always practised."¹⁰ A naval commander might be able to inflict punishment, but according to this telling, only the missionary could effect everlasting change.

As time passed, the relationship between Americans and West Africa changed, and as practical uses for the *Mary Carver* story diminished it was forgotten. Liberia declared its independence from the ACS in 1847. The Africa squadron became an established entity. And the annexation of Texas, the Mexican War, and the ensuing sectional crisis dominated American politics and foreign policy.

The *Mary Carver* affair is more than just one family's tragic story, it is an illuminating example of the complexities of American politics and foreign policy during the Tyler administration. The Tyler administration demonstrated the affair's importance when it deployed a naval squadron and a force of some two hundred marines to avenge the *Mary Carver*, punish the attackers, and destroy a series of villages. The United States had a long history of using its navy to protect American citizens and their interests abroad, and of

¹⁰ "Missionary Letters to Children No. XVII," *Episcopal Recorder*, 6 July 1850.

avenging attacks against those citizens. The U.S. response to the *Mary Carver* attack fit with established policy, but the Africa squadron was not created to avenge the *Mary Carver*.

The *Mary Carver* affair was about more than punishing the people of Little Berriby, it played a role in the future of U.S. naval policy and in the country's relations with Britain. The need to avenge the *Mary Carver* gave the new Africa squadron greater purpose, which helped convince the American people and their representatives in Congress to support the squadron. Using the full force of that squadron to meet, interview, and then punish the people of Little Berriby also helped the squadron's public image in Africa, back home in the United States, and throughout the Atlantic community. By appearing to meet with the African suspects and attempting to resolve their differences peaceably, the United States maintained the higher moral ground on this world stage. And by using such overwhelming force to punish and destroy Little Berriby, Commodore Perry protected the squadron from potential embarrassment while making an impressive show of force that cultivated respect for the United States and its navy. This show also helped to keep Americans interested in the squadron and maintain public support during the squadron's first crucial year. The squadron's actions at Little Berriby showed Americans that Perry's men were earning their keep.

Historians have misunderstood the importance of the *Mary Carver* affair because they have misinterpreted the squadron's purpose, focusing too narrowly on the effort to suppress the slave trade and ignoring larger issues of U.S. foreign policy. The United States created the Africa squadron for several reasons, including to help suppress the slave trade, but its primary motive was too improve relations with Britain and it wanted a squadron to protect American citizens and their interests from British abuse. It was intended to instil respect for Americans along the coast, and to deter future attacks. The United States hoped that the squadron's presence would make both Britons and Africans think twice before abusing Americans. Efforts to accomplish this mission took many forms, actions that historians have interpreted as contradictory were actually meant to be complimentary. For example, protecting Americans and their legitimate interests on the coast was thought to counteract the slave trade. Both

policy makers and naval officers at the time supported a variety of methods to suppress the slave trade, not just policing the seas.

When one considers the squadron's creation and mission within the larger context of U.S. foreign policy it becomes clear that suppressing the slave trade was only one part of that mission. The first Africa squadron, commanded by Matthew Perry, performed a variety of duties successfully and received praise from the U.S. government and the American people. They considered it to be a success and in many ways it was. The squadron successfully punished the *Mary Carver* attackers and resolved a series of disputes between Americans and Africans along the coast. Perry and his squadron significantly increased respect for Americans in West Africa. The squadron challenged Britain's practice of interfering with American shipping and deterred further abuse. The squadron also helped American missionaries and the Liberian colonies both directly and indirectly. And Perry's squadron helped the navy and future squadron commanders by intensely studying the coast and significantly increasing the government's knowledge about the region. Finally, the squadron's impressive record of good health, few casualties, and relatively little scandal was a valuable achievement that helped sustain its political support. Overall, although the squadron did not capture criminals engaged in the slave trade, it successfully accomplished the mission that it was given. The United States may have failed to suppress the slave trade, but that was not a failure of Perry's squadron.

The U.S. Africa squadron was not created to avenge the *Mary Carver*, the idea for the squadron and the pledge to create it both preceded the *Mary Carver* affair. But the *Mary Carver* affair did play an important role in forming the squadron. The attack on the *Mary Carver* and the promise of vengeance helped to secure congressional funding for the squadron. And the squadron's act of vengeance further helped to maintain American interest in, and support for, the squadron. The *Mary Carver* affair gave Americans a tangible and easily understandable reason for supporting an Africa squadron and when that affair ended they turned their attention elsewhere.

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