Sara Fanning

Caribbean Crossing: African Americans and the Haitian Emigration Movement. New York: NYU Press, 2015. xii + 167 pp. (Cloth US\$35.00)

The free movement of black people in the wake of the American and Haitian revolutions is an important, yet understudied, area of Atlantic world history. The persistence of African slavery throughout the Age of Atlantic Revolutions maintains a solid grip on historical writing and research. A chapter in Chris Dixon's *African America and Haiti: Emigration and Black Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (2000) remains a staple work in discussions of African American migration. In recent years scholars and publishers have shown an increased interest in African American migration to Liberia under the auspices of the white U.S.-led American Colonization Society (ACS). And the first chapter of Ousmane Power-Greene's *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle against the Colonization Movement* (2014) argues that African American emigration to Haiti undermined ACS effort to rid the United States of free black people.

Sara Fanning offers the first book-length study on free people of African descent who decided to emigrate from the United States to Haiti in the 1820s. The American Revolution prompted the abolition of slavery across the northern part of the United States. *Caribbean Crossing* convincingly captures the way the disenfranchisement of black people in the northern states, the persistence of slavery in the southern states, and the international objectives of Haiti prompted some 13,000 people of color to leave the western Atlantic world's first independent nation for the second.

Fanning's goal in *Caribbean Crossing* is straightforward: to argue that "the emerging ideology of white supremacy faced a major challenge from American supporters of Haitian recognition who publicly advocated for closer American diplomatic ties to Haiti, the self-proclaimed black republic" (p. 2). She displays remarkable attention to detail in the research and exceptional discipline in writing. The book is placed within the historical context of major happenings of the early nineteenth century, such as Haitian independence, the growth of the black press, African colonization, and Atlantic migrations. However, it does not stray far from its discussion of Haitian recognition.

The narrative revolves around the pull and push factors in Haitian emigration. The strong desire of President Jean-Pierre Boyer to gain international recognition for his ailing country, isolated by the United States and European nations, created the pull factors for African Americans. Boyer revised earlier policies for African American emigration initiated by Henry Christophe and Alexandre Pétion. In one year Boyer spent some US\$300,000 to finance African

American migration, providing food, supplies, and housing for migrants to cultivate land in Haiti. Boyer believed that if sufficient numbers of African Americans settled in Haiti, he could expect the country to be recognized by the United States.

A range of social pressures pushed African Americans to leave everything they knew in the United States. The book illuminates the diversity of people who emigrated and their rationales for departing. Emigrants included families, single men, and single women, and came from all social levels. At home African Americans faced increased discrimination and decreased political and social rights. One of Fanning's greatest contributions is her attention to the commercial motivations to emigrate. Boyer marketed Haiti as a place where African Americans could fulfill their economic dreams of advancement. At its core, "emigration to Haiti resulted from the common desire of black people in the U.S. and in Haiti for the political and social empowerment of themselves, their race, and their nation" (p. 3).

Fanning has penned the go-to book on black emigration to Haiti. The writing is straightforward and accessible. Scholars and graduate students who research early Haitian, African American, and Atlantic migration history will benefit greatly from her research and the style in which she presents it. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot has noted, through Haitian decline across the nineteenth century, "The revolution that was unthinkable became a non-event."¹ Fanning's book, like most that treat Haiti's early stages of nation building, ends on a note of defeat and disappointment. Nearly two-thirds of the African American emigrants returned to the United States, and Haiti did not achieve U.S. recognition. But *Caribbean Crossing* leaves readers with an important conclusion: "The establishment and progress of Haiti as an independent black nation marked a political and cultural milestone in the African diaspora" (p. 10).

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1 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, 1995, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press), p. 98.