

Race, Removal, and the Right to Remain: Migration and the Making of the United States. By Samantha Seeley. Williamsburg: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. 368 pages. \$34.95 cloth; \$29.99 ebook.

In *Race, Removal, and the Right to Remain: Migration and the Making of the United States*, Samantha Seeley explores how the persistent presence of Native nations and African-descended peoples repeatedly challenged American conceptualizations of race, national belonging, and citizenship in the decades of the early republic. In well-researched parallel discussions, the book analyzes Black and Native peoples' efforts at resisting white American demands for their forcible removal from territories claimed by the newly independent United States. The experiences of Native and Black peoples with removal were not identical, of course. Numerous dissimilarities existed between them, reflecting their differing historical relationships with the emerging American state. Native peoples, for instance, might experience removal as the forcible departure from Midwestern tribal homelands (sometimes at gunpoint) because of the misleading and ambiguous provisions of a treaty. Enslaved Black folk, by contrast, might be transported against their will by their enslavers to new territory where their unfree labor would enrich those same enslavers, very possibly on land just appropriated from Native people. Although Native nations and enslaved Blacks articulated very different reasons for resisting removal, each asserted they had the right to remain in North America. Their differing claims to rightful occupation of North American soil further led them to demand inclusion within the new American nation. In so doing, they defied a competing American vision of the United States as an ethnically and racially homogenous nation. Refusing the American logic of removal, both communities of color continuously challenged the vision of a racially exclusionary American future.

The several practices of forcible migration and removal that enmeshed Black and Native peoples were not coincidental, Seeley argues: they were foundational to the United States. Beginning while the Revolutionary War was still in progress, Americans concluded that their future was linked to the continued appropriation of Indigenous lands. Without putting the name "settler-colonialism" to their actions, Americans nonetheless came to believe that their country's success would be secured by its continued annexation of Indigenous lands, particularly in the trans-Appalachian region that they called the Northwest Territory. By definition, American occupation would also be predicated on the removal of Native peoples from the land, a process Americans instigated repeatedly from the 1780s through the 1830s. Native peoples asserted their rights to remain in multiple ways, from intertribal armed resistance movements to canny efforts to adopt just enough of the outward appearances of American-style land-ownership, agricultural practices, and gender relations to claim their worthiness for

inclusion within the American republic. Although many Native peoples were removed, some remained (and still remain to this day) in the states created from the Northwest Territory. Over the course of decades, Americans, ignoring Native presences, emphasized their removals, crafting a narrative of disappearance that repeated the old trope as if it were reality. Incapable of becoming civilized, Native peoples—so this conventional wisdom went—had moved, pretty much volitionally, to some far-off western lands. Seeley's overlooking of the tribal communities that remained in the Lower Great Lakes states is an unfortunate missed opportunity. Persuasive though the rhetoric of removal was, she would prove her point about Native efforts to remain much more effectively if she had discussed the Miamis of Indiana, the Potawatomi communities of Michigan, and scattered others who have successfully asserted their right to remain in the region to the present.

If white Americans would persuade themselves that Native peoples had vanished, African-descended persons, especially when freed, presented another dilemma. While not citizens, Blacks lived within the United States in ways most Native people did not, encapsulated within white society, in white towns and on white farms and plantations. Their proximity to whites made their freedom all the more troubling. These concerns increased in the early years of American independence when, fired by revolutionary fervor and the rhetoric of freedom, white Americans manumitted hundreds of enslaved individuals. Some, of course, were family members, even children of their enslavers.

Yet few white Americans, even those who opposed enslavement, seemed prepared to grant freed Blacks inclusion and citizenship within the new republic. Paralleling their actions in removing Native peoples beyond the borders of the American state, white Americans planned for the expulsion of Black people as well. Support grew in the 1790s and afterward, spurred in no small measure by the successful Haitian Revolution in 1791 and the barely averted uprising of enslaved Blacks in Richmond, Virginia, led by Gabriel Prosser in 1800. Convinced that the formerly enslaved and their enslavers could not live together, white Americans threw their support behind removal efforts. The most well-known was the African Colonization Society, which sought to repatriate freed Blacks to western Africa. Paralleling their obfuscation of Native removal by depicting it as a natural phenomenon, white Americans presented Black repatriation to Africa (on lands the colonization societies had wrested from African polities) as an opportunity to return and spread Christianity to the homeland. While there was interest among some Blacks in leaving the United States, for many others the basic logic of their enslavement prompted them to seek to remain in North America. As articulated by Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and a tireless abolitionist, Black Americans had "tilled the ground and made fortunes for thousands" (Allen quoted, 322). Black labor had literally built the country. Freed Blacks could—and did—claim the United States as their native land and assert they had earned the right to remain there as free people.

As Seeley makes clear at the outset of this 300-plus-page work, her object is not to compare and contrast the experiences of Black and Native peoples in resisting attempts by the American state to remove them, nor does she evaluate the successes or failures of these two communities of color in actually managing to remain on lands

of their own. Interesting as such explorations might be, they are not the focus of the work. Rather, what Seeley seeks to document is that both Native and Black peoples were present at the creation of the United States. Furthermore, not only were they present, they were *integral* to that creation. They lived and worked within the borders of the new United States, shared in the debates over the governance of the new nation, and by their visible presence pressed Americans to recognize more expansive forms of inclusion in the new republic. She reminds us that, from its origin, the United States has been a multiracial society, a project built by hands of many colors. There was no all-white founding of the nation. In our current fraught political moment, this book is a timely and meticulous documentation of this fact.

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