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Brandon Mills: The World Colonization Made. The Racial Geography of Early American Empire, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020

The World Colonization Made is a title that makes this book hard to place. And that is precisely the issue at stake with histories of the American Colonization Society (ACS). Very often, histories of the ACS place its efforts within the framework of US domestic politics and racial exclusion. Sometimes this organization, with a largely white backing, is studied in contrast to Black emigration projects in the nineteenth century. This book takes the perspective that the ACS and founding of Liberia can be placed within a broader imperial US ideology whereby Black and Indigenous people both faced removal modeled on republican self-rule. The book is well organized and works through the shifting geographies of colonization, including the Trans-Appalachian West, Liberia, Western removal, and the Americas. The author situates these ideologies and projects, some more realized than others, within an imperial and geopolitical framework. That is, founding (quasi) independent settler states on the basis of race could also fulfill geopolitical goals while serving a domestic purpose: supporting white settler colonialism.

This book is important for several audiences beyond scholars of the American Colonization Society and the founding of Liberia. Colonizationism as explored in this book contributes to debates on the format of the US empire in the nineteenth century, before the US had formal colonies in name. It importantly broadens the scope beyond the issue of white settler colonialism to show the important racial geography and geopolitical aims of colonizationism (ie. not only a national project) and its commercial promise. Secondly, the book also discusses how colonizationism relates to white Americans' reactions to the founding of Haiti, and is therefore of interest to scholars who deal with Haitian and US relations. And third, though the author does compare ACS to British efforts in Sierra Leone, this book more broadly contributes to understanding US empire in a way that speaks closely to European colonization in the nineteenth century: How to foster a "republic" or "nation," while excluding certain populations – especially on the basis of race – from those rights? Colonizationism promised white Americans a solution to that conundrum. As such, this book should be read broadly among nineteenth-century imperial historians.

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