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# Struggle for Sovereignty: An African-American Colonization Attempt and Delicate Independence in Mid-Nineteenth Century Central America

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**Struggle for Sovereignty: An African-American Colonization Attempt and Delicate  
Independence in Mid-Nineteenth Century Central America**

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**Thesis submitted to the Eberly College at  
West Virginia University in partial fulfillment for the degree  
of Master of Arts in History**

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## ABSTRACT

### Struggle for Sovereignty: An African-American Colonization Attempt and Delicate Independence in Mid-Nineteenth Century Central America

Matthew Harris

This thesis uses a series of United States foreign relations documents centered around an 1862 attempt by Abraham Lincoln to colonize parts of Central America with freed African-Americans. Traditionally, these communications have been used by historians for U.S. foreign relations or Black resettlement history. Here, instead, this collection is used to display the major threats to Central American sovereignty in the mid-nineteenth century in their own words. The collection reveals that two of the threats were foreign imperialistic thought and racial instability. However, the third, and ultimately most destabilizing threat to the region, was the five nations' rivalry amongst each other. This thesis provides an image of Central American history previously overshadowed by other events in the region while explaining how both individual sovereignty and regional autonomy there began to disintegrate in the early 1860's.

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## **Introduction:**

### **Black Resettlement and Foreign Backlash**

Racial and regional tensions through the United States in the mid-nineteenth century quickly devolved into the United States Civil War by 1861. As war raged across the country, figures across the North looked for solutions to their perceived current, and future, issues should the institution of slavery be abolished. Already in the spring of 1862, Abraham Lincoln had begun plans to emancipate the whole of the Confederate States of America's slaves. However, while waiting for the right moment to do so, he and his peers tried to sift through the many options on how to rightly govern a nation where African-Americans could safely live side by side with Caucasian-Americans.<sup>1</sup>

Eventually, advocates for the colonization of liberated African-Americans looked to parts of Central American and the Caribbean began to form. However, the poorly laid plans of the Lincoln cabinet were met with hard rejection in Central America. The five nations of Central America; Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua deemed the plan not only an individual threat to each of them, but one that could harm the entire region. Aggressive foreign incursions and racial instability had made the five countries wary of any threat to their sovereignty. However, the largest threat to both the region and each nation's own sovereignty turned out to be their rivalries amongst each other. This thesis should illuminate how Central American governments of the mid-nineteenth century view threats to their sovereignty and their ability to work together to combat such threats - as well as the eventual collapse of that ability.

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<sup>1</sup> He waited until after the Union victory at Antietam to abolish all slavery in the states that had seceded. This was a political move to both punish the states that had left, while also destabilizing them by telling slaves that they were allowed to escape.

This Central American backlash against proposed U.S. colonization also displayed a complex tangle of nationalism and regionalism. Each country was willing to work together to maintain the region's independence from outside influence, but none had any qualms about manipulating another when no outside threats were present. Therefore, this series of events gives a close look at how nineteenth century Central American countries perceived outside threats, and how they each enacted their own strategies to retain regional autonomy while undermining each other's individual sovereignty.

It should be kept in mind that this thesis does not argue about the success of the Central American countries in deterring black settlement in the region, it just uses it as a framework for how successful those nations were in organizing and resisting threats to their sovereignty. The Chiriquí colonization plan, and its surrounding narrative, failed for a variety of reasons. Perhaps some of that was due to Central American resistance, but there was also a range of issues with the project due to the U.S. Civil War. The war detracted money, organization, and focus away from the project. Even without those issues, the Chiriquí land described in this thesis was in a dispute zone between Costa Rica and Gran Colombia.

Previously, the mid-nineteenth century relations of the United States and the Central American region have largely been confined to two narratives, the economic takeover of Cornelius Vanderbilt (among many other businessmen) and the military takeover of William Walker, both of which occurred in the 1850's. This thesis, however, argues that there was at least one other important foreign relation interaction during this time period, an attempt at resettling U.S. born African-Americans in Central America. This colonization plan helps put context into the policies and actions of the Central American countries of the time.

Lincoln's colonization 'scheme' has been a footnote for Black resettlement or to the history of the American Colonization Society. However, proper analysis of this event and the time period reveal new insights to the U.S.-Central American relationship of that era. Perhaps more importantly though, this article also reveals the delicate balance between nationalism, and regionalism, that characterized the five Central American countries of the time period. This was the last time that this cooperation successfully kept out foreign influences. Afterwards, the countries' lack of regional cooperation and aggressive maneuvers towards each other undid this unique relationship in Central American history. The region could unite strongly, but ultimately its five sovereign states undid this fraternal bond, to the detriment of all Central America.

On April 16, 1862 Lincoln announced that every slave in Washington, D.C., was freed. It was apparent that the president was testing a larger emancipation plan that would take place six months later. In response to the freedom of so many people, his presidential cabinet, and the United States Congress began plans for the colonization of African-Americans outside of the country. Their idea to do so was not groundbreaking. Many abolitionists and northern citizens believed that colonization was the only way to resolve the constant racial strife that had seized the country in the prior years. A several page pamphlet written by Lincoln's Commissioner on Negro Colonization, James Mitchell, highlighted the benefits of a renewed colonization effort.

His pamphlet began, "the peace and prosperity of the country and the permanency of our republican civilization, require a separation of the colored or negro race from us..." He wrote further, "The social and civil evils resulting for the presence of the negro race are numerous..." Going far beyond racism, Mitchell tried to weave a compelling argument of Armageddon and

future race wars should the Lincoln administration not act to migrate African Americans from the country.<sup>2</sup>

This fear-mongering pamphlet quickly spread beyond the walls of the presidential office, resulting in offers and bids from several swindlers, investors, and wealthy men throughout the U.S. Eventually though, only one was being seriously considered by the summer of 1862. The place under consideration was the Chiriquí Peninsula, a region located in modern day Panama, and bordering Costa Rica. It was owned by questionable businessman Ambrose W. Thompson. Thompson was most likely trying to use the U.S. government for a quick profit once he and his father realized that their investment was mostly useless for several reasons that will be elaborated on.<sup>3</sup>

The hotly-contested Chiriquí peninsula had first been bought by a Frenchman, Gabriel Lafond, from Colombia in the 1850's. It was then sold to Thompson a couple years later, on the basis of its great mineral wealth and prime coastal location. For the most part, the land was inaccessible and unprofitable.<sup>4</sup> However, having the U.S. buy-out the land was an easy way to redeem his money and ensure further profits. His first attempt to acquaint the U.S. with the land was an offer to the U.S. Navy in 1862. A year later, Thompson was actually suggested personally by the Secretary of the Interior, Caleb Smith, based on his previous year's submission to the Navy. Smith inquired to Thompson, "if you would undertake their [African Americans] colonization and settlement on the lands of the "Chiriquí Improvement Company..."<sup>5</sup> The faulty

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<sup>2</sup> *Ambrose W. Thompson Papers*. Box 43, Chiriquí Improvement Company File, 1851-1866. Library of Congress, folder Sept. 1862-1863.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Schieps, "Lincoln and the Chiriquí Colonization Project," *The Journal of Negro History* 37, no.4 (October 1952): 420.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Schieps, "Gabriel Lafond and Ambrose W. Thompson: Neglected Isthmian Promoters," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 36, no. 2 (May 1956): 212.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Ambrose W. Thompson to Columbian Government, *Ambrose W. Thompson Papers*, folder Sept. 1862-1863.



science and beliefs of the era had misguided politicians. It was a commonly held belief, especially amongst whites, that African descended people were more resistant to tropical diseases and thrived in hot, humid climates. No doubt, a reason like this is why Smith thought that the otherwise unlivable, untamable jungle isthmus would be great for black resettlement.

According to one letter of correspondence with the Colombian government, Thompson planned on building mines, roads, and ports. Then after the initial investment in these projects and other infrastructure, he had bragged his land claim could host even more than fifty-thousand African Americans. Colombia at first conceded but wanted a promise that anyone migrating from the U.S. stay in that region for the first year and also renounce their citizenship.<sup>6</sup>

Knowing that the land was subject to Colombian control and negotiation, and not entirely Thompson's would have immediately raised 'red flags' within the Lincoln administration over its usefulness. However, Thompson kept his communications private, in an attempt to keep the investment moving. The administration also did not know of the claim to the same region by Costa Rica. Despite two powerful countries vying for power and sovereignty over the region, Thompson did little to make the U.S. government aware of this border dispute, and other issues, that he was all too aware of.<sup>7</sup>

Word began to spread during the summer of 1862 that African-American colonization in Central America was possible. The July 20, 1862 edition of the Honduras Official Gazette reprinted an article from the Boston Daily Advertiser and stated, "They [African Americans] desire to emigrate to Central America... they desire to bring to the United States that great commerce of the Pacific, which ought to increase...the riches and power of their common

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

country.”<sup>8</sup> Central Americans did not see this as a faulty plan to solve race relations in the U.S., they viewed it as an invasion. Soon though, Lincoln’s statements would confirm their fears of encroachment.

On August 12, 1862, Lincoln met with a group of former Washington slaves to discuss the future of African American society. Although he had just freed them four months prior, he was eagerly trying to test his plan on removing them from the country. His speech included suggestions such as resettling these freedmen to an environment both physically, and socially, “more accepting of their race”.<sup>9</sup> Already at this point, Lincoln had put Samuel C. Pomeroy, Kansas Senator, in charge of gauging interest and preparing a colony at Chiriquí. Interestingly enough, Pomeroy had been staunchly anti-colonization just six months before. His entire life had been spent voting against American Colonization Society goals and plans. Then suddenly, he was the head of colonization efforts under Lincoln by 1862. He seemingly volunteered for the position, but it is unknown why he had such a change of heart about black resettlement. It has been speculated that perhaps Pomeroy joined to embezzle funds. There is some proof to this, as Pomeroy was given \$50,000 by Congress to aid in settlement in Chiriquí, but only \$25,000 was ever accounted for afterwards.<sup>10</sup> However, he was also involved in several charitable actions, such as the Ladies Sanitary Fair.<sup>11</sup> So whether Pomeroy, or Thompson were responsible for the loss of money, is unknown. A third party may have also been responsible for the missing funds,

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<sup>8</sup> Message of the President of the United States to the Two Houses of Congress at the Commencement of the Third Session of the Thirty-Seventh Congress (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1862), 892.

<sup>9</sup> Roy P. Basler, ed., 1861-1862, vol. 5, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 370.

<sup>10</sup> Schieps, “Lincoln and the Chiriquí Colonization Project,” 422, 431.

<sup>11</sup> *Papers of William Seward*, Microfilm, Correspondence: Indexed, General, August-September 15, 1862. Library of Congress, reel 71.

but that aside, a decent amount of currency had been provided for the plan and therefore it can be speculated that there was at least some serious effort behind the settlement.

Anti-colonization agitation in Guatemala, Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica had already begun with the printing of the Honduran article and built upon previous worries. Concerns existed about a large influx of African descendants to the region, along with worries about their allegiance to the United States. Every country was loath to have an intrusive, United States colony on their borders. The concept for the colony, and Lincoln's speech, had also been published before Pomeroy or Secretary of State William Seward announced it to the various Central American diplomatic correspondents. The agitated public and politicians assumed this meant that the United States planned to take land without permission if it desired. The backlash against the proposal was swift.

There were two ambassadors for the five Central American countries at the time. Antonio José de Irisarri represented the historically friendly, then on the brink of war, states of Guatemala and El Salvador. The other ambassador, Luis Molina, represented Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Both ambassadors wanted to ensure that the region remained autonomous and without further U.S. intrusion. However, in a region of strong political fragmentation, they also wanted to push the agendas of their native countries. Therefore, when responding on behalf of their various constituents, they sometimes come across as being of mixed opinion. Ultimately, their responses were based on how they viewed U.S. power in strengthening their native countries or unbalancing the regional autonomy. This balancing act was the same that many of the countries had been using to limit British pressure in the region and remain independent despite their small size and lack of power.

Irisarri, issued a frank statement, “Colonization cannot take place, because it does not suit the views of those governments.”<sup>12</sup> Neither government was interested in selling land to another country, and it did not want immigrants unless they were educated. Immigrants would only be accepted if they were “colonists of a different class, who may have had a more liberal education than those that can be acquired in a state of slavery.”<sup>13</sup> The Secretary of Foreign Relations, Pedro Zeledon, for Nicaragua followed up Irisarri with even harsher words to say. He thought allowing freed slaves into the country would worsen it due to the “degradation of that race.” It also was unacceptable for immigrants to act “under the special protection of another nation.”<sup>14</sup> Not only were former slaves not wanted as immigrants, but the idea of either of the countries' governments not having control over migrants to their nations was insulting.

Honduras was preemptive in their response, acknowledging that no one had even reached out to buy land or suggest the idea to them. Foreign Minister James R. Partridge communicated the opinion of the Honduran President. Due to the newspapers the president figured the United States should know Honduras' opinion on the matter of colonization and immigration. Honduras only wanted “industrious *whites*” like the “*German* immigrants... in Costa Rica,” who had created great prosperity in that country. Bringing in freed slaves was “not at all desirable” because Honduras already faced many problems with their own free African population that supposedly refused to be law abiding citizens. Just like the representative from San Salvador and Nicaragua, his country would gladly accept educated or industrious white immigrants from the United States, but it wanted no more migrants of African descent in his country.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Message of the President of the United States*, 883-886.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 895.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 891.

Nicaragua was the most vehemently opposed to the colonization of freed slaves into their country. The United States minister in Leon de Nicaragua, Andrew B. Dickinson, communicated with the Nicaraguan government and had this to say. “The people of Nicaragua are very generally opposed to such a scheme,” and “they feel indignant at being ranked with the North American negro.” Not only were Nicaraguans against the idea of colonization, they were completely offended that anyone even thought that they should live with or around African descendants. The whole of Nicaragua was apparently in a panic for several weeks about Lincoln’s proposal. They considered it the “greatest degradation for the country to be overrun with blacks.”<sup>16</sup> In the public mindset “negroes... are worthless, idle, thieving vagabonds,” and if they were allowed to intermingle with Native Americans would give birth to “the worst cross-breed that society can be infested with.” A deep fear had taken hold in Nicaragua that the United States meant to upend their society and destroy its fragile racial balance.<sup>17</sup>

The only country that was open to the idea of colonization was Costa Rica. Months earlier, in May, the congress of the country began to consider proposals for a “tract of land for the settlement of free negroes.”<sup>18</sup> This was a seemingly independent move from the growing unity of the Central American coalition it soon joined.

One location, Chiriquí, was perfectly suited for Lincoln’s desire to have a trans-oceanic colony and considered perfect for the health of African Americans.<sup>19</sup> The problem however was

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 893-894.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 896.

<sup>18</sup> The most likely reason for Costa Rica being open to the idea was the location of the Chiriquí land grant. It was directly against their southern border, and in a disrupted zone with Gran Colombia. By offering the U.S. colonization of the land, they were attempting to force an arbitration and recognition of the area as their own; Ibid, 887.

<sup>19</sup> Lincoln and his cabinet were eager to have a trans-oceanic route to better connect the east and west coasts of the U.S. This was years before the completion of the U.S. continental railroad system made that route obsolete until the early 1900’s. At that point, new U.S. colonies in the Caribbean and Pacific (from the Spanish American War) revitalized interest in a trans-isthmian route out of necessity for military movement and communication.

the land was the object of a dispute between Costa Rica and New Granada (modern day Colombia). United States Ambassador to Costa Rica, Charles N. Riotte, could not see a peaceful resolution between the two countries resulting in sale to the United States. He also could not recommend his government spend “one cent” to set aside land because the United States “government would most surely be swindled” by salesmen and land owners with useless property, whose sole desire was to make a quick profit by setting freedmen up for failure.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, the Costa Rican government was initially open to colonization, but the United States had to both resolve a massive territory dispute, and convince the winner to sell the highly disputed land, or wade through a mire of risky real estate transactions themselves. Costa Rica’s consideration of the proposal did not last long though.

While Central Americans reacted, Pomeroy travelled quickly. By September 1862 he supposedly had 13,000 applicants for the Chiriquí colony. He planned to leave by October 1862 and had received \$25,000 to help the colonizers with their arrival, which conveniently disappeared.<sup>21</sup> While he was recruiting applicants for the journey, the horrendous battle at Antietam took place. The bloodiest day in U.S. history severely halted minor plans such as the Chiriquí colonization plan, and Lincoln’s cabinet turned its focus towards those more pressing issues. Lincoln in the meantime, prepared his Emancipation Proclamation in the wake of the close victory. No doubt he was distracted by his intention to give rights to millions of people for the first time.

With Lincoln and his cabinet distracted by national developments elsewhere, Pomeroy, focused on his goal. He took out ads and further publicized his intention to leave in October with

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 889.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.,

a large group of freedmen to establish a colony.<sup>22</sup> Seward and the State Department had spent the last month assuring Central Americans that no colonization was going to take place without more diplomatic discussion. As seen, Costa Rica was even open to the idea, with restrictions, initially. However, Pomeroy's aggressive leadership of the movement, along with his blatant disregard for how Central Americans were interpreting his actions, resulted in a new response.

Due to Pomeroy's unsubstantiated and but seemingly ready plan to colonize in the next month, a regional effort was assembled to stop the colonization plan in mid-September 1862, when a legation of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Honduras composed a letter to Seward. With Minister Luis Molina as the three countries' representative, he communicated that no country at the meeting "would consent to the formation in its territory of independent colonies, whatever might be their color and place of departure."<sup>23</sup> None of the countries wanted a United States-controlled colony inside their region, no matter who it was settling it, African-Americans or "industrious whites" (like Honduras had so bluntly requested). Even Costa Rica was closed to the idea, because the plan was now seen as a regional threat, rather than an individual boon. Molina also stated that the countries did not want an unexpected influx of former slaves, "a plague... the United States desire to rid themselves [of]."<sup>24</sup> It must be kept in mind as well, that Irissari had already dismissed the idea weeks earlier as the representative for Guatemala and El Salvador. Now all five of the countries had rejected the U.S.

These five Central American countries had made it clear that they were not going to allow a colony in or near their borders. A few seemed open to the idea of limited African American migration at first, but concerns grew over how much oversight and physical aid the

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<sup>22</sup> Schieps, "Lincoln and the Chiriquí", 437.

<sup>23</sup> *Message of the President* 897-898.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

United States might provide for the settlers. U.S. support for the proposal also seemed to dwindle. A nationally reprinted article from the *New York Sun* compared Lincoln's attempt to move African Americans to another country to that of a beetle trying to move a cannonball out of a wheel rut.<sup>25</sup> The comparison not only indicated how futile the effort to remove such a massive number of people would be, but also speculated that most African Americans did not wish to leave the country.

Pomeroy's persistent public organization of the project continued, rising concerns through October 1862 in Central America forced Seward reaffirm multiple times that the United States was not going to settle in Central America.<sup>26</sup> Even so, the Palace at Managua introduced new passport laws in a paranoid attempt to keep former slaves out and prevent abolitionists from smuggling them in.<sup>27</sup>

Then, behind closed doors, Pomeroy and the Chiriquí colonization plan began to crumble. Due to the responses of Colombia and Costa Rica to the colonization plan, it became apparent that Thompson had lied about his full ownership and rights to the Chiriquí land grant. Instead, the Central American countries were looking to use him, and the U.S. as an extension, to assert their own contested claims to the land. It would remain locked in a diplomatic stranglehold well into 1866.

Pomeroy on the other hand remained alert and continued to stand by for directions on when he would be able to leave with the colonists for their destination. However, by April 1863 his interest in the project began to wane. He wrote to the president, concerned about the

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<sup>25</sup> In other words, African-American freedom was too big of an issue to simply push away; see, *Western Sentinel* (Winston [i.e. Winston-Salem], N.C.), 03 Oct. 1862, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress.

<sup>26</sup> *Message of the President*, 904.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 906-907.



departure of the colonizing project. He stated, “I respectfully ask a discussion upon this important question: if the colony is to sail, this is the time for its departure. If it is not, I wish to leave for my home in the West.”<sup>28</sup> Clearly months of stagnation on the project had soured Pomeroy’s view on how long it would take. Or perhaps, more cynically, he had obtained all of the money that he could by exploiting the Department of the Interior and Thompson’s relationship, and was ready to return to Kansas. Either way, the Chiriquí colonization narrative ended quietly - in the United States. In Central America however, the Chiriquí colonization plan had unveiled the region’s most dire concerns and largest threats to the region; each of which can be broken down and considered for its danger to Central American sovereignty and regional cooperation.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ambrose W. Thompson Papers*, folder Sept. 1862-1863.

## Historiography

Lincoln's isthmian colonization suggestion was an intrusive plan on an already diverse and divided area of the world. Ralph Lee Woodward Jr. has argued that Central America is a region of mixed ethnicities and cultures, whose unification only occurs under the greatest stress or threat.<sup>29</sup> The Chiriquí colonization plan was one such threat. However, from a historian's perspective, the plan, which was hardly even put into action, seems insignificant. This thesis endeavors to understand why Central Americans felt the need to unite against this proposal, a rare occurrence in their normal interactions with each other. Namely, in what ways did the plan threaten each country's sovereignty? Additionally, this was one of the few times that Central Americans successfully resisted U.S. imperial and economic goals in the region. Did Black resettlement truly create such a hysteria in Central America as depicted in political documents, or is there more to these events hidden beyond English translation?

Before my work delves into these questions, previous interpretations will be examined. The previous scholarship on Lincoln's 1862 colonization plans has been overwhelmingly U.S.-centered approach to these. More often than not, the events of April 1862 to January 1863, and disorganized planning therein, are used to analyze Lincoln's approach to solving the freed slave 'issue'. When not used to understand Lincoln, these events are normally pushed aside as a very small footnote in the much more dramatic colonization attempts such as at the settlement at Île-à-Vache.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., *Central America, A Nation Divided*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press), 1999, p. ix.

<sup>30</sup> The African-American resettlement at Île-à-Vache, a satellite island of Haiti, ended in disaster and is more notable since it was a colonization attempt that actually occurred and failed.

The earliest of such works are several articles from the 1940's and 1950's. These three: Frederic Bancroft's "Schemes to Colonize Negroes in Central America" (1947); Warren Beck's "Lincoln and Negro Colonization in Central America" (1950); and Paul Schieps' "Lincoln and the Chiriquí Colonization Project" (1952); were the foundation for modern analysis of the topic. However, as obvious from their titles, all three of these articles focus on Lincoln and a very specific U.S. perspective.<sup>31</sup> Only a few other works focusing on Lincoln's colonization efforts were to follow these articles in the following decades.

The earliest of manuscript-length additions to the field was Benjamin Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro* (1962). Just like the articles, this book merely incorporates Lincoln and colonization into a broader narrative of Lincoln's constantly changing views on the interracial U.S.<sup>32</sup> Civil War expert James McPherson offered a slightly different viewpoint in a short article in 1965 where he observed how the African-American public responded to Lincoln's many colonization schemes.<sup>33</sup> Yet another article focused on Lincoln and the political machinations behind African-American colonization in Michael Vorenberg's, "Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization" (1993).<sup>34</sup>

Only a few mentions of colonization can be found in a variety of Lincoln-focused books through the early 2000's, which have mostly reused the same sources, with only a slight deviation from the standard argument. However, the most recent work on Lincoln and the

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<sup>31</sup> See Frederic Bancroft, "Schemes to Colonize Negroes in Central America," in *Frederic Bancroft, Historian*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke, 192-227. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957; and Warren A. Beck, "Lincoln and Negro Colonization in Central America," *The Abraham Lincoln Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (September 1950): 162-183; and finally, Paul Schieps, "Lincoln and the Chiriquí Colonization Project," *The Journal of Negro History* 37, no.4 (October 1952): 418-453.

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin Quarles, and Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniana (Mississippi State University. Libraries). *Lincoln and the Negro*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 1962.

<sup>33</sup> James M. McPherson, "Abolitionist and Negro Opposition to Colonization during the Civil War." *Phylon* (1960-) 26, no. 4 (1965): 391-99.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Vorenberg, "Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* vol. 14, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 22-45.

broader implications of his colonization plans, has been *Colonization After Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (2011), coauthored by Phillip Magness and Sebastian Page. While a somewhat short book, at around one-hundred and fifty pages, it is the most up-to-date analysis on Lincoln and colonization. The biggest breakthrough that it uses to stand out from the somewhat stagnant approach of the last sixty years is the introduction of British archival material as a primary source. Documents from British Honduras and British Guyana archives have illuminated a close relationship between U.S. and British efforts in the region.<sup>35</sup> In addition to this work, Sebastian Page is due to have another book on the topic, *Black Resettlement and the American Civil War*, out by spring of 2020, with an even more in depth approach and an even broader inclusion of British records into the narrative. His continued work in this topic even includes a 2011 article that laments the lack of a Latin American perspective, as well as a general ‘state of the field’ for this topic in particular.<sup>36</sup>

As Page suggests in his article, "Lincoln and Chiriquí Colonization Revisited," this U.S.-centric viewpoint leaves little consideration for the reactions of the Central American countries. Even works such as his that break away from the American-centered view, still use a colonizer's viewpoint, the British. This stagnant viewpoint is due to the heavily analyzed sources that all researchers on this topic approach. These are primarily the diplomatic communications of previously mentioned Ambassadors Antonio Irissari and Luis Molina - found in the Department of State's Record Group 59 in the National Archives. It is no wonder that the Central American viewpoint is of little interest when previous historians have only considered using the translated, diplomatic letters of two men to explain the reactions of tens of thousands of people.

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<sup>35</sup> Phillip Magness and Sebastian N. Page, *Colonization After Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press), 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Sebastian N. Page, "Lincoln and Chiriquí Colonization Revisited," *American Nineteenth Century History* 12, no. 3 (2011): 289-325.

Furthermore, the Central American reaction is normally downplayed in its significance. No doubt the U.S. had nothing to fear of a Central American reaction to colonization. However, to completely dismiss Central American response and opinion on the events due to their perceived insignificance is aggressively ethnocentric. That is the most significant omission of this historical narrative, refusal to understand, or attempt to understand, the reason as to why Central American countries reacted so sharply.

On the other half of the historiography, Central American history of this time period, focuses mostly on the filibusters of the previous decade, or of the consistent civil wars plaguing the region. These overwhelming more popular events have allowed little room to research how Central Americans reacted to and resisted Lincoln's colonization plans. That is of course not to say no work has been done from this direction. The first work to approach Lincoln colonization from a Central American perspective was Mary Chapman's "The Mission of Elisha O. Crosby to Guatemala, 1861-1864," (1955) in which she discussed Guatemala's initial reactions to U.S. policy in the 1850's, and its eventual stance on black colonization.<sup>37</sup> A follow up to that, but in the same Central American viewpoint, was Thomas Schoonover's 1980 publication, "Misconstrued Mission: Expansionism and Black Colonization in Mexico and Central America during the Civil War." This work did attempt to address the reactions of these countries to the proposed expansionist policies of 'El Norte'. However, perhaps due to availability of sources at the time, the article devotes only seven of its fifteen pages to Central America. Even in those chapters, the reader can quickly see an overreliance on the same National Archive sources as other authors, and only two newspapers.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Mary P. Chapman, "The Mission of Elisha O. Crosby to Guatemala, 1861-1864," *Pacific Historical Review* 24, no. 3 (1955): 275-86.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Schoonover, "Misconstrued Mission: Expansionism and Black Colonization in Mexico and Central America during the Civil War," *The Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 4 (1980): 607-620.

In my criticisms of these other authors, I feel confident in addressing the overreliance on the previously mentioned Record Group 59 and failure to properly analyze a Central American reaction due to my own previous work on the subject. My undergraduate publication from 2018, “Condemning Colonization: Abraham Lincoln’s Rejected Proposal for a Central American Colony,” exhibits some of the same weaknesses as other previous writers. Over-reliance on *Foreign Relations of the United States* (the U.S. government's published documentary history of foreign policy), Lincoln’s correspondence, and overwhelming English language materials are all problems that have plagued my previous work on the topic.<sup>39</sup> No doubt all of these sources are historically valid, and useful, but how can the viewpoint of the Central American people be provided through purely U.S. federal sources? Until now, Central America’s role in these events, and the broader context of the American Civil War, has been overlooked. In writing this thesis, the goal is to assess what the Chiriquí colonization attempt meant to Central Americans. Their role in this, and their ability to successfully push back against U.S. hegemony, deserves a deeper investigation. Namely, how their pushback against colonization reflects their struggle for sovereignty just a few decades after independence.

This brief historiography should suggest one obvious solution: a proper explanation of how and why Central Americans reacted to Lincoln’s colonization proposals. How did the Chiriquí colonization proposal fit into Central American history? What was so threatening about it that forced them to unite? The first step in doing so was to shift reliance away from Irissari and Molina’s interactions with the U.S. These papers are useful, and a strong backbone for the interactions between the U.S. and Central American in 1862, but they alone cannot explain these events completely. To expand on those communications, systematic research into Spanish

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<sup>39</sup> Matthew Harris, "Condemning Colonization: Abraham Lincoln’s Rejected Proposal for a Central American Colony," *The Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era*: Vol. 8, 2018.

language sources was done. Collections at Tulane such as the *Papers of Gerardo Barrios*, the president of El Salvador from 1861-1863 were used. Additional collections at Tulane such as their *Printed Ephemera of Central America* were used as well. There are also a broad range of document readers available that help explain Central American concerns about their sovereignty.

While it was impossible to construct a purely Central American perspective without leaving the U.S., this thesis should accurately reflect the ways that Central American viewed threats to their sovereignty and why. Where possible, this thesis has used Central American sources whether in English or Spanish, to fully explain why that region was so against the Chiriquí colonization suggestion of 1862. To that end, a new perspective on the threats that Central Americans faced in the mid-nineteenth century should be apparent by the end of this thesis. Unfortunately, the Central American perspective discussed here is from the perspective of elite Central Americans, or the governments' perspectives. The voice of racial minorities and the 'average' Central American are contributions that can hopefully be made in the future to further illuminate this series of events.

## A Note on Note on Racial, Ethnic, and Political Terms

This thesis obviously covers some very sensitive topics about race, ethnicity, and politics in Central America. Many disagreements have been started, and are ongoing, about the first two especially. Therefore, here is a quick breakdown about the use of certain words to denote groups of people in this text.

Firstly, indigenous peoples of Central America will be referred to as ‘Indians’. The term Indian was, and in some cases still is, used by Central Americans to deny them political recognition. It separates them from the rest of the population with a term, but does not confer the recognition of indigenous status, that they were in the Western Hemisphere first. Indians were a class of person largely created by the Spanish and is an important term in referring to them in the context of this thesis.<sup>40</sup>

Next, the term African-American will refer to any colonist, freedmen, or other person of origin from the United States. Black resettlement shall be used at times which also refers to those of U.S. origin with a more condensed title than “African-American colonizer”. The term in ‘Blacks’, primarily in chapter two, refers to those of African origin living in Latin America. The word is used to combine Afro-Latin Americans into one racial group, which is largely how Central Americans viewed them - although that background is much more complex and will be discussed.

Finally, the singular term ‘American’ will not be used here to identify a citizen or person from the United States, outside of African-American. As Eduardo Galeano pointedly described the modern use of American well. “For the world today, America is just the United States; the

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<sup>40</sup> Virginia Q Tilley, *Seeing Indians: A Study of Race, Nation, and Power in El Salvador* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), xvii



region we inhabit is a sub-America, a second-class America of nebulous identity.”<sup>41</sup> Almost every historical figure or group discussed in this thesis is an American. There are Native Americans, Afro-Latin-Americans, Central Americans, and many more Americans throughout the western hemisphere. To only allow these many groups only the secondary title of ‘American’, after centuries of struggle for recognition by all of them would be a disservice of the highest degree. Refusing to use the term American for those from the U.S. is a small effort to help end the cycle of missing identity that the U.S. has inflicted on the Latin Americans discussed here, among others.

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<sup>41</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, (New York: Monthly Review Press), 1997, p. 2.

## Chapter I

### **Anglo-Aggressors: Mid-Nineteenth Century U.S. and British Desires for Central America**

From the foreign correspondence surrounding the proposed Chiriquí plan, it is clear that Central Americans were not interested in the idea for long. The Secretary of Foreign Relations for Nicaragua, Pedro Zeledon, upon hearing about Abraham Lincoln's colonization plan, stated that immigrants could not live there "under the special protection of another nation."<sup>42</sup> Antonio Irisarri, the ambassador for Salvador and Guatemala also said, "in those two republics [the two he represents] no kind of colonization of foreigners, whether white, black, or other color, is allowed without a special permission from the respective governments."<sup>43</sup> Both of these diplomats reflect a joint concern about the United States attempting to colonize the region without their permission and even militarily backing colonists.

Their statements hint at the largest, most tangible threat to Central Americans' sovereignty in the 1850's and 1860's, a phenomenon that this thesis labels as Anglo-aggressors. The two main manifestations of Anglo-aggression were the United States and Great Britain. The two countries were white-governed nations capable of taking what they wanted from nearly any Latin American country at the time. However, especially during the mid-nineteenth century, the U.S. and Great Britain both sought footholds in Central America. The term aggressor is fitting, because whether it was through physical, economical, or even conspiracy to attack, these countries and their agents sought to seize some aspect of Central American sovereignty.

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<sup>42</sup> Message of the President of the United States to the Two Houses of Congress at the Commencement of the Third Session of the Thirty-Seventh Congress (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1862), 895.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 883.

The region was highly sought after for its ideal location as a shortcut from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. As early as the 1840's it was realized that a Nicaraguan or Panamanian canal would subvert the harrowing journey around South America's Cape Horn into a trip half as long. Centuries of travel had proved that journey one of the most dangerous in the world. Essentially, the country that controlled isthmian transit, would control transportation in the western hemisphere. The U.S. especially had a stake in Central American isthmus as it provided a much quicker route for travelers from the eastern seaboard to the west, years before completion of the transnational railroad.

By 1862, and Lincoln's resettlement proposal, attitudes toward the U.S. and Britain was at an all-time low for the time period. These were not necessarily hysteria-fueled, xenophobic attitudes either. The threat was all too real to Central American countries. Their size and populations were fractions of the two growing, imperial giants. In the civil wars that split the region from 1826-1842, armies generally did not surpass a few thousand troops. Two different armies, the first numbering 2,000 and the second numbering 1,400, were able to capture one of the largest cities of the region, Guatemala City, in 1839 and 1842.<sup>44</sup> Less than a decade later, in its war against Mexico, the U.S. had over 42,500 regular soldiers, and 73,000 volunteers. General Winfield Scott's own army numbered over 10,000 men when they began their invasion of the Valley of Mexico and ultimately took Mexico City.<sup>45</sup> By sheer numbers, if the U.S. or Britain desired, they could easily overwhelm Central Americans with military force. Of course, factors like disease, political instability, and guerilla warfare could greatly drag out such a

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<sup>44</sup> Michael Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts : A Statistical Encyclopedia of Casualty and Other Figures, 1494-2000*, Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008, p. 322.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

fictional invasion - but looking at just statistics, Anglo-aggressors had the greater armies and economies to support them.

Although the U.S. was much closer to the region, actual physical occupation of land began with the British, however. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Britain already held a significant number of Caribbean territories. The already rich empire wished to extend those holdings westward to the isthmus. British ambitions in Central America began innocently enough, massive loans to the Federation of Central America when it declared its independence in 1824. The British influence and recognition that came with the loans angered Spain, but British-Spanish relations had not been cordial for centuries. Britain was both interested in a possible isthmian canal project, as well as a desire to create more naval footholds in the region where it held so many Caribbean islands. During the following decades though, the British attempted to ensure that Central America stayed unstable and easier to manipulate. This primarily occurred through the funding of rogue factions in Guatemala and Costa Rica, the funding of which helped fuel regional tensions and ultimately dissolution. This manipulation began to strain the relationship between Britain and the newly splintered Central American countries.<sup>46</sup>

Following the fracture of the federation, Britain aimed for the most vulnerable target to establish a foothold in. The easiest they found to take advantage of was Nicaragua and the Mosquito Coast that it shared with two other nations, Honduras and Costa Rica. The area was inhabited by racial minorities who the state had little governing power over. Covered in detail later in this thesis, the ethnic and racial groups of most Central American countries were deeply divided. Central American Indians and Black Hispanics were particularly difficult for centralized governments to control. This was because Indian groups stayed far away from major

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<sup>46</sup> Lester Langley, *America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere*, Second ed., The United States and the Americas, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010, p. 57

metropolitan areas, and both groups inhabited areas that most Hispanics did not view as tenatable. The Mosquito Coast was the perfect example of such an inhospitable area. It was a long stretch of swampy, eastern coastline that bordered the Caribbean Sea in Nicaragua, Honduras, and Costa Rica.

The Mosquito tribe was a blended racial group of Central American Indians and escaped or freed Afro-Latin-Americans.<sup>47</sup> The ancestors of these inhabitants had been enslaved escapees from Britain's Caribbean territories, or later, willing migrants from those same destinations once slavery was abolished. Few other settlers seemed interested in the region. It was a swampy lowland filled with the area's namesake, mosquitoes, and a virile collection of deadly diseases such as yellow fever and malaria. Mosquitos and disease were not yet connected in the mid-nineteenth century so the land itself was deemed toxic to whites, but habitable by 'tropical' races, which was obviously wrong. The Mosquito Coast was also very disputed on who held autonomy over it, any three of the Central American countries, or the Mosquito 'tribe' itself. This is where Britain stepped in to take advantage of the destabilization.

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<sup>47</sup> The Mosquitos, also referred to as the Miskitos, were a mixed-race people of British, African, and Indian blood. Shipwrecked slaves centuries before intermingled with Spanish-resisting Indians. British settlements and contact slowly incorporated that culture and group into the tribe as well. By the mid-nineteenth century, the unique combination could not identify with the governing Nicaraguan population at all. Therefore, it was quite easy for them to side with British agents who were slightly more culturally similar and more racially accepting. For more on this fascinating sub-nation on the eastern shore of Nicaragua consider; Baron L. Pineda, "Nicaragua's Two Coasts." In *Shipwrecked Identities: Navigating Race on Nicaragua's Mosquito Coast*, 34, New Brunswick, New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2006.



The British signed a deed for a portion of the Mosquito Coast (highlighted in red) at the very southeastern tip of Nicaragua, right where the Rio San Juan (San Juan River) enters the Caribbean Sea. Courtesy of Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection at University of Texas.

As early as 1844, Britain began negotiating with the Mosquitos for land grants and treaties. The Mosquitos were eager to cooperate with Britain. The two groups had a long, friendly correspondence, were culturally agreeable, and most importantly, the empire offered them self-rule, something that no Central American country was willing to do. What first began as small land grants in a region that Nicaragua could not be bothered to control, evolved into a much more aggressive strategy. In 1848, a mixed army of British and Mosquito troops attacked the port of San Juan and Anglified it with the name Greytown. The invaders were quickly driven off, but days later a pair of British warships and reinforcements forced Nicaragua to give up the town. When panic began to surge throughout the region and the U.S. with worry of further

British invasions, the British distanced themselves. The Mosquitos were given credit for the endeavor and allowed to rule over the area until a year later.<sup>48</sup>

The deed granting the captured area to the British the following year, 1849, reveals the respect and care that Britain took in its negotiations with the Mosquitos. In their agreements with the Mosquito King, George Augustus Frederick, the British agreed to grant the group autonomy, official recognition, and monetary support for port and coastal access to the Greytown portion of the kingdom. Throughout the wording of the treaty they consistently refer to the king by his title, his land as a kingdom, and overall showing him the utmost respect. To lavish Frederick with such royal words and recognition as a leader who had been repeatedly refused recognition by his peers explains a great deal as to why he so eagerly made an agreement with the British.<sup>49</sup> Using minimal violence, the British had established a new foothold, strengthened their alliance to the region's underdog, and received virtually no repercussions. The Nicaraguans feared the British threat to their sovereignty but had little choice to relinquish control of the area to the Mosquitos, and in turn the British. They already had been unable to control their eastern seaboard, beginning in 1849, the British ensured the region was completely out of Nicaraguan control.

The newly empowered, mixed-race Mosquitos, backed by a foreign power, probably explain the 1862 reaction of Nicaragua to Lincoln's proposed colonization. Nicaraguans thought that Blacks and Indians created "the worst cross-breed that society can be infested with."<sup>50</sup> Or, as Secretary of Foreign Relations, Pedro Zeledon, for Nicaragua put it, the country would worsen due to the "degradation of that race." He also mentioned that it was unacceptable for immigrants

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>49</sup> The deed the British and Mosquito King signed begins with "Know all present that..."; see, Mosquito Treaty and Deed, 1859. *Central American and Carib Misc. Mss, Mosquito documents, Deed, 1859*, Box 1, Folder 8a, Latin American Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 896.

to act “under the special protection of another nation.”<sup>51</sup> To Nicaragua, the entire Lincoln proposal of 1862 had already happened in 1849-1850, and the outcome had been very unfavorable for the country’s central government. From their view, a settlement of Black settlers from the U.S. would evolve into another Mosquito-British disaster.

The U.S., at the same time as Britain worked with Mosquito, went on an aggressive negotiating spree under their Central American diplomat George Ephraim Squier in 1848. He laid the groundwork for transit companies in Nicaragua with a very pro-U.S. treaty that hoped to counter Britain, and in Honduras, he negotiated the purchase of Tigre Island, just off that nation’s coast. With a port in hand, the U.S. seemed ready to begin its own expansion into Central America, and with open arms receiving them. The British however, forcefully took Tigre Island before the U.S. could celebrate. Aggression had outmaneuvered patience, a factor in Central American domination that the U.S. would pick up on very quickly.

By 1850, the U.S. more aggressively followed the British in their own attempt to usurp Central American authority, but this time economically. Regional instability, U.S. desire for transport through the isthmus, and the California gold rush fueled a massive effort by both the government and independent companies to stake their claim by the 1850’s. Many Central Americans, especially those in Nicaragua, saw the financial intervention of the U.S. as a way to resist and usurp Britain's physical presence in the region. Playing one Anglo-aggressor off against the other would become a strategy for Latin Americans for the rest of the century. This hope quickly evaporated after the U.S. and Britain secretly worked out a plan to jointly protect and fund the transit routes that were just taking root in Nicaragua. The culmination of their discussions, the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, also stated that neither nation would “occupy, or fortify,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



or colonize... any part of Central America.”<sup>52</sup> This sentence was one which neither party actually intended on obeying though. Instead of coming to blows over who would control Nicaragua, both nations realized it was much easier to just work together and reap equal benefits. Much to the chagrin of the Nicaraguans they were not recognized as a beneficiary in the treaty, and the two Anglo-aggressors grew wealthier at their host’s expense.

Different companies each pushed their own agendas and in different countries. The largest transit company, for example, was run by U.S. transport mogul Cornelius Vanderbilt. He obtained an exclusive over-land transit agreement with the government of Nicaragua. His series of trains and steamboats was planned to be replaced by a permanent canal that connected the oceans via Lake Nicaragua. A plan that never fully developed and was later replaced completely by the Panama Canal. Other transport companies established contracts in Costa Rica and Panama (the latter was then a province of Colombia). For the most part however, price wars with Vanderbilt and the further distance of these countries made them much less successful. The most common Panamanian route for example was six hundred miles further south than the Nicaraguan crossing, and Vanderbilt’s initial ticketing was fifty-percent less than that route.<sup>53</sup>

This regional monopoly on transit by Vanderbilt caused significant issues for Nicaragua and the surrounding area. Over and over construction of the canal was pushed off, as profits for standard transit were never nearly as high as he had foreseen. The U.S. representative in Managua also kept signing addendums to the U.S. treaty, ensuring that both mail and transport

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<sup>52</sup> Right after working out a deal with Nicaragua for exclusivity rights, the U.S. nearly cut off communication with Britain over it. Then, in a surprise turn, Britain eagerly joined the U.S. in planning and offering to protect the canal and oversee regional disputes. Ultimately, it doubled the problem of outside influence in Nicaragua rather than correct it; see, Stephen Dando-Collins, *Tycoon's War : How Cornelius Vanderbilt Invaded a Country to Overthrow America's Most Famous Military Adventurer*, Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2008, p. 12-14.

<sup>53</sup> Vanderbilt’s opening price for a ticket was \$300, as compared to the average Panamanian transit cost of \$600, *Ibid.*, p. 7.

were left solely in Vanderbilt's clutches.<sup>54</sup> Royalties appeared slowly, and U.S. migrants through the region acted terribly towards the populace. They would refuse to pay for services, disrespect citizens, and cause chaos in once peaceful towns and villages. Overall, the treaty with the U.S. stifled Nicaraguan economic growth for over a decade and caused a tremendous amount of angst against transient U.S. citizens who were viewed as disgusting and rude. Eventually, Vanderbilt's Accessory Transit Company began to bleed value, and he abandoned that investment in favor of one in Panama. Nicaragua had sacrificed years of development for little money, little gratitude, and an apprehension for further dealings with the U.S.

More distaste for the U.S. came in the wake of the 'grey-eyed man of destiny', William Walker. While the U.S. and Britain had only manipulated Nicaraguan groups for economic monopolies or small land concessions, a far more aggressive, independent invader arrived from the U.S. Direct conquest in the region had been historically done through manipulation of a country's minorities, and this case was no different. William Walker, a U.S. filibuster, accepted an invitation from a small group of liberals in that country. Already Walker had taken volunteers and pronounced himself president of two failed nations, one on the Baja Peninsula, the other in the Sonoran Desert. The armies of the time often numbered in the hundreds, and he, with a few dozen other U.S. filibusters, helped the local liberals to rout the conservatives and seize control of Managua. Quickly, he used exorbitant promises and developed connections with those who had invited him to manipulate the government to his will.

By July 1856, he was the president of Nicaragua. At his inauguration supper on the night of his victorious election, Walker and his followers made several toasts. Among them: somber reflections on the filibusters who had failed early that decade in Cuba, a promise to capture

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 12-13.

Cuba, and further, to wrest control of Christopher Columbus' ashes in the name of America.<sup>55</sup> This series of toasts at the inauguration showed that Walker and his cohorts were far from content with his recent victory. They were already planning and dreaming of their next conquest. Next was Cuba, and if following the ideals of many expansionists back home, there would be another island or nation after that. This was a cycle that would repeat until all of the Western Hemisphere had been claimed by the U.S. or its descendants - a future that the most radical acolytes of Manifest Destiny wished for.

The U.S., in the wake of Walker's triumph, appeared ever more dastardly to Nicaraguans, and Central Americans as a whole. The U.S. had failed to dissuade filibusters of their independent version of Manifest Destiny and throughout the 1850's countries surrounding the U.S. had been assaulted by the filibuster movement. To the south, Cuba and Mexico were the largest targets, but even countries as far away as Ireland had been the target of filibuster conspiracy. Walker however had succeeded in conquering a whole country, one bigger than some U.S. states. Some U.S. leaders changed their policies on filibustering after Walker's success. For example, in reaction to Walker's rise to office, U.S. President Franklin Pierce shortly legitimized and gave public recognition to the U.S. filibuster turned Central American dictator. Instead of condemning the actions of an aggressive, war-hawk citizen, the U.S. had congratulated it. The statement was quickly walked back after realization of the impact that government support of seizing foreign countries could have on U.S. society and its foreign relations. After Pierce rescinded his encouragement, Walker condemned Pierce for his lack of expansionist zeal, weak support of slavery, and failure to properly address the abolitionists in the

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<sup>55</sup> Columbus' ashes were in Cuba. In other words, filibusters would take control of the entire Caribbean; see, *Nashville Union and American*. (Nashville, Tenn.), 16 Aug. 1856, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress.

U.S. in his public writings.<sup>56</sup> To Walker, southern Democrats, and those that supported them, Walker's actions were the kind that would lead to a revitalization of slavery and regional hegemony by the U.S.

In his role as president over the next year, Walker upended the balance of power in the country and sought to break down both traditional and progressive aspects of Central American society. As a Protestant, he sought to strip power from the Catholic Church in the region. This was not radical for a liberal leader of Central America to attempt; however he went too far in the eyes of many when he promoted physical violence against the clergy. This was both a physical and spiritual assault on the large majority of Nicaraguans who strictly followed the Catholic faith.

Then, in an attack on the Liberal ideas Walker was called in and empowered to promote, he also suggested reinstating slavery in Nicaragua, which had been outlawed since its secession from Spain thirty years earlier. He wrote later what his motivation for reimplementing slavery was. He stated, "If free labor prevails in its effort to banish slave labor from the continent, the history of American society becomes a faint reflex of European systems and prejudices..." In other words, if slavery was not solidified in the Western Hemisphere, that entire half of the globe was to degrade into a shoddy European duplicate.<sup>57</sup>

His pro-slavery background from the southern U.S. and conflicting ideology with the locals quickly labelled him as a threat to the other Central American powers. This threat, one that threatened Nicaraguan tradition, future, and sovereignty was seen as a threat that could leak into other countries - Liberal or Conservative, if not controlled. The series of events also seemed to

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<sup>56</sup> A book of his own writings was originally published by Walker after his time in Nicaragua, and before his death in Honduras. So, although it is biased towards his own views, it does effectively illuminate his racial viewpoints; see, William Walker, *The War in Nicaragua* (Detroit: B. Ethridge-Books, 1972), 274-275.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

be escalating into a situation not unlike the slow takeover of Texas by U.S. colonists decades earlier. If not controlled, the situation could have spiraled out of control into a seemingly endless stream of filibusters with U.S. support, and eventually forced annexation. So, in 1857 the four other countries surrounding Nicaragua worked together and were able to force Walker's retreat back to the U.S. The local nations even had cooperation from two other interlopers in the region, Vanderbilt and the British. Both provided material support and resources to ensure that the status quo that they had profited from for so many years was restored. At the last moment, President James Buchanan of the U.S. helped evacuate Walker back to his home country. Yet another blow to the respect that Central Americans had once felt for the U.S. For his part, Walker persisted in his filibustering for, as he promised at his Nicaraguan inauguration, there was much more to conquer. His follow-up invasions returned him to Mexico and then to Honduras, the latter of which was able to catch and execute him in 1860, once again with Britain's help.<sup>58</sup>

Walker had been a man of action. By all accounts he was extremely charismatic, intelligent, and driven. He was perhaps the only U.S. expansionist at the time with the zeal and ability to actually succeed, even for the short time that he did. However, outside of Walker's extraordinary personality, there were a litany of lesser figures and background actors that also desired hemispheric conquest. Perhaps less driven and memorable, there were no doubt thousands of other U.S. expansionists who supported and acted on their version of Manifest Destiny.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Walker ambushed a port city and took it. Before long, a British captain came to his aid. The captain offered him safe passage back to the U.S. if he surrendered peacefully. Instead, the captain turned Walker over to the Hondurans who ensured his filibustering days ended once and for all with a noose; see, Michel Gobat, *Empire by Invitation: William Walker and Manifest Destiny in Central America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018),

<sup>59</sup> For a deeper breakdown of filibustering and U.S. support of it consider this book (among many others by the same author on the same topic); Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

The most notable of these groups was the Knights of the Golden Circle. This group existed both before and during the U.S. Civil War. It included radical members such as John Wilkes Booth, who later assassinated Lincoln. The group's goal was to wrest control of the entire Caribbean, most of Mexico, and the upper portion of South America. In doing so, they would create a slaveholding empire centered around the Gulf of Mexico and comprising more than fifty states. Aside from its lofty goal and fraternal jargon, the group boasted impressive numbers. It supposedly had over seven-thousand ground troops, soldiers who would do the actual invasions and conquests in 1859. Not to mention a few thousand logistics and secretarial roles, and a few hundred officer positions.<sup>60</sup> This meant that if properly mobilized, as expressed previously, those several thousand troops could do significant damage to Central American countries who just could not field equivalent numbers of armed men.

However, for all of their ambitions, meetings, and funding, the group did not contribute in a physical sense to the history of filibustering. For all of its glitz and frills as a secret society, it could not properly mobilize. One planned invasion began in Baltimore in the spring of 1860. A New Orleans paper claimed that, "a branch of the Knights of the Golden Circle, consisting of nearly 1000 young men from respectable families, are being drilled for the purpose of invading Mexico."<sup>61</sup> By November, the troops had arrived in west Texas and the invasion was days away. Then, instead of leaving, they slowly disbanded and returned to their homes - apparently not convinced of their goal. The note ends with a warning on how young men "should be cautious how they enter upon quixotic and desperate expeditions of this kind."<sup>62</sup> The language used by

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<sup>60</sup> David Keehn, *Knights of the Golden Circle: Secret Empire, Southern Secession, Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> *New Orleans Daily Crescent*. ([New Orleans, La.]), 30 March 1860. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress.

<sup>62</sup> *Lewistown Gazette*, (Lewistown, Pa.), 01 Nov. 1860, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress.

these newspapers is also telling of the regional divide on filibustering. The southern New Orleans paper makes note of how these young men are respectable, while the northern Lewistown paper hints that these young men are foolish.

The horrifying part is that probably with a more charismatic and ambitious leader like Walker a group like this could have successfully mobilized. The group simply lacked the driving personality that had made other filibusters somewhat successful. According to one anonymous member in 1861, the group had turned from invading, political kidnapping, and other terrorist activities to more defensive ones. This mostly involved building up defenses and fortifications for the impending civil war, the result of which would finally stop the North from its goal to “degrade and oppress the South.”<sup>63</sup>

Contributing to filibusters and secret societies alike were the Southern ‘fire eaters’. These were state and politicians, as well as other unaccountable individuals, who fueled the ideology and ambitions of groups like the Knights.<sup>64</sup> These were slavery owning extremists with significant amounts of notoriety and recognition. They were not part of a secret weekend club for men like the Order of the Golden Circle. Their voices were public, if not international. The ‘fire-eaters’ that spoke in Congress and to their constituents could be taken at face for the goals that they, and those around them, supported. One such senator, Albert G. Brown, from Mississippi, had said in a public speech, “I want Cuba; I want Tamaulipas, Potosi [sic]... for the planting and spreading of slavery. And a footing in Central America will powerfully aid us in acquiring those

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<sup>63</sup> The author of this expose on the Order of the Golden Circle remained anonymous in his publication on the group; see, *An Authentic Exposition of the "K.G.C." "Knights of the Golden Circle;" or, A History of Secession from 1834 to 1861* (Indianapolis: C.O. Perrine, 1861), p.12.

<sup>64</sup> Men such as Edmund Ruffin were aggressive supporters of slavery, annexation, and secession but did not have political constituents and therefore no obligations whatsoever to withhold their radical ideas.

other states... I would spread the blessing of slavery... to the uttermost ends of the earth...”<sup>65</sup>

This is a discussion in the first session of the 36th Congress. There was hardly a more overt way of telling Central Americans that their region was wanted by the U.S. However, Republicans and some abolitionists also sought to use Central America to solve race conflict in the U.S.

In the same session of Congress bipartisan support to use Central America appeared. While southern Democrats were trying to take Central America to create more slave states, Republican senators attempted to work out a plan for resettling African-Americans in that region. Senator James Rood Doolittle of Wisconsin argued for the removal of all four million slaves from the country. Unlike the Democratic slave holders, he disagreed with the methods of people like Walker, or the Knights of the Golden Circle. The process could not be forceful, instead, a “friendly hand” had to be extended to Central Americans to convince them to accept up to four million freed slaves. He even states that the task would be easy. He suggests that the concept of race is of little importance to regions of the world such as Central America. A fallacy that was incredibly wrong, but that will be covered in the next section.<sup>66</sup>

The most alarming aspect of Doolittle’s racist, impossible plan, was that representatives in the North *also* wanted to use Central America. According to his plan, U.S.-backed, Black migrants would flood the tropical countries of Central America to enjoy equality and economic stability. Now consider the Central American point of view: migrants with completely different religions, cultures, and languages that move into their land peacefully. Even if willing, the

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<sup>65</sup> As seen in his wording, Senator Brown wanted to reinstate slavery in a variety of places. He mentions Cuba, Tamaulipas, and Potosi (in this case a state of Mexico, not the Bolivian capital), along with a vague “two or three more states.” Most obvious, he mentions Central America as the perfect foothold to begin this massive conquest, probably thinking of a north and south invasion to completely engulf Mexico; see, *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong. 1st Session, vol. 1, p.571.

<sup>66</sup> As mentioned in the next chapter, race was even more complicated in Central America than it was in the U.S. There were a variety of racial blends and ethnic groups, but all of them had been structured by the Spanish to have a caste system with Blacks and Indians at the bottom, more on that in the next chapter; see, *Ibid.*, vol 2, p. 1632.



natives and migrants are so diametrically opposed in every aspect that only one thing could happen, and it had happened before. This is the same scenario that took place in the 1835-1836 Texas secession from Mexico. Migrants moved in peacefully to take advantage of cheap land but found themselves at opposition with the Mexican way of life due to their U.S. background. The same would have happened with black migrants. U.S. politicians may not have meant to implement a takeover such as this on purpose, but some Central Americans view it as such. It was seen as a delayed invasion, where a completely different group is so disenfranchised by their new home that they shape it to something familiar by force. This is especially true, since the more passive abolitionists and later Lincoln suggested that resettled slaves be given U.S. support and funding for their endeavors.

This type of ‘invasion’ akin to the Texas-Mexican conflict was something that Central American politicians like Antonio de Irisarri eyed warily. Irisarri was strongly opposed to U.S. settlement in Central America. He especially worried about U.S. expansion, no matter the source, taking over his beloved country of Guatemala. He looked to the history of the U.S., their citizens settling Mexico, then forcing a mass annexation of Texas, as a warning to his own region. If not controlled, the settlers, investors, and businessmen visiting Nicaragua and the other growing attractions of Central America would soon overwhelm them. In fact, when the U.S. Civil War broke out, Irisarri was glad that the quickly growing nation had been splintered. He even cheered for the Confederacy for the rest of his time serving as ambassador, hoping the split would permanently cripple “El Norte”.<sup>67</sup> He was not alone, the more that the U.S. and Central America

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<sup>67</sup> Irisarri lived in Brooklyn for over a decade as his time as ambassador and until his death. This proves the fact that he lived in the North and obviously liked it there. What he did not like however, was the expansionist tendencies that the U.S. clearly had, and which he had a ‘front row seat’ to due to his living situation; see, Mary Chapman "The Mission of Elisha O. Crosby to Guatemala, 1861-1864," *Pacific Historical Review* 24, no. 3 (1955): 279.

actually interacted, the more the latter realized that the U.S. was not a kind, parental figure, but rather a threat ready to consume them entirely.

The U.S. ambassadors to the region were much better at disguising their urges for conquest than economic giants, militant filibusters, and blood-thirsty Congressmen. Two ambassadors to Central America had completely different ideas about how Central Americans should play a role in the future of the U.S. The first, Ephraim Squier, had fallen in love with Central American history and wrote extensively on the anthropology and ethnography of the region when he returned in the late 1850's.<sup>68</sup> When he heard about U.S. expansion efforts into the region, he wrote in a scrapped draft that the U.S. should focus on settling the Mississippi valley and the rest of the Midwest, which had hardly been colonized. He questioned why the U.S. needed to devour more territory when it had done little to consolidate its gains from the last sixty years.<sup>69</sup>

However, while in service to the State Department, he never flinched to try and gain extra concessions for the U.S. He was cordial and professional with what other ambassadors had considered a diseased, useless land. Many Central American diplomats before him had resigned or died during their service in Central America. Squier on the other hand respected the people and the land as is evident through his anthropological writings. His idea of using Central America was much more similar to Britain, who he consistently tried to outmaneuver in the region. The U.S. should have small land agreements and outposts to facilitate military movements and trade, but no overarching empire that involved overseeing the host nations.

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<sup>68</sup> Squier had many interesting ideas on the formation and structure of American civilization before the Europeans. Most of it has been modernly debunked, but his genuine interest and less racist coverage of the region stands out against other contemporary figures. A collection of his professional, anthropological papers can be found in; *Papers of Ephraim Squier*, Microfilm, series 4, vol. 10, Reel 13, Library of Congress.

<sup>69</sup> Manuscripts and Notes on Manifest Destiny, undated, *Squier Papers*, Box 2, Folder 6, Latin American Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans.

Another U.S. ambassador, Elisha Crosby, the diplomat to Guatemala from 1861-1863, thought very highly of the Central Americans, especially Guatemalans. He believed he had gained a lot of confidence from the popular Raphael Carrera and the other Guatemalan leaders. When he learned of the black colonization plan in 1862, he worked eagerly to convince that country to accept the settlers. He was sure that the African-American immigration to the country would strengthen the bond of friendship and bring a large source of smart, strong laborers to the country. He had his doubts about how civilized and progressive the country of largely indigenous people could become without U.S. help. In his case, he genuinely seemed to want to help Guatemala through colonization, not seeming to consider a takeover or power struggle. Although not looking to force U.S. civilization onto Central Americans his ideas on them and African-Americans in general were still very racist. He was eventually turned down however, and realized that he did not have as much clout with Carrera as he previously thought. His thoughts on freed slaves civilizing Indians in Guatemala also meant he had a plan on how to shape the future of Central America.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, although this chapter is titled with reference to white, “Anglo-aggressors”, non-whites in the U.S. also sought U.S. expansion into Central America for their own benefit. The most notable African-American to support U.S. annexation of the region was Martin Delaney. His publications on annexation show his obvious support for a plan similar to Lincoln’s but years earlier. His writing also revealed his personal feelings on why African-Americans should colonize. In one speech from 1854 Delaney echoed the sentiments of his contemporary science, that whites in Central and South America were intolerant, that they were diminishing due to the environment. His suggestion then, is to “repeople” the central and southern continents with

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<sup>70</sup> Chapman, “The Mission of Elisha O. Crosby,” 277-278.

Blacks. He stated, “the white race could never successfully occupy the southern portion of the continent; they must... be repelled from another quarter of the globe.”<sup>71</sup>

Delaney was not an Anglo-aggressor, but he *did* subscribe to the theories of Anglo-aggressors. He strongly believed that Blacks lived better and were more tolerant to tropical conditions, therefore Blacks from the U.S. should colonize southward. Not only did he believe that racist concept, but he also agreed with other resettlement backers that Central America would gladly accept freedmen into their countries. The ideas of Anglo-aggressors had permeated his thought, and while not championing slavery or forced removal, he did intend on utilizing those areas for Black settlement. However, instead of seeing Central and South America as a place to simply move African-Americans, he saw it as a place where they could create their own empire of freedom due to their adaptability to the region. The example of Delaney proves that Anglo-aggressor ideology not only went across political party lines, but also across racial ones.

Anglo-aggressors manifested themselves in many ways. The ideas and movement of Anglo-aggressors were transnational, transpolitical, and transracial. What they all had in common was a desire to utilize Central America for their own purposes, with a blatant disregard or ignorance of how the Central American countries felt. To this end, Anglo-aggressors sought to usurp Central American authority. Domination could take place through economical means, military invasions, the support of splinter groups, and there was a vast amount of ideological debate on which action was best. However, all of these methods prove one thing, that the U.S. knew that it needed Central America under its thumb, for one reason or another. Few in the U.S.

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<sup>71</sup> Although Delaney was a brilliant man and a hero to many free African-Americans, he was nonetheless just as deluded about ‘racial science’ as many of his white contemporaries. Ideas such as Blacks being more tolerant to rainforests and jungles were falsehoods created to justify movements like Black resettlement. However, different from whites, Delaney saw his race’s ‘ability’ to withstand the tropics as a weapon in which Blacks could forge their own nation; see, Martin Delaney, *Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent*. August 24, 1854, *Manifest Destiny and American Territorial Expansion: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Amy Greenburg (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, Macmillan Learning, 2018), p. 138.

could picture a way in which Central American manipulation would not help them. It was the key to forging a slaveholding empire, it was the solution to how freed Blacks could be abandoned so lukewarm-abolitionists could feel better about themselves, and it was the small strip of land separating the two halves of the growing North American colossus.

To Britain, the region was another foothold in the Western Hemisphere. It was a collage of splintered factions all of whom could be taken advantage of. A variety of forts, ports, and holdings that would strengthen their military presence in the region and ensure their continued economic domination of the world. By 1862, Central Americans saw both the U.S. and Britain as a threat. This was for good reason, as it was a fact. For one purpose or another, Anglo-aggressors saw Central America as the next piece of their own burgeoning empires. For each Central American nation to fear such a seemingly small proposal, like Lincoln's proposed black resettlement, is very understandable. The entire region was under siege, and without cooperation from its neighbors, a single country could easily be swallowed by the variety of predatory figures eyeing the region.

## Chapter II: Race and Ethnicity as Threats to Stability

Anglo-aggressors were an outside threat, a looming menace that forced Central Americans to keep a close eye on their borders and delicately negotiate every aspect of their foreign policy. However, most Central Americans saw an equally grave threat all around them. This threat was one that could collapse in on the centralized governments of the five countries at any time, the threat of non-whites.

In their rejection of Abraham Lincoln's colonization scheme, several countries hinted at this concern. Honduras only wanted “industrious *whites*” like the “*German* immigrants... in Costa Rica.” The option to settle freed slaves was “not at all desirable” to Hondurans.<sup>72</sup> Andrew B. Dickinson, the United States ambassador to Nicaragua, relayed that nation's response stating that Nicaragua saw it as the “greatest degradation for the country to be overrun with blacks.”<sup>73</sup> His discussions with the Nicaraguan government had shown that in the public mindset of that country “negroes... are worthless, idle, thieving vagabonds,” and was told that if they were allowed to intermingle with Indians would give birth to “the worst cross-breed that society can be infested with.”<sup>74</sup>

These quotes display that the second largest threat to Central American countries' sovereignty was, as they would have labelled it, ‘inferior’ racial groups. To be precise, Indians and Blacks. As mentioned earlier in the Anglo-aggressors chapter, these two racial groups were seen as unruly, dysfunctional members of society who served little purpose to the state. Central

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<sup>72</sup> *Message of the President*, 891.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 893-894.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 896

American elites were paranoid by the possibility of a racial uprising, whether it be violent or political. Even outsiders, such as Dickinson in his intercommunications with other regional diplomats posed a query, “the great disturbing question of this country [Nicaragua] is, which of these races shall maintain the political supremacy?”<sup>75</sup> Even outsiders had noticed the racial tensions that seemed to threaten stability in the region. To fully understand the delicate balance of race in Latin American a short history of race in the region, beginning with Spanish settlement, is needed to understand the mid-nineteenth century struggle of Indians and Blacks against central authority.

Spain, and its neighbor Portugal, began their conquest of Africa and the Americas at the end of the fifteenth century. This expansion introduced the Iberian Peninsula to slavery from Africa and the Middle East. Both countries were more than happy to adopt the practice and radicalize it to an extreme extent within a hundred years. At the same time, Christopher Columbus was the first to make contact with the indigenous peoples of the Americas. With the cultural practices of the day, he quickly enslaved several of the Indians of Hispaniola and continued on his expeditions, but he had set an unfortunate precedent by enslaving Indians.

By 1521, the Spanish were no longer just exploring Central America, Hernando Cortez had conquered the center of it. Using factional differences to his advantage, Cortez launched a rebellion-conquest of the Aztec empire and toppled it. Instating himself as the leader of the redesigned empire, he was the first Spaniard to introduce slavery to the New World on such a vast level. He and his fellow conquistadors were granted vast tracts of land by the crown, and with that land, laborers to produce value from it. Both the indigenous allies and the defeated Aztecs were subject to becoming part of a Spaniard’s *encomienda*, or group of royally granted

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 894.

workers (essentially slaves). Indians who refused to cooperate, or were even suspected of not complying, were in risk of being purged by the more bloodthirsty conquistadors.<sup>76</sup> The sixteenth century continued on, with Spaniards repeatedly wrangling more and more Indians out of the mountains to work for them. Those that were able to fight back heroically and died, while others barricaded themselves in the most remote areas of Central America. All the while these indigenous peoples died horrendous deaths from foreign diseases in their secluded villages, exhaustive labor in industry, or from rebellions against their recent conquerors.

Those that did not die were still seen as a thorn in the side of centralized government. One document from 1773 reflects the attempts of New Spain (later to become Mexico and the Central American nations) to control the natives. The letter explains how hard it is to force Indians to stay in one place for labor, and that granting *encomienda* holders the right to permanently own the Indians would benefit everyone. Indians who survived and had the choice to move around, remain in the mountains, or work their own schedules infuriated landowners who saw themselves as the superior masters of the Indians.<sup>77</sup>

By the early seventeenth century, the numbers of Indians in Mexico and Central America had dwindled significantly. The cruelty and germs of the Spaniards had laid low their mighty cultures. The Spaniards, for the most part undeterred, wanted to keep up productivity of their mines, farms, and ranches. At first the Spaniards hunted down and captured the Indians that they could. In areas such as Costa Rica for example, the Spaniards had to fight across harsh terrain

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<sup>76</sup> Pedro de Alvarado led a tyrannical purge of Indians who refused to submit in modern day El Salvador. His attacks on the native peoples saw many of them hide in the wilderness for decades to avoid Spanish persecution; see, Virginia Tilley, *Seeing Indians: A Study of Race, Nation, and Power in El Salvador* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), pp. 4-5.

<sup>77</sup> Most of Spanish-America at the time was wild and untamed. Indians would frequently run away to a new boss or into the wilderness. For some reason this gentleman believed that if they were declared slaves they would stay on plantations and mines. Unlikely; see, *Petition to the King to Grand Permanent Encomiendas, Latin American Conflict and Creation*, ed. Bradford Burns (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2003), p. 38-39.



and desperate Indian defenders to capture more labor for their *encomiendas*.<sup>78</sup> However, as just mentioned, the Indians would simply run away - back into the mountains or to a more benevolent landowner.

A different solution to the Spanish labor problem was African slaves, who at that point had begun forced labor in other parts of the globe. The Spanish simply moved the system to their own colonies with little hesitation. This solution also came as a relief to the Indians, who over the course of a few decades found themselves moved up slightly in the caste system that the Spanish had, for the most part, purposefully created to ensure that Iberians remained at the pinnacle.

This caste system based on birthplace and race became more and more stratified over the ensuing centuries, cementing itself into Latin American culture. There were several classes of person in Latin American, and race was the only factor that stood between tiers on the social ladder. Of the several there were: Iberian Spaniards, *peninsulares*, Caucasians who were born in Spain but worked or immigrated to the colonies; *Creole* Spaniards, Caucasians whose parents had both been Iberians, but their birthplace was in a New World colony, so they were seen as inferior to Iberian Spaniards; there were *castizas* or *mestizos*, the children of Caucasians and Indians; mulattoes, the children of a Caucasian and African; and finally there were indigenous peoples and Blacks. Unfortunately, the entire social system was structured in the descending hierarchy just described. At the top, *peninsulares* could become governors, merchant executives, and colony bureaucrats. At the bottom, Blacks were largely doomed to a life of servitude and slavery, even if they were freed they rarely were allowed to rise out of their status as a low-wage

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<sup>78</sup> Claudia Quiros, "Hunting Indians," *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Steven Palmer and Iván Molina (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 16-17.

worker. Blacks who appeared lighter skinned were sometimes able to rise out of their normal station if they convinced census agents that they were *mestizo* or mulatto.<sup>79</sup>

This social system created a hierarchy in which race and skin color determined your place in life the moment you were born. Iberians and Creoles especially took pleasure in being at the top of the social structure, while every other tier looked down on the ones below it in satisfaction, glad that they were not the bottom of the pyramid. This all changed however, with the fragmenting of the Spanish empire. When Napoleon conquered Spain in 1810, the colonies fell into self-governance. Creoles were glad to restructure the government without oversight from their haughty, Iberian governors. From 1809-1825 different Spanish regimes struggled to reassert authority over the colonies. Having tasted freedom for the previous decade, revolutions rose rapidly in most segments of Latin America. Creoles saw it as their time to rule the New World and exploited the old racial hierarchy to ensure their independence. *Libertadors*, or liberators, led the way for Latin American independence.

The most influential *libertador* was Simon Bolívar, the South American revolutionary who led most of that continent in rebellion. He was extremely influential throughout Latin America for his battle against Spanish authority and perfectly reflects the attitude of Creoles of that time. Early on in his leadership, he appealed to the lower classes, *mestizos*, mulattoes, and Blacks to aid the Creoles in their wars for independence. He promised them freedom, democracy, and a chance to break out of the tyrannical system that the crown had forced them and their ancestors to exist in. His supposed appreciation of non-white groups, who had largely viewed the rebellions as wars between two elites, leapt to the aid of Creoles like Bolívar. The opportunity for freedom and a better future had stimulated them to join in revolution. At first

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<sup>79</sup> There were dozens of other classifications as well, but too many to delve into here. Also, Central Americans have used the term *ladino* interchangeably with the general Latin American term *mestizo*.

glance these new promises make Bolívar appear as a champion of the oppressed, but like most Creoles, he was simply trying to become the new master with Spain's power waning.

In his first declaration on June 2, 1816 Bolívar did in fact outlaw slavery. However, he also demanded that "The new citizen who refuses to bear arms...shall be subject to servitude, not only for himself but also for his children...his wife, and his aged parents."<sup>80</sup> He banned slavery, but basically told the newly freed citizens that they needed to serve in the military or their entire family would be reenslaved. In a letter clarifying his orders, he also states that the military needs to "utilize the slaves" or suffer further defeats to Spain. Bolívar still held contempt for what he viewed as the lesser races of the Americans; but he knew that their military aid could help him win the war of independence and further, minorities with a taste of freedom would be less likely to rise up like had occurred Haiti.<sup>81</sup>

His declarations considering Indians were a little more progressive, but still showed intentions at restricting their power. In May 1820, he decreed that all *encomiendas* belonging to royalists would be returned to Indians. The Indians would have the land distributed to them via a special council. Then, they were required to farm the land for state tribute and to pay for local infrastructure such as school buildings and churches.<sup>82</sup> This seems like a significantly better way of life than that of an *encomienda*, until the lack of freedom is considered. Previously, Indians had been able to migrate freely from employer to employer. Under Bolívar's orders, the Indians were tied to specific tracks of land with debts and obligations to their labor. This was even more

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<sup>80</sup>Simon Bolívar "Decree for the Emancipation of Slaves." *El Libertador: Writings of Simón Bolívar*, ed. David Bushnell, trans. Frederick Fornoff (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), pp. 177–178.

<sup>81</sup> Simon Bolívar, "Letter to General Francisco de Paula Santander: On Slave Recruitment," *El Libertador: Writings of Simón Bolívar*, ed. David Bushnell, trans. Frederick Fornoff (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), Oxford University, 2003, pp. 182-183

<sup>82</sup>Simon Bolívar, "Decrees on Indian Rights, Lands, and Tribute," *El Libertador: Writings of Simón Bolívar*, ed. David Bushnell, trans. Frederick Fornoff (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), pp. 184-185.

oversight than had existed in the colonial system. In a way he had granted them freedom, but he had also tied them to state supervised land that made it easy for the central government to observe and control them unlike the previous centuries. His orders were a barely concealed attempt to limit further rebellions in the new country, and also a way to ensure that 'useless' laborers like the Indians were working and accounted for - a goal that many Central American countries attempted to strive for in the mid-nineteenth century.

Bolívar had guaranteed New Grenada's independence by the mid-1820's. During the years of reconstruction that followed independence, he wrote extensively on his fear of *pardocracia*, the fear of the racial minorities rising up in revolution against his state.<sup>83</sup> It had happened before, in Haiti, where Blacks had driven out white landowners and claimed the island nation. In his mind, the same could happen in any country where Blacks were not controlled. To remedy this, he did as previously mentioned, outlawed slavery, but limited their political freedom. He had slightly improved their lives, but not to the point where they could grow powerful enough to challenge central authority who now had more control over them than ever before.

As mentioned, Bolívar perfectly represented Creole attitudes towards the racial hierarchy in Latin America. The Central American Creoles saw themselves as the true inheritors of the region. They had been born there, they had run the bureaucracy and economy while Spain had simply collected taxes. Even with independence, with Central America following suit to free all slaves in their region, the Creoles were wary to threaten the hierarchy now that they were at the

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<sup>83</sup> *Pardo* was a term used to refer to the racial mixture of Europeans, Indians, and Africans that occurred in the new world. A *pardocracia* was a situation in which Bolívar, and other Creoles, envisioned a future in which the mixed raced people of Latin America would rise up to overthrow white governments.

top of it. The most important step in securing their power was to exercise complete control over Indians and Blacks.

Thus, Creoles sought to limit the migration of those they termed as uncontrollable or lazy into the country. As mentioned in the previous chapter, much of Central America at the time invited foreign investment and attempted to rapidly industrialize like the U.S. and Europe had in the last few decades. This is why the Honduran government stated that they did not want Black migrants, but “industrious *whites*”.<sup>84</sup> The Central American countries thought that white immigrants would purify their blood-lines, and contribute to the economy in far greater ways than Black migrants would. That is why the Secretary of Foreign Relations, Pedro Zeledon, for Nicaragua stated that the racial balance and economy of that nation would suffer “degradation of that [African] race.”<sup>85</sup>

Besides being worried about new migrants, the countries were also concerned about the Indian and Black populations they already had. The most obvious example of Indians or Blacks attacking Central American sovereignty has already been discussed, the attack on San Juan del Norte by the Mosquito Tribe and the British. To briefly revisit this, some Central Americans barely made note of the British involvement in the attack. The *Gaceta de Guatemala* [Guatemalan Gazette] after the attack described it as an area once legitimately held by Central American authorities, but was now a Mosquito Tribe protectorate with British backing.<sup>86</sup> The article does not even discuss the military or naval forces that Britain used to help the Mosquitoes. Rather, it sounded like the British were a passive bystander to the more aggressively depicted,

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<sup>84</sup> *Message of the President of the United States*, 891.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 895.

<sup>86</sup> “...poseído entonces pacíficamente por las autoridades de la América central, aparece ahora como ejercicio legal de un protectorado sobre la tribu de los indios mosquitos.” See, *Gaceta de Guatemala* [Guatemala Gazette]. (Guatemala City). 6 Feb. 1856.

racially different Mosquitoes. This article also showed that the Guatemalan government did not recognize the Mosquitoes or any land claims they made. Most Central Americans felt the same, recognizing an ‘inferior’ racial group's independence and land holdings could quickly snowball into a thousand smaller countries forming in the already splintered region.

Further racial strife came with the rapid industrialization that most of the region experienced in the 1850’s. Industrialization enforced an idea that all inhabitants of the region should be hardworking and respectable citizens contributing to national growth. Indians were especially seen as anathema to this industrialization goal. After centuries, Indian groups still retained their independence in the mountains and swampy low-lands of Central America. They inhabited the most inaccessible land of Central America, neither military force nor economic development could really reach them. To Creole governments, Indians were irresponsible and backwards, they refused to help the nation develop, instead going where they pleased and maintaining their own identities. This however, did not endanger the government. Indians who were deemed lazy or minded their own business did not rebel against the government.

One traveler to Costa Rica observed that many Indians went about their own lives and did not even recognize a central government or authority over them. He stated Indians “...did little or nothing for their living, while they knew and cared as much about Costa Rica as they did about Lapland.”<sup>87</sup> The same Indian they interviewed did not even know who the Spanish were. Most Indians were fine living their lives and being ignorant of government completely. They only rebelled when a government tried to force organization or authority upon them.

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<sup>87</sup> He was in fact speaking with a Costa Rican Indian who did not know what Costa Rica or Spain was; see, Thomas Francis Meagher, “Holidays in Costa Rica”, in *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Steven Palmer and Iván Molina (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 92.

No matter the Central American country or which political party was ruling it at the time (Liberal or Conservative) the leaders wished to keep Indians under control, so they could benefit from their labor.<sup>88</sup> The perfect example of this is Guatemala's extensive Indian policy changes during its formative years of independence beginning in 1840. Liberal leadership collapsed after the federation of states failed. That liberal leadership had acted similarly to Bolívar. Liberals had granted land back to Indians, set up farm systems, and expected them to be close and manageable. However, with the rise of Conservative Rafael Carrera to power, he completely reversed that system. He argued that it was impossible for Indians to live jointly with Guatemalans, similar to the U.S. same struggle to join white and black societies.<sup>89</sup>

His policy was to return Indians to the lifestyle they had 'enjoyed' (from the view of whites) during the colonial era. This meant two separate, and definitely not equal, societies. The Indians were in charge of laboring for their own food, participating in municipal works, and paying taxes. However, they were also allowed to remain in their villages and retain their culture. Carrera believed that this would lessen the chance of Indian rebellion. Conservatives like him believed that a segregated distance between Indians and Guatemalans would deter rebellion, while Liberals thought that full assimilation into society would raise Indians out of a status of rebellion and inferiority. Both groups wanted to keep Indians calm and prevent an uprising, but they differed in their racist approaches to national harmony.<sup>90</sup>

Central governments in Central American did not just take precautions or attempt to divert Indian rebellion. Most of the countries had to actively deal with it on a repeated basis. In *Seeing Indians*, author Virginia Tilley cataloged over nineteen Indian revolts in El Salvador

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<sup>88</sup> A deeper explanation on political parties of Central America will appear in the next chapter.

<sup>89</sup> Ralph Lee Woodward, "Changes in the Nineteenth-Century Guatemalan State and Its Indian Policies," *Guatemalan Indians and the State*, ed. by Carol Smith (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 67.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

alone from 1771 to 1862.<sup>91</sup> These mostly occurred in response to government policies, taxation, or rebellion against local businesses who treated them unfairly. Indians in El Salvador seemed primarily to rebel when the centralized government tried to force new regulations on them. It is also interesting that these are not necessarily poor, rural Indians either. In many cases, elites purposefully urged exasperated Indians or actually led them in revolt.<sup>92</sup> In the countries with large Indian populations like El Salvador and Guatemala, the smallest government overreach could incite a rebellion from a significant portion of the country. However, perhaps due to the paternalistic attitudes toward Indians, their uprisings were much less feared when compared to Black uprisings.

Central American Blacks were much more feared than Indians for their perceived rebellious nature.<sup>93</sup> As mentioned previously, Bolívar had warned and feared of further uprisings like Haiti, one that he had experienced in his lifetime. He had led most of Latin America in abolishing slavery, to grant Blacks and slightly better rank in life to ease their discomfort, so that rebellion was less likely. Even with ‘freedom’, Central American Blacks were relegated to the worst tasks of society. They were the ones that did the manual labor on plantations and constructed infrastructure such as canals for example. They were not slaves, but they were paid in miniscule amounts for the hardest labor of society. This terrible lifestyle imposed on them, by the same people who had supposedly freed them, caused Black society to seethe under the

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<sup>91</sup> The most common reasons for rebelling were military conscriptions, taxation, and land reforms. Indians were very passive when left alone but were not afraid to revolt when pushed too far by an overreaching government that claimed authority over them; see, Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 123-125.

<sup>92</sup> Elites would promote Indian revolts to destabilize regions and create their own political leverage, see, *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>93</sup> Indians were probably a little less feared in their uprisings due their more common occurrence, and the fact that an Indian rebellion had never permanently unseated a government like in Haiti. Indian uprisings were terrifying and a real threat to Central Americans, but they were not seen as harbingers of a completely changed society. Black rebellions were viewed as a threat to the entire structure and lifestyle of Central America.



service. Most Central Americans knew that rebellion was possible, but it took actual riots to instill fear into Central American society.

The most notorious Black uprising in Latin America during this time period occurred in Panama City, just a few hundred miles south of the Central American countries.<sup>94</sup> The infamous *Incidente de la tajada de sandía* (Watermelon Slice Incident), showed that oppressed African-descended laborers were willing to rise up when pushed too far. By the 1850's, Panama had become one of the main transit locations for U.S. citizens passing from the east to the west. The backbone of this transit economy was Black labor, displaced Blacks from the Caribbean, or those freed from slavery decades earlier. They were the ones that guided the mules across the isthmian route, they worked on the docks moving freight, and they worked a thousand other tasks that catered to U.S. travelers.

On April 15, 1856 a Black watermelon vendor named Jose Manuel Luna was working his fruit stand as usual. Several inebriated transients from the U.S. came up to his stand, one took a slice of watermelon, and refused to pay for it. After yelling and threatening each other, the drunken thief drew his pistol, and Luna supposedly stepped back. Then, another Panamanian attacked the U.S. traveler and tried to disarm him, a pistol shot erupted from the scuffle, injuring a local who had been watching. After blood was shed, chaos ensued.<sup>95</sup>

According to most reports, it was a riot of poor, Black laborers who went on to destroy most of the U.S. investment district. They destroyed train depots, shipyards, and warehouses. Over a dozen casualties resulted on U.S. travelers who boarded themselves into hotels and bars

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<sup>94</sup> The country of Panama and Panama City were still part of Colombia at the time of these events. So although they had not joined the contemporary classification of Central America, their proximity to the other five nations made events that occurred there very real to Central Americans.

<sup>95</sup> Aimes McGuinness "Searching for 'Latin America': Race and Sovereignty in the Americas in the 1850's." In *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, 91. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003; and, Daley, Mercedes Chen. "The Watermelon Riot: Cultural Encounters in Panama City, April 15, 1856." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 70, no. 1 (1990): 85-86.

owned by fellow countrymen. Black jobs had been continually changed or outdated due to the industrialization of Panama, and they could not demand any respect from local Creoles or foreign white travelers.<sup>96</sup> The slice of watermelon had been the breaking point. When the riot was eventually controlled, there were almost two dozen corpses and millions of dollars of property damage.<sup>97</sup>

This event is more complex than just a dispute over a piece of street cuisine. Blacks in Panama, as well as most of Central America, knew their worth was little in the eyes of Creole elites and white travelers to their countries. The ‘Slice of Watermelon’ was just the catalyst for decades, if not centuries, of bubbling racial tension in Panama. The utter disrespect that Luna was shown by the U.S. drunkard tapped into years of resentment against whites, especially transients from the U.S. Black workers were forced to do some of the worst labor of the region and their jobs were constantly being outdated or industrialized. One Jamaican woman named Mary Seacole moved to Panama in 1851 to work in the booming transportation industry, in her case at a family owned boardinghouse. She wrote in 1857 about the cruelties that the U.S. transients, mostly Southerners in her experience, treated the Black laborers all along the isthmian highway. They would beat, shoot, and rob Black laborers freely. Laborers, for their part, stood up to the violence against them in the only way they could. After entering more remote and isolated towns of the route, such as Cruces, U.S. travelers could be attacked themselves. She said, “few tales of horror in Panama could be questioned on the ground of improbability.”<sup>98</sup> The

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<sup>96</sup> The first isthmian railroad opened in 1855 in Panama. It allowed for quick, safe travel across the country but also replaced a large number of Black muleteers’ jobs who had been the traditional guides in the region. This was just one example of how industrialization affected traditional labor in the area.

<sup>97</sup> McGuinness, “Searching for Latin America”, p. 91-92.

<sup>98</sup> Mary Seacole, “A Jamaican’s View of Americans in Panama,” 1857. *Manifest Destiny and American Territorial Expansion: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Amy Greenberg (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, Macmillan Learning, 2018), p. 140.

wild, frontier-like Panamanian route acted as a breaking point for many Black laborers. Before, they had been able to work peacefully, if not unhappily. With the white transients harassing and terrorizing them however, it showed that they could stand up for themselves when they wished to.

From their point of view, Central American governments were right to fear Black resettlement plans. The countries, whether led by Liberals or Conservatives wished to retain their political supremacy over non-whites. Indians were not as terribly feared, but they were deemed lazy and irrelevant to society. The newly industrialized nations needed hard workers to create infrastructure and manufacturing. In Nicaragua's opinion for example, that government believed that migrant, U.S. born African Americans and Indians intermingling would produce an even lazier workforce, one that would leave the country struggling to modernize.

Blacks were not feared for their laziness as Indians were, but rather for their ability to organize and fight back when pushed to their breaking point. Blacks were forced to do the most intensive labor and worst jobs of Central America. This low position in society, combined with governments that gave them minimal rights and recognition *did* create a seething, rebellious group of people. It was not that Blacks wished to overthrow white governments just out of amusement though. They only struck back when they were forcibly degraded time after time. This is the reason that race threatened Central American sovereignty. To the five countries, the best-case scenario was that Blacks would intermingle with Indians and create a lazy society. In the worst-case scenario, the migrants would help incite a full-scale, white-genocidal rebellion. To Central Americans, either case meant that Black migrants were definitely not desired as new citizens.

### Chapter III

#### Rivalry and Subversion: The Central American Threat to Itself

The final threat to Central America during the mid-nineteenth century was one that is hardly apparent in the U.S.-Central American communications. Central Americans feared many threats to their sovereignty during this time - Anglo-aggressors from outside, *pardocracia* from the inside - these were threats that the five countries could unite around to combat. However, the greatest threat to the region endangered not only individual sovereignty, but the regional sovereignty of Central America as well. The greatest threat to Central America during this time was, of course, the nations themselves.

The five Central American countries actively sought to preserve regional autonomy, but their rivalry and differences with each other were a grave threat to their sovereignty. In threatening, weakening, and attempting to outdo each other, they undid the neighborly bond they had preserved for the first forty years of independence. The result was five nations who could not, or would not, help their neighbors who sought to undermine them in times of peace.

Upon independence from Spain in 1821, Central America briefly governed itself. Local disagreements spiraled out of control however, and Mexico quickly absorbed the unstable region. After another two years, Mexico offered the five provinces of Central America the opportunity to govern themselves again. The five agreed and formed a federation with each province having a representative. The turmoil did not end though because the two major political groups of the new nation - the Conservatives and the Liberals - did not cooperate and were outright violent in their usurpation of one another. This bloody combat between the political parties would set a precedent for much of Central American government history.

Central American Liberals were a highly progressive, anti-tradition political group. They sought to upend the entire Spanish system that had existed for three centuries. This meant abolishing much of the Catholic Church's rights to the region, forced integration of Indians and Blacks into mainstream society, and rapid economic development to match neighbors in the hemisphere. In many ways, Liberals attempted to match the U.S. system of government. Few Liberals, however, saw Indians or Blacks as their equals as mentioned in a previous chapter. Liberals were mostly Creoles and did not see non-whites as worthy of governing.<sup>99</sup>

Conservatives on the other hand, wished to keep the region in a colonial system. They were strong supporters of the Catholic Church in government. They also wanted to keep Indians and Blacks at 'arms-length'. Indians should be forced to work, but remain in their villages and collectives far from cities where they could cause trouble to a central government. In many cases, in the early years, Conservatives would have reimplemented slavery but could not figure out how after years of freedom.

Ultimately, the two parties were complete opposites. Liberals wished to radically change the country to match industrialized nations, while the Conservatives sought to keep the system unchanged. In both cases, the parties were led by Creole elites who did not wish to share power with the other party, or those they considered inferior - particularly non-elites and non-whites.. Their political ideas took backseat to their struggle for power.<sup>100</sup> The Liberals took control of the newly Federal Republic of Central America for several years in an 1824 election; civil wars and uprisings by Conservatives followed for the next five years. During this time period, the Liberals were the first to ask for outside aid and received loans from Great Britain to finance

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<sup>99</sup> Again, this reflects a paternalistic attitude similar to the northern United States. Many Liberals and many Northerners believed that Blacks should not be enslaved, but also did not believe they were capable of self-government either. A viewpoint that Blacks should be free, but free under the control and direction of whites.

<sup>100</sup> Woodward, *Central America*, 93-94.

independence.<sup>101</sup> By 1829, Liberal leader Francisco Morazán forcefully united the five nations under a Liberal banner. Morazán, however, could only hold the republic together for less than a decade.<sup>102</sup> This thesis can hardly dive into the litany of revolutions, revolts, and civil war during the region's first twenty years of independence. To summarize Liberal-Conservative relations in the early to mid-nineteenth century: the two parties were irreconcilable.<sup>103</sup>

By 1838, conflict between the liberals and conservatives had reached a boiling point again, and much broader civil war erupted. By 1841, the countries had begun declaring their own independence from the federation and all five eventually followed suit. Each country became strongly conservative for the next decade, with strong leaders like Rafael Carrera of Guatemala implementing colonial style governments that did not seek modernization or rigorous foreign investment.

The five countries when in federation had been a powerful and diverse, if not agreeable, collection of nations and people. Their fragmentation however, made each one significantly weaker and more unstable than previously. Further destabilizing to the region, was the two political parties consistently usurping each other in various ways. Besides outright rebellion and violence, most usurpations came in the form of foreign aid. The most significant events have already been discussed in the first chapter, Anglo-aggressors.

As a primary example, the instability brought on by the political parties and economy of Nicaragua forced that country to create a series of transit agreements with the U.S., namely Vanderbilt and his peers. The government willingly invited and gave huge land grants,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>103</sup> Consider the following for more detailed breakdown of the political parties' wars against each other; Woodward, *Central America*, p. 92-119.

infrastructure rights, and monopolies to U.S. investors.<sup>104</sup> In essence, they sold their country for a chance at economic prosperity. However, Vanderbilt and other U.S. investors kept asking for more concessions, which were granted, and refused to pay the annual fees that had been negotiated with the government.<sup>105</sup> The U.S. and its private corporations were obviously to blame for the refusal of payment and poor treatment of their Nicaraguan agreements. The Nicaraguans though, for their part, had perhaps been too eager, and too willing, to cede so much to foreign capitalists.

Nicaraguan invitations to the U.S. did not end there, however. Liberals, in an attempt to seize power, offered an invitation to the infamous U.S. filibuster William Walker to help them usurp the conservative Nicaraguan government in 1856. He led a varied army of individuals who were promised land, political offices, and opportunity in the warring country.<sup>106</sup> Once again, Nicaraguans had inflicted a threat to sovereignty against themselves. Conservatives had mistakenly given their economy to the U.S., and then Liberals handed over their politics to U.S. agents as well. In trying to out-manuever each other, the political parties of Nicaragua had only undone their country. Walker was quick to seize power in the political vacuum the two parties had made. In retaliation, Conservative armies from the other four Central American nations removed him from power and reinstated a new conservative leader.

Other nations were also quick to invite foreign elements to their land. This is apparent in U.S. ambassador to Costa Rica Charles Riotte's message to William Seward in May 1862. Just weeks after Lincoln had gained financial backing for a colonization plan, Riotte stated that the Costa Rican government wanted to "...set aside on one of the coasts of the republic [Costa Rica]

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<sup>104</sup> Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua Under U.S. Imperial Rule* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 24-25.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

a tract of land for the settlement of free negroes...”<sup>107</sup> While not apparent at first glance, this message showed that the five Central American countries were not initially united against the U.S. colonization plan. Costa Rica had purposefully messaged the U.S. to be considered first for an African-American colony. Costa Rica was essentially trying to gain U.S. investment first, without considering the regional or political ramifications. The Nicaraguans had done the exact same thing a decade earlier. The invitation to a foreign country to establish a foothold was a dangerous action. It was not until Costa Rica probably considered the outcome that they rescinded their invitation.

Besides accommodating the decline of their domestic sovereignty, Central Americans of the mid-nineteenth century were also quick to undermine their neighbors’. The clearest example of this was the rivalry between Salvadoran president and Liberal, Gerardo Barrios and Guatemalan president and Conservative, Rafael Carrera. El Salvador and Guatemala had a close relationship for over a decade following independence. After all, they had even jointly declared Antonio Irisarri the ambassador of both countries to the U.S. in the 1850’s. Central American inter-country relationships were always shifting, however. By 1858, Barrios had become temporary president, and by 1860, he held the full title. Although politically different from Carrera, he did make several attempts to initiate a fresh, friendly relationship despite their different backgrounds. In 1860 he even visited Guatemala personally to express that friendship. Many of his preserved writings were to a family friend in Guatemala, urging the man to express his Salvadoran respect and friendship to the Guatemalan government.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *Message of the President*, 887.

<sup>108</sup> *Gerardo Barrios Papers*. Central American and Caribbean Misc. Barrios Letters, 1860, Box 2, Folder 15A, Latin American Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans.



Barrios was most likely trying to create an amicable relationship with Guatemala due to countries' proximity to each other. Guatemala, under Carrera, was also one of the most powerful, stable countries in the region during the 1860's. Barrios' respect, and possibly fear, of Guatemala was not on display towards the other Central American countries though. In other letters, he also sought to undo the sovereignty of his neighbors. In one letter he discusses the possibility of El Salvador and Guatemala cooperating to split Honduras between the two.<sup>109</sup> In his last letter held at Tulane University, Barrios discusses a spy that he has working in Nicaragua for some nefarious purpose.<sup>110</sup> So even though he appeared, on the surface, to be coordinating unification and friendship between some Central American countries, Barrios was also guilty of secretly planning to undermine and even take over his neighbors.

Carrera had announced himself president for life by 1860, at the same time Barrios was trying to create a cordial relationship with him. Perhaps he was at first convinced, or maybe indifferent, of Barrios attempts at friendship. In either case, by 1862 he had begun amassing armed forces near the Salvadoran border in preparation for war. The increasingly liberal policies of Barrios began to heighten tensions with the old, conservative Carrera.<sup>111</sup>

While Carrera pondered invasion over Barrios' Liberal politicking, Lincoln broached the Chiriquí colonization plan to the African-American committee, and accidentally to the countries of Central America. Irisarri, representing both nations, put on a facade of a joint front. Indeed, as mentioned previously, when faced with outside threat, the nations of Central America were able to unite and thwart it. From the summer of 1862 until early November, Carrera and Barrios hardly seemed to consider each other. As far as documents go, the peculiar lack of writing at this

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<sup>109</sup> *Gerardo Barrios Papers*. Central American and Caribbean Misc. Barrios Letters, 1860, Box 2, Folder 15B, Latin American Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans.

<sup>110</sup> This is the last letter in this collection; Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Woodward, *Central America*, p. 152-153.

time suggests that Lincoln's plan had eased the two nations' tensions for a few months. They seemed to have put their differences aside as they awaited word on the colonization attempt.

For several months, the result was unknown. Guatemala did not report to its own people until early November that the colonization plan was beginning to fail. The entire correspondence between Irisarri and Seward was released on November 2. This showed that the colonization plan had been mostly halted.<sup>112</sup> Right after that, a rise in aggression happened among Salvadoran and Guatemalan media. Several newspapers in the week after began advocating for violence between the two nations and verbally attacked the political ideology of their rivals. Newspapers that went against the political affiliation of their state were shuttered and their editors exiled.<sup>113</sup>

On November 20, 1862, with relations amongst Central Americans calm, Carrera even announced in a report to the Guatemalan Congress that "Official relations between the government of the republic [Guatemala] and those of Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa-Rica, continue to be cultivated..."<sup>114</sup> He even mentions that some of the other countries have suggested to him that they wish to once again "...link the five states of Central America..."<sup>115</sup> This was in an official speech to his government, and although Carrera was president-for-life, he

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<sup>112</sup> The state newspaper published the entire correspondence two months after it actually took place (Irisarri and Seward ceasing discussion on it in September 1862). This shows how long it took for the Guatemalan state to actually learn that colonization had been stopped. There had been two or three months of uncertainty where Irisarri had been one of the only people to know what was going on; see, *Gaceta de Guatemala*, 2 November, 1862, Guatemala City.

<sup>113</sup> One liberal paper in Guatemala was forced to close and move out of the country. The publishers swore to continue publishing outside the country, but a Guatemalan newspaper attempting to publish news for Guatemalans elsewhere probably did not work for long; see, Boada y Balmes Los Redactores, 1862, November 5. *Latin American History and Culture: An Archival Record*. Series 9: Collections from Latin American Library, Tulane University. Pt 2: Central American Printed, Ephemera Collection. Microfilm 3063, Reel 6, Latin American Library, Tulane University, New Orleans.

<sup>114</sup> "Las relaciones oficiales entre el Gobierno de la República y los del Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua y Costa-Rica, siguen cultivandose..."; see, Rafael Carrera, "Mensaje dirigido a la Camara de Replantantes," November 20, 1862. *Latin American History and Culture: An Archival Record*. Series 9: Collections from Latin American Library, Tulane University. Pt 2: Central American Printed, Ephemera Collection. Microfilm 3063, Reel 6, 20(486), Latin American Library, Tulane University, New Orleans.

<sup>115</sup> "La idea de volver à unir los cinco Estados de la América Central..."; Ibid.

had no reason to lie about rising hostilities. There is no mention of conflict with El Salvador, Barrios, or anything similar. If anything, Guatemala was neutral with all five of its neighbors.

However, as the year ended and it became more certain that no African-American invasion was going to take place, the two countries returned to hostilities with vigor. From late 1862 to early 1863, Barrios evicted a large number of the clergy from Salvadoran lands who promptly fled to Guatemala. Around this time, Carrera also stated that Barrios had invited Mexico to invade Guatemala.<sup>116</sup> These events gave Carrera all the legitimacy he needed to attack now that an outside threat was no longer present.

With the Lincoln colonization plan defeated, the Liberal-Conservative tensions had returned and Carrera invaded El Salvador. He was quickly defeated, but returned to defeat Barrios and seize the capital within a few months.<sup>117</sup> The other three Central American nations, all conservative at the time, supported Carrera's ousting of the Liberal threat. Once again, the political parties had destabilized one of the five pillars of Central American autonomy. According to author Ralph Woodward, the hostility between Barrios and Carrera, between northern-Central American Liberals and Conservatives, resulted in fifty years of instability for Guatemala, El Salvador, and even Honduras.<sup>118</sup> Such instability acted as an invitation to foreign interests to take advantage of the unstable countries. Three of the five Central American countries could not support regional autonomy for the rest of the century. Without all five working together, it could hardly resist foreign influence at all. For the next fifty years the U.S.

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<sup>116</sup> A writer by the initials M.F. outlines all of the reasons why Guatemala is waging a righteous war with its neighbor El Salvador. He also argues strongly against an exiled Guatemala Lorenzo Montufar for his view of the war; see, Guatemala, Refutacion de la refutacion, 1863 [Refutation of the refutation, 1863], *Latin American History and Culture: An Archival Record*. Series 9: Collections from Latin American Library, Tulane University. Pt 2: Central American Printed, Ephemera Collection. Microfilm 3063, Reel 6, 20(449), Latin American Library, Tulane University, New Orleans.

<sup>117</sup> Woodward, *Central America*, p. 153.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

had free reign of the region as it began imposing one-sided trade agreements in the region for agricultural goods. Central Americans, unstable and poor from their warring, relented quite frequently to U.S. pressure.<sup>119</sup>

The Chiriquí colonization plan had shown that the five countries were strong together but were constantly working to undermine each other. When not facing existential threat, they proved to be the most powerful threat to themselves. By undoing individual sovereignty, they sacrificed regional unity. Nicaraguan Conservatives had invited greedy, ineffective investors to take over its economy. Then, Nicaraguan Liberals invited Walker to take over, which he did successfully. This led to Nicaragua's total undoing for more than a year. Even Costa Rica, the leader in the fight against Walker did not hesitate to invite foreign colonization of its land. Only after considering the dire ramifications for their country and the region did they join with the rest to declare colonization unacceptable. Finally, in El Salvador and Guatemala, leaders sought to overthrow their neighbors' governments and restructure regional power. Both Barrios and Carrera eventually fell and created a power vacuum that Liberals and Conservatives battled over for decades leaving three-fifths of Central American destabilized.

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<sup>119</sup> Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 84-85.

## **Conclusion: Central American Sovereignty Withers**

Lincoln's colonization plan was probably not designed to agitate and worsen relations with Central America. However, it displayed that Central Americans could fight back and that they could unite. The five Central American countries: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua had been close allies at first, and then desperate rivals for their first forty years of independence. The five knew when to unite, each country was small, but when combined they were a force large enough to instill respect. Each country was aware that a threat to one was a threat to all. By the 1850's, the nations had realized what the main threats to their existence, to their sovereignty, were. Through the Chiriquí colonization plan communications, it is clear that Central Americans saw Anglo-aggressors and racial turmoil as the main threats to their independence.

Anglo-aggressors came in the form of U.S. and British attacks on Central American interests. This could be economical, political, or outright seizure of land. Almost every person in the U.S. had an idea on how to use Central America to the benefit of that nation. The British also sought to destabilize the five countries, the weaker they were, the easier it was to manipulate them. Anglo-aggressors had dozens of reasons to strip Central American countries of their sovereignty, and the five nations were well aware of that.

Elite Central Americans also saw racial balance as a threat that had to be managed. To them, Indians were lazy, ineffectual workers that stood between antiquity and modernity. Mobilizing Indians was already hard enough, so to add more inferior laborers to their systems seemed anathema to industrialization. Blacks on the other hand were highly effective laborers but were viewed as hard to control. At any moments Blacks could rise up and establish a

*pardocracia*, eliminating the white Creoles from power. Blacks did rise up occasionally, but only when pushed to their breaking point by governments or figures who barely cared for them at all.

While Central Americans thought they were effectively preventing the destruction of their own sovereignty by monitoring these two perceived threats, they were not aware that they themselves threatened their own sovereignty the most. The Liberal and Conservative rivalry stripped the region of much of its wealth and stability. Repeated coups prevented the two parties from having balanced economies. In response to this, most nations requested foreign aid or investment to have a functioning economy. This nearly always ended poorly for the bulk of Central Americans. Outsiders did not have the best interests in mind and exploited the divided countries easily. After the Liberal and Conservative rivalry reached a peak with Barrios and Carrera, the region was unable to unite again effectively. This made it even easier for foreign influences to take advantage of the region. With many of the nations unable to assert their own sovereignty, they definitely could not unite to ward off threats that came after the Lincoln colonization plan.

During the mid-nineteenth century, Central Americans had been able to thwart most threats to their sovereignty through their cordial cooperation with each other. They limited U.S. and British influences at times, they drove Walker out of Nicaragua and reasserted Central American independence, and they forced Lincoln to back down when he suggested an African-American colony on their lands. However, their attacks on each other occurred constantly when a looming outside threat was not present. The omnipresent threat, their rivalry, was the greatest threat to their sovereignty.

For the next century of Central American history, there were no filibusters, or African-American colonies. Instead, arguably far greater threats arose: billionaire fruit companies and

full-scale foreign military coups.<sup>120</sup> After chipping away at their neighbors for so long, Central Americans had ruined the amicable relationship that had maintained their independence for their early history. The five countries were powerful when united; secondary threats were easy to overcome when each of them worked together. However, once their relationship unraveled, the other threats - Anglo-aggressors, internal racial strife - became much more dangerous. This thesis used Lincoln's colonization attempt as a way to understand the threats to Central American sovereignty and how they responded to those threats. Therefore, it seems appropriate to turn to Lincoln once more to express the final downfall of national and regional sovereignty in Central America, "A house divided against itself cannot stand."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> This is in reference to companies such as United Fruit and the U.S. political and military backing of them. Central American manipulation became a hobby for the U.S. by the 1900's.

<sup>121</sup> Mark E. Neely Jr. *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1982).

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