

December 7, 1860 (Doc. 97)

There is much angry feeling on both sides. The result can not at present be foreseen.

I remain as ever
your friend
Joseph Henry

Dr. John Torrey
New-York

Torrey Papers, Archives of the New York Botanical Garden.

Reply not found but dated December 24 according to a file note.

1. Not found, but evidently the letter of instruction about the national herbarium (discussed in Doc. 87).

2. Henry apparently meant to say the disbursing clerk, of which there were three at the

Department of the Interior. *Register of Officers and Agents, Civil, Military, and Naval, in the Service of the United States on the Thirtieth September, 1861* (Washington, 1862), p. 73.

97. TO ASA GRAY

Washington Dec 7th 1860

My Dear Dr.

The good people of the north do not appear to believe in the fact of the danger in which we are now placed. I think it more than probable that our Union is doomed to suffer the fate of all governments. The struggle of life must produce its effects with us as it has with all the world of past history. Every year the number of persons who adopt politics as a profession is increasing; the class must therefore deteriorate in talents, acquirements, and morality. The struggle for office must constantly increase in intensity, and as under our organization the number ↑ of offices ↓ cannot be changed the tendency will be to separate us into several governments each with a President and a corps of subordinates. If the north will suffer the negro question to remain undisturbed the whole matter will in due time be settled by the law of population and the conflict of Races. White labour from the north, as it is cheapened by the increase of laborers, must be gradually extended into the south until it is stopped by the heat of the sun.

There are parts of our country which cannot be worked by the white man and this must be cultivated by the negro or not at all. I have little hope that the black man can ever be civilized unless by selection in the course of geological periods, but I would make the experiment on a grand scale and expend millions under the direction of the colonization

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society in establishing an empire in Africa.¹ The rulers might be the half breeds which we could constanly furnish for many years ↑to come.↓²

I do not think the negro can ever exist in close approximation with the white man, except in a state of slavery. The struggle of life must be most severe at the lowest point of the scale and the negro has neither the mental nor physical power, in our climate, to continue long the contest.

May we hope to have a few lectures from you this winter on trees³ and the pleasure of a visit from Mrs. Gray?

I am much gratified to learn that our friend Dr. Torrey has made so pleasant an arrangement with Columbia College. In the present aspect of political affairs no position connected with the government can be considered permanent.

This communication was intended as an accompanymnt to my official letter of yesterday⁴ but was accidentally omitted in mailing the other.

I remain as ever
Truly your friend
Joseph Henry

Dr. A. Gray

Historic Letters, Archives of the Gray Herbarium, Harvard University.

1. "The removal of blacks from the United States," writes historian John David Smith, "appealed to a broad group of whites, and to some African Americans as well, who concluded that the two races could never live together in peace." Henry was a part of this group. While evidently not an active member of the American Colonization Society (ACS), he had been supportive of its aims since the 1830s (*Henry Papers*, 3:431n; 4:183.) Over its forty-year history, the ACS had raised more than \$2 million to transport some 10,000 blacks to Liberia and to promote the cause of colonization. The number sent to Liberia, however, was a fraction of the black population in America, which had grown to more than four million by 1860. Even though the focus of colonization was on free blacks, about 11 percent of the black population, and some were able to pay a portion or all of their own expenses, mass colonization was an immensely expensive proposition. John David Smith, ed., *The American Colonization Society and Emigration: Solutions to 'The Negro Problem'* (New York, 1993), pp. xxv (quotation), xxvi; Kelly S. Drake, "Colonization or Deportation?: Black American Emigration to Liberia and the American Colonization Society," *The Log of Mystic Seaport*, 1999, 51:2-11; P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York, 1961), pp. 248, 251; Ira Berlin, *Slaves*

without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South (1974; Oxford, England, 1981), pp. 136-137, 396-397.

2. Mulattoes in fact, according to historian M. B. Akpan, "dominated the ruling and commercial classes" in Liberia during this period. Compared to darker-skinned blacks, they came from a privileged background in America, where they represented a large percentage of free blacks and often held skilled jobs, which gave them an advantage when they resettled abroad. Their higher status in America also reinforced the common belief that possession of some white blood made mulattoes superior in intelligence to pure blacks. M. B. Akpan, "Alexander Crummell and his African 'Race-Work': An Assessment of his Contributions in Liberia to Africa's 'Redemption,' 1853-1873," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 1976, 45:179-180.

The 1850 census counted a mulatto population of some 406,000, 11 percent of the African-American population in the United States. Henry's comment about being able to supply Liberia with mulattoes may be viewed not only in terms of numbers, but also in light of the accelerating trend in the 1850s toward intolerance of mulattoes and free blacks in the South. As sectional tensions grew, many whites saw mulattoes as a problematic racial category, a