



Samantha Seeley. *Race, Removal, and the Right to Remain: Migration and the Making of the United States*. Williamsburg: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2021. Illustrations. 368 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-6481-1.

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In recent years historians have increasingly explored the relationship between the various efforts to remove and resettle African Americans and Native Americans in the early United States. While previous scholarship has fruitfully examined this topic by approaching it from more limited angles, Samantha Seeley's excellent *Race, Removal, and the Right to Remain: Migration and the Making of the United States* offers the most comprehensive and fully realized examination of the convergence between these policies published to date. By making the concept of removal, and resistance to it, the book's primary focus, Seeley convincingly argues that the early United States was forged in an "Age of Removal" and defined by the nation's consistent dispossession of populations from both its physical territory and its body politic.

The book's structure demonstrates Seeley's commitment to focusing equal attention on both halves of the removal story as they unfolded within interlinked, yet distinct, trajectories for Native Americans and African Americans. After an important stage-setting chapter outlining the precedents for population removal in prerevolutionary colonial policies, the book's main body of chapters are organized into two parts. Part 1 addresses the early United States' efforts to remove Native

peoples up through the era of the War of 1812, while part 2 details the plans to exclude and resettle African Americans during this same time period.

The book's first section makes a strong case for situating removal as the driving force behind US plans for settlement and expansion in the decades following the American Revolution. Seeley shows that in the immediate aftermath of the war, the United States' aggressive federal removal policies were focused on the trans-Appalachian region where white Americans planned to colonize Native land through the processes outlined in the Northwest Ordinances. Throughout the 1780s and 1790s, the Shawnees, Miamis, and Kickapoos consistently defied US designs on the region through both diplomatic and military campaigns. With great nuance and detail Seeley explains how Native political leaders, led, in part, by an alliance called United Indian Nations, sustained robust political arguments and forged new coalitions aimed at thwarting removal. This led to a series of negotiations that resulted in some "permanent" boundary lines restricting US settlement, a process Seeley highlights most prominently in her discussion of the Greenville Treaty Line, established in the Ohio Valley in 1795.

While Native peoples hoped that stable territorial lines would secure a right to remain on their lands, Seeley argues that the United States used these boundaries as a tool of further dispossession. By enabling settlement to push up against and often indiscriminately breach these boundaries, US officials ensured that the growing pressure created by the overwhelming demographic reality of rapid settlement would help lead to divisions within and between various Native groups and force them to accept land cessions in exchange for territories further west. Similarly, the federal government's "civilization policy" during this period also served the ends of removal. It created agricultural demonstration towns that the United States ultimately used as a mechanism for consolidating and exerting control over Native peoples by encouraging them to sell "surplus" land. Seeley shows that although federal officials employed shifting strategies developed in response to persistent Native resistance, removal was firmly established as an underlying object of US policy long before it came to dominate public debate in the 1820s and 1830s.

The second part of the book examines the same postrevolutionary decades but shifts its focus to white Americans' plans to remove free African Americans to colonies in North America or Africa. Seeley shows that while some Black leaders were initially attracted to plans for voluntary emigration to Sierra Leone in the 1780s, many turned away from the concept as white advocates increasingly linked colonization to anti-Black rhetoric and laws. During this period both anti-slavery reformers and anxious slaveholders advanced colonization proposals that reinforced a series of state and local laws aimed at restricting Black migration between states and Black residency within those states. These measures forced free African Americans, often liberated by the wave of postrevolutionary gradual emancipation laws, out of public spaces by positioning them as mere "in-

habitants" with no rights, paralleling the situation of Native peoples also facing removal.

These developments laid the groundwork for the growth of Black activism centered on the "right to remain," a stance Seeley brilliantly demonstrates by analyzing the response to an 1806 Virginia law that required all free Black people to leave the state. In the face of removal, Black residents of Virginia consistently defied laws requiring registration or forced migration from the state. They also used their local connections with whites to help them vouch for their status or petition the state legislature to be granted exceptions to the law. Notably, Seeley shows that the arguments they made on behalf of their right to remain were rooted in localism and community ties, an approach that was remarkably distinct from activists' later emphasis on universal rights to citizenship. This implicit rejection of both colonizationism and forced exclusion serves as a crucial precursor to the emergence of steadfast Black protests against the newly formed American Colonization Society in the late 1810s and the abolitionist movement's full-throated embrace of birthright citizenship by the 1830s.

The book's bifurcated structure can occasionally make these stories of Native American and African American removal feel separated in ways that undercut the effort to show how they emerged from a common context. Nevertheless, Seeley skillfully weaves intersections and comparisons throughout the study and in the final chapter brings the threads of this narrative together very effectively by showing how the United States constructed a white settler empire through the converging logics and policies of removal: first by displacing Native peoples from their land and then excluding Black people from the states carved out of that land.

Race, Removal, and the Right to Remain offers an essential contribution to the literature on these subjects particularly because Seeley has chosen to mainly focus on the era before the high tide of the

African colonization movement and the acceleration of Indian removal policy in the 1820s and 1830s. By chronologically reframing the story in this way, Seeley provides essential contextualization for the emergence of these policies and shows that their growing centrality in the era after the War of 1812 was a product of the dynamics established by the United States' ongoing strategies of settlement, state-building, and racial exclusion.

Seeley's account also brings critical attention to the way that resistance to removal, and an insistence on the right to remain, was a long-standing, and even foundational, element of both Native and Black political formations in the early republic. This fine study shows that removal, as a set of foundational ideas and policies, has made a deep imprint on the United States in ways that we are only beginning to fully appreciate.

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