

F Your Racist History***

E107: *White Homeland: Part 1*

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Narrator: Christian Picciolini

Executive Producer: Christian Picciolini / Goldmill Group

Producer: Jamie Moeller / Goldmill Group

Writers: Maggie Coomer and Jasmin Brand / Dark Nostalgia Works

Editors: Christian Picciolini and Jamie Moeller / Goldmill Group

Fact Checkers: Maggie Coomer and Jasmin Brand / Dark Nostalgia Works

Sound Editor: Ken Pendola

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Show Notes

In this episode of *F*** Your Racist History*, we explore three specific efforts by American white supremacists to create a white homeland abroad. In 1859, a physician turned orator named George Bickley spearheaded a paramilitary movement designed to aid the Southern states in the formation of a massive slave Republic consisting of 36 slave states and encompassing most of South America. He named it Knights of the Golden Circle, and the society was rumored to have nearly 60,000 members on the eve of the Civil War. Then, in 1863, a smooth-talking Florida planter and self-proclaimed abolitionist named Bernard Kock convinced President Abraham Lincoln to start a colonization effort for ex-slaves on an island off the coast of Haiti called Île-à-Vache, or “Cow Island.” Finally, when the Confederacy officially lost the Civil War, Southern slave owners who could not, or would not, face the uncertainty of their future abandoned the United States in favor of a slavery-friendly colony in Brazil where they transplanted their Southern practices and customs; they were called the “Confederados,” and they still have descendants living there to this day.

EPISODE SCRIPT

Introduction

In the last episode, we delved into the volatile pre-Civil War political landscape of the United States and the xenophobic Know-Nothing movement. The Know-Nothings hung their hats on nativism, violence, and anti-immigrant principles. They longed for an America with exclusively white Protestant leadership and prosperity for white descendants of early colonists. But, they weren't the only ones with delusions of racist grandeur.

The 1850s was the decade of the secret society for America. They existed everywhere, in almost every state, and consisted of secretive groups of every race, religion, affiliation, and creed. There were also plenty of charlatans peddling their vision of a perfect America and an ideal way of life; many were selling the notion of a country built around white superiority, of Manifest Destiny, and everyday Americans were buying into the hype.

The idea of Manifest Destiny had infected nearly every class of American, feeding the notion that God had bestowed upon the white man the ability to claim and "tame" the lands of the Western hemisphere and to dominate all so-called "inferior" non-whites into submission.

As divisions over slavery pushed America toward a breaking point, those who made their wealth and livelihood from the exploitation of enslaved peoples started desperately trying to preserve their way of life. Secession fever in the pre-war South ignited the fighting spirit of slaveholders, especially in the face of the growing abolitionist movement sparked by the U.S. Supreme Court Dred Scott case in 1857. This landmark decision stripped all people of African descent of their American citizenship, and in turn, prompted a strong reactionary abolitionist movement to end chattel slavery for good. Slave owners, of course, resisted.

This progressive endeavor, and the abolitionist movement in general, outraged Southern slave owners, and non-slave owners alike, who profited from and revelled in the forced inequity of Black people. They perceived abolition as a personal affront to their survival, so when a Virginian physician turned orator named George Bickley started giving stump speeches preaching secession from the Union and hinted at establishing a "Golden Circle of Slaveholding states from the Mason Dixon line all the way to Central America," people listened. Americans were hungry for it; the idea of a sovereign slave state built upon a foundation of white male

supremacy and domination over all “lesser races,” was intoxicating. People joined Bickley’s not-so-secret society, “Knights of the Golden Circle,” in droves between 1859 and 1861, until followers realized Bickley could talk the talk, but couldn’t exactly walk the walk.

When chattel slavery was officially abolished in the United States with the end of the Civil War and the passage of the 13th Amendment in 1865, hundreds of former Confederates and their families fled the Southern U.S. in favor of establishing a new slaveholding community in the *really* Deep South: the South American country of Brazil. Slavery was still legal in Brazil, and Emperor Dom Pedro II was hungry to exploit cotton cultivation in his country; he welcomed the racist U.S. ex-patriots with open arms. These people were dubbed *Confederados*, and their descendants are still present in Brazil to this day.

During this period, even some people who were in the anti-slavery camp were looking for ways to offload newly freed Black people from the United States. The end of slavery upended almost every aspect of American politics. Many, including even Abraham Lincoln, believed slavery had forever tainted the relationship between whites and Black people, and so the only solution for an America without slavery had to include the deportation of freed Black people. That meant colonization efforts abroad, which Lincoln agreed to.

In today’s episode, we explore efforts by Americans to create a so-called white ethnostate, be it in the United States by ejecting African enslaved peoples, the secession of the Southern states and the acquisition of new foreign territory, or the total abandonment of the United States in favor of a land more friendly to the wants and desires of the wealthy slaveholding class.

This is episode 7 of *F*** Your Racist History: **White Homeland: Part 1.***

Knights of the Golden Circle

On July 4, 1854, the early stages of a subversive racist movement called the Knights of the Golden Circle began to form in the United States.

The group’s organizer, George Bickley, was at the time splitting residences between his home county of Tazewell, Virginia, where he’d founded the local historical society, and Cincinnati, Ohio, where he was a professor at the Eclectic Medical Institute. By the end of 1854, Bickley had developed a small cohort of devoted followers who considered him a great intellectual. A

practicing physician, he landed speaking engagements at medical colleges across the Midwest; his oratory skills were legendary.¹

He published a work called *History of the Settlement and Indian Wars of Tazewell County, Virginia*, and later founded a literary magazine called *West American Review*, serving as editor.² By all accounts, Bickley showed real promise as an author and was developing a respectable public persona in the North, as well as the South.

In 1858, Bickley retired from medicine and went to work for a patent company before plunging full-time into developing his vision for the Knights of the Golden Circle. It was timely; uncertainty gripped the Southern United States and its citizens were in the right headspace for an insurgent movement like Bickley's, which preached secession and the full-scale militarization of the Southern United States to defend itself against the North and abolitionists.

By 1860, Bickley was traveling all over the Southern states to recruit new members. Bickley claimed that at their height, the "Knights" had over 60,000 members, though that number is impossible to confirm. Styled as "General" of the secretive group, he signed all of his writings as President General of the American Legion, K.G.C. However, despite his self-imposed "rank," there is no historical record of him serving in either the Mexican War or the Crimean War, as he and his followers had claimed.

So, what was George Bickley's Knights of the Golden Circle, and how did one get accepted into this shadowy racist organization?

The Knights of the Golden Circle formed as a paramilitary group, as journalist Ollinger Crenshaw put it in his 1941 piece for *The American Historical Review*, "to hasten the southward march of Manifest Destiny."³

¹ Ollinger Crenshaw, "The Knights of the Golden Circle: The Career of George Bickley," *The American Historical Review* 47, no. 1 (October 1941): 23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1838769>. NOTE- Most of the information about Bickley in this section is from this Crenshaw article. Page 24.

² Ollinger Crenshaw, "The Knights of the Golden Circle: The Career of George Bickley," *The American Historical Review* 47, no. 1 (October 1941): 23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1838769>. Page 24.

³ Ollinger Crenshaw, "The Knights of the Golden Circle: The Career of George Bickley," *The American Historical Review* 47, no. 1 (October 1941): 23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1838769>. Page 26.

Bickley's ultimate goal was for the Southern states to secede from the Union and form their own nation and government, while annexing all of Mexico, Cuba, and islands in the West Indies. This would create a sprawling nation of 36 slave states, affectionately named by Bickley as "the Golden Circle."

All Southerners and Northerners who lived in the South and were outspoken about their support of slavery and the superiority of white men were eligible to join—as long as you were white and Protestant.

Membership Degrees

The Knights of the Golden Circle had a complex organizational structure with at least three degrees of membership.

The First Degree was designated for the military branch of the Golden Circle, which consisted of a Home Guard and a Foreign Guard; these initiates either stayed in the United States to fight against those they believed opposed Southern sovereignty, or went further South into Mexico to try to conquer new lands there. At the height of founder George Bickley's vision, the Knights intended to include over 16,000 men in their army.

They also intended to pay their soldiers salaries that were one-eighth higher than those the U.S. army paid, making the choice easier for a Southern man with a martial spirit who might be living hand to mouth. The Knights also proposed something similar to the Revolutionary War-era practice of giving preemption land grants to veterans; they offered either 640 acres abroad or 320 acres in the Southern United States for sympathizers to continue their slaveholding practices. Initiates could otherwise take a cash value of \$400 if they chose.⁴

The Second Degree was the Knights of the Golden Circle's Commercial and Financial division. Again, there were foreign and domestic assignments.

The Foreign Corps was to include supply managers, commercial agents, paymasters, postmasters, clerks, physicians, ministers, teachers, editors, hunters, and negotiators.

⁴ Ollinger Crenshaw, "The Knights of the Golden Circle: The Career of George Bickley," *The American Historical Review* 47, no. 1 (October 1941): 23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1838769>. Page 35.

Essentially, everything necessary to keep a rogue army running smoothly and to help set up communities within newly conquered lands.

The Home Corps would coordinate supplies and logistics, be in charge of recruiting efforts, and craft propaganda favorable to the cause.

The Third Degree within the Knights of the Golden Circle was the highest level of membership and comprised the group's political and organizational leadership. Just like the first two degrees, this one was also broken down into Home and Foreign Councils. To no one's surprise, no women were allowed in the Third Degree.

Being designated as a member of the Home Council entailed absolute secrecy, even from the other degrees of Golden Circle membership. Members of the Home Council acted as strategists, dictating the movements of foot soldiers.

As its name suggests, the Foreign Council governed the Knights of the Golden Circle's foreign interests, including, but not limited to, agriculture, education, manufacturing, finance, religion, policing, war, law, and foreign relations.⁵ This Council included a legislative body in charge of creating and implementing Golden Circle government legislation.

A *New York Times* article from 1861 suggested there was a Fourth Degree for especially influential members who reported directly to Golden Circle President General George Bickley, but because the definitive structure of the organization was shrouded in relative secrecy, it's hard to know for sure.

There were dues, of course, just like any good secret society or social club. To join the First Degree, your dues were one dollar—not cheap in 1859. For the Second, you paid five dollars. Third Degree, you forked over a whopping ten dollars. This might have been weekly or monthly—that much is unclear. Membership into the Knights of the Golden Circle without paying dues was expressly forbidden.

⁵ Ollinger Crenshaw, "The Knights of the Golden Circle: The Career of George Bickley," *The American Historical Review* 47, no. 1 (October 1941): 23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1838769>. Page 35.

The society also relied heavily on rituals, secret handshakes, and passwords. George Bickley was alleged to have been a member of the secretive Know-Nothings movement, so it's easy to see from where these quirks and customs may have evolved.

Invasion Plans

The Knights of the Golden Circle were all about creating the so-called perfect slaveholding Republic that elevated white men and subjugated all other races into slave servitude. Bickley and his followers drafted intricate plans to ensure this newly established independent slave nation would be a power player on the world stage. As secession talk turned into action in the Southern states, Bickley started sharing his plans through “manifestos” published in Southern secessionist newspapers.

His recruiting efforts throughout the South were incredibly effective. He gave speeches and used the press to spread his message.

By the end of 1860, support for Bickley's Knights of the Golden Circle had swelled to thousands of followers; they had a presence in every Southern state, reaching even as far north as Ohio and Illinois. Pro-secessionist Southerners at the time were spoiling to fight, so this newly formed paramilitary organization was just what the quack doctor ordered.

A tentative date for the Knights of the Golden Circle's invasion of Mexico was set for January 1861, and this nugget of news spread quickly among members nationwide.⁶ Pro-secessionist newspapers gleefully reported on the intentions of the Knights and the goals of its leader. Headquarters were established in Knoxville, Tennessee, and there were rumors that Bickley's insurrectionists were accumulating at the Mexican-American border.

Execution

January came and went without any Golden Circle activity, however. Bickley kept touring and giving speeches, but the longer he went without actually taking steps to invade Mexico as he had claimed, the more Southerners started to believe he was all talk. He regularly apologized in speeches he gave to skeptical spectators, telling them not to worry; that the invasion was going

⁶ Ollinger Crenshaw, “The Knights of the Golden Circle: The Career of George Bickley,” *The American Historical Review* 47, no. 1 (October 1941): 23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1838769>. Page 40.

to take place at a later date. He cited logistical issues—apparently mobilizing a largely wishful 16,000 troops across eleven states and getting them to the Southern border to invade a foreign country was more complicated in practice than in theory.

In New Orleans, Louisiana, a group of Knights publicly accused Bickley of being a liar and a cheat, and (*quote*) “through his misrepresentations had deceived between five and six hundred of their fellow citizens.”

Bickley managed to avoid trouble from his followers by fleeing New Orleans and calling for an internal investigation into his administration of the Knights of the Golden Circle, which perhaps unsurprisingly, vindicated him. From there, he traveled back to Virginia to continue recruiting efforts, but his credibility was shot. No one was taking George Bickley seriously anymore.

By the time U.S. Civil War fighting was underway in the summer and fall of 1861, Bickley’s hold on the organization had fizzled, and the Knights of the Golden Circle was kept alive only by independent factions, rumors and press speculation. Many allegedly jumped ship and joined the Ku Klux Klan.

Bickley resurfaced again as a surgeon in Confederate General Braxton Bragg’s army in 1863, but was eventually captured and imprisoned by Union troops after trying to return to his home in Cincinnati, Ohio. Union officials released him in the fall of 1865, but only after the traitor had signed an oath of allegiance to the standing United States government.

Conspiracy to Assassinate Lincoln

When Abraham Lincoln won the presidential election in 1860, some of Bickley’s Knights from Baltimore, Maryland, hatched a plan to assassinate the president-elect as he blew through town en route to Washington, D.C.

Lincoln had planned an 11-day victory tour, stopping in various American cities as he headed to his inauguration, and conspirators intercepted his travel plans. When he stepped off the train in Baltimore, armed assassins would be at the ready to fire on the lanky statesman. Then, once Lincoln was dead, they would install the more movement-friendly John C. Breckenridge, Vice President under James Buchanan, as new president of the United States.

Traveling with Abraham Lincoln at the time was Allan Pinkerton of the future infamous Pinkerton Detective Agency. He uncovered the assassination plot and made a discrete plan with Lincoln to thwart the would-be assassins. After Lincoln delivered his speech in Philadelphia honoring George Washington's birthday, he hopped aboard a speeding train and avoided Baltimore altogether, arriving in Washington, D.C. a few days early. And, so, the plot to kill Lincoln (at least the first one) was foiled.⁷

Supposed Members

Golden Circle members and sympathizers were hardcore secessionists who believed in the expansion of slavery in the United States and abroad. As most wealthy people in the South before, during, and after the Civil War were in that camp, it's hard to narrow down who might have belonged to the secretive group. Still, supposed Knights of the Golden Circle included Confederate President Jefferson Davis (no surprise there), Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest (a founder of the Ku Klux Klan, whose name "Ku Klux" is taken from the Greek word *kuklos*, or "circle"), President Abraham Lincoln's eventual assassin John Wilkes Booth and his co-conspirators John Surratt and Samuel Mudd, the infamous outlaw Jesse James, as well as many more prominent politicians and public figures of the era.⁸

When the Confederacy officially died in 1865, many wealthy slave-owning families fled the United States and emigrated to Brazil where they formed an exclusive community and called themselves "Confederados"; many of these people were believed to also be card-carrying members of the Knights of the Golden Circle.

The Confederados

Following the Civil War, many former Confederates were concerned about facing the consequences of a Union victory; while most were simply unwilling to accept the Confederate loss and the end of slavery. William Hutchinson Norris, a former Alabama State Senator, was one such person. Rather than face an uncertain future in the United States, he, his family, and approximately fifty other slave-owning American families traveled to South America in search of a new home where they could preserve their "Southern way of life," i.e., the institution of slavery.

⁷ Brad Meltzer, "The First Secret Plot to Kill Abraham Lincoln," Time, April 20, 2020, <https://time.com/5829275/first-secret-plot-kill-lincoln/>.

⁸ "Knights of the Golden Circle," Wikipedia, May 30, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knights_of_the_Golden_Circle.

After a long and arduous journey, the group ended up in the Brazilian region of São Paulo and established a town that would become known as Americana.

Norris, together with men like Ezekiel B. Pyles, the final military escort for Confederate President Jefferson Davis; H.F. Steagall, a Confederate spy, George S. Barnsley, assistant surgeon in the 8th Georgia Infantry Division; Johnathan Ellsworth, drummer, 1st Arkansas Brigade; and Benjamin C. Yancy of the 16th Battalion, Alabama Sharpshooters⁹, would come together and build this bizarre little enclave where the Confederacy would continue to live on. These “Confederados” created an insular community that allowed them to continue their white-supremacist lifestyles uninterrupted. Brazil did not have much of an abolitionist movement in the 1860s, so the Confederados went relatively unopposed exploiting the Indigenous peoples.

Although Americana is often considered the most successful Confederado colony, it was far from the only one. During this time, thousands of disgruntled U.S. Confederates fled to Brazil, where the practice of slavery was still legal. One such American was Lansford Hastings, who wrote *An Emigrants Guide to Brazil* in 1867. During the Civil War, Hastings sided with the Confederacy despite being born in the North and living in the West. Looking for a new venture after his short-lived scheme to unite California with the Confederacy failed, he established his own colony in Brazil. Hastings then assisted Emperor Dom Pedro II in attracting other “Lost Cause” sympathizers to Brazil. As he had done on the westward trail, he published a guide to entice new colonists which promised to help them make their way. He died of fever at sea in 1870, attempting to guide a ship of settlers to his Confederado colony. It was only his second trip.¹⁰

Brazil, or at least Emperor Dom Pedro II, craved this kind of immigration as a way to boost Brazil’s economy. Cotton had become a hot commodity, as the world was suffering from a cotton famine. The Emperor wanted to fill the gap in the market and thought he might just do it by appealing to the *right* kinds of people: white Americans. He had provided a safe haven for Confederate ships during the U.S. Civil War and now wanted to extend that to anyone looking to leave the United States and settle elsewhere. This particularly appealed to those Southerners who had their properties destroyed or confiscated during the war. The Emperor promised cheap

⁹ *THE “LOST COLONY” OF THE CONFEDERACY*. (2021). Vt.edu.

<https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/VA-news/VA-Pilot/issues/1995/vp950418/04180268.htm>

¹⁰ Place, E. (2016, April 22). The Emigrants’ Guide to Lansford Hastings. The History Bandits; The History Bandits. <https://thehistorybandits.com/2016/04/22/the-emigrants-guide-to-lansford-hastings/>

land (some plots cost as little as 22 cents an acre compared to an average of \$7 in the US at the time), tax breaks, and immediate citizenship rights. In a significant move, often called “Brazilian Fever” by newspapers of the era, thousands of Americans emigrated. Estimates put the number of self-exiles at close to 20,000 people.

Confederate immigrants brought more than just a racist ideology tied to an illegitimate Southern battle flag. They also brought technology such as the plow, new crops like cotton, tobacco, and watermelon, and they established the first Southern Baptist churches in Brazil. Like other South American countries, Brazil could, and would, overlook the negatives of these newcomers in favor of “progress” and profit.

Back home, prominent Confederate figureheads like Robert E. Lee and President Jefferson Davis asked people not to go to Brazil. They desperately needed their support in America while the South was rejoining the Union and working things out with the federal government. A white middle-class exodus from Southern states could spell disaster for their way of life and the future of the newly established government. Realistically, those fears were unfounded as President Lincoln searched for a quick way to reunite the states, and his successors sought compromises that would keep the “peace” and also allow for terrible injustices and further oppression in the name of status quo white supremacy.

Brazil eventually abolished slavery (as the last country in the Western world to do so) in 1888. The installation of Jim Crow laws in the United States convinced roughly half of the Confederados to return to their home country, and many left the enslaved people they had taken to Brazil behind. Those whites that stayed eventually learned the language, moved to other parts of the country, and many even married native Brazilians.

In 1972, then Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter was shocked when he visited the Confederados settlement of Americana with his wife, Rosalynn. Her great uncle W. S. Wise had been a founding member of Americana. The couple did not expect to be greeted by Brazilians who spoke with an American Southern drawl while adorning themselves in Confederate flags and other Southern insignia. After the visit, Carter said:

"My most significant feeling was one of great sadness. They had foregone for all those generations the enjoyment of being a part of this nation they still revere so deeply. The

futility of it all was apparent. None of them looked upon their ancestors as mistaken. They didn't seem to feel any self-pity."¹¹

Side note: many of Adolf Hitler's Nazis who escaped Germany following the end of World War II also found themselves in Brazil and settled near São Paulo and in the vicinity of Americana. For example, Dr. Josef Mengele, known as the "Angel of Death," lived approximately 20 miles from Americana along with several other prominent Nazis and their families when they were discovered. It might be a coincidence, but something about this area garners a distinct kind of attention. Seeing that Hitler's Nazism was deeply inspired by American antisemites like Henry Ford and U.S. Jim Crow laws, it isn't too much of a stretch to believe this wasn't just a "happy accident."

To this day, Confederate nostalgia and sentiments are still very much alive in the Brazilian town of Americana. Celebrations known as "Festa Confederada" take place quarterly. Women in 19th-century style hoop skirts, people dressed in Confederate flag patterns, and a group called the Fraternity of American Descendants all attend. Festivities include dancing to old Confederate songs and American country music while eating traditional Southern foods like fried chicken, biscuits, vinegar pie, and chess pie. Most attendees and residents insist that there is nothing racist meant by their persistent use of the Confederate flag. A Brazilian university even conducted research that claimed "only" 66 enslaved people were controlled by U.S. expats there,¹² and state that this "fact" makes it clear they did not move to the only South American country that allowed slavery for the purposes of expanding slavery. *Hmm.*

In reality, historians can point to 54 families that bought at least 536 slaves upon their arrival in Brazil.¹³

Very little is known about those American Confederados who first emigrated to Brazil. But, in the last few years, rising interest in the Black Lives Matter movement has encouraged some regular Festa Confederada attendees to examine their long-standing traditions. A 35-year-old Brazilian

¹¹ Shifon Berumen, "The Confederates of Brazil," The Confederates of Brazil (Esri, September 25, 2019), <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/aa4436c5ef3946c6aea6b910ed96016a>.

¹² Alcides Gussi, an independent researcher of State University of Campinas

¹³ McCoy, T. (2020, July 11). They lost the Civil War and fled to Brazil. Their descendants refuse to take down the Confederate flag. Washington Post; The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/brazil-confederate-flag-civil-war-americana-santa-barbara/2020/07/11/1e8a7c84-bec4-11ea-b4f6-cb39cd8940fb_story.html

woman who has attended the feast her entire life told the *Washington Post* in 2020 that despite how proud her town was, she had begun asking that the Confederate flag be removed from public display. “It represents my family’s traditions. But, in the entire world, in the United States, they know what it *also* represents.” I’m guessing she means *racism*.

Île-à-Vache, “Cow Island”

As early as 1816, organized societies, such as the American Colonization Society, also dedicated themselves to finding ways to disenfranchise and deport newly freed Blacks out of the United States. These manufactured societies consisted of predominantly white, middle-class Americans and contained a large number of both abolitionists and slaveholders in their ranks. The leading theory giving credence to these colonization efforts abroad: the belief that the so-called integration of Black people after they had earned their freedom would be an impossible effort in the United States; and Black people would be too angry and bitter after being enslaved by whites to cooperate. In short, a future “free” America was for white people only, and they feared a reckoning for their past racist practices.

There is little known about a man named Bernard Kock, but he is best remembered for being associated with one of President Abraham Lincoln’s biggest political missteps. In the midst of the Civil War, Kock, a self-proclaimed abolitionist (who also owned a cotton plantation), proposed a “free” Black colony on a small island off the Haitian coast called Île-à-Vache, or “Cow Island.” He claimed to have concocted the idea after seeing the high quality of Haitian cotton while attending the 1862 Great Exhibition in London. Nevermind the event had taken place over a decade earlier than he claimed, in 1851.

Wherever Kock might have been that year, by August 8th, 1862, he managed to sign a lease with the Haitian government for him to occupy Cow Island and harvest its natural resources. He was granted ten years with an option to extend for another decade if all was agreeable and went along as planned. Payment would be 15 cents an acre in rent plus 35-percent of any lumber or cotton processed on the island. Kock was also offered tax exemptions and protection by the Haitian government. There were additional perks for Kock’s workers—newly freed Blacks from the United States—that he brought in, such as the promise to them to become farmers or landholders when their contract was over, and immediate Haitian citizenship upon arrival. President Fabre Geffrard of Haiti hoped Kock’s plan for the uninhabited island would create a new middle class for his country. However, his enthusiasm wasn’t matched by all in the Haitian

government at the time, some of whom opposed the plan altogether. As a relatively new independent nation that had struggled with colonization of their own throughout its history, white men with proposals of colonization did not go over well.

However, Kock managed to talk President Geffrard into the plan by agreeing that all his workers would be of African or Native descent and that only 10-percent of the overseers would be white. Kock planned to set up the whole project, as he believed that newly freed Blacks would need “meaningful work...with wise and paternal regulation.” *Hmm*. Now, he just needed to convince the United States government. Luckily for Kock, President Abraham Lincoln’s stance on Black colonization was initially favorable.

Lincoln saw colonization and emancipation somewhat as joint efforts; so, he offered to pay fifty dollars to anyone for every freed Black person they took out of the country and gave a job.

By September 1862, Kock sought out Lincoln’s Secretary of State, William H. Seward, for aid in funding his new colony abroad. However, it was bad timing; Central and South American countries were growing tired of Lincoln incentivizing Black colonization and began to resist. In an effort to smooth foreign relations, Secretary of State Seward published strict requirements to curtail foreign governments complaints about the program. Anyone wanting to claim the money offered for newly freed Blacks had to meet four requirements:

1. Homes for them would be ready on arrival;
2. Adequate compensation would be provided for their work;
3. Schools and medical care would be readily available for those in need;
4. And, foreign governments would need to grant emigrants the rights of citizenship.

Kock saw this as a roadblock to his colonization efforts, so he decided to go over Seward’s head and headed for President Lincoln’s office. He over-promised on Seward’s requirements in an attempt to get Lincoln to agree. He told the president that he had leased Cow Island and wanted to take 5,000 freed Black people to work the land. Kock would provide comfortable housing, food, schools, hospitals, and churches. He would also offer a four-year contract with compensation. He wrote:

“At the expiration of the term for which these persons are employed, the Government of Hayti [sic], by special law, will give each family sixteen acres of good land, and to each single man eight acres, so that, with this grant, and the money earned during the four years of service, the intelligent negro may enter upon a life of freedom and independence, conscious that he has earned the means of his livelihood, and at the same time disciplined himself to the duties, the pleasures, and the wants of free labor.”¹⁴

He then asked Lincoln to help provide safe passage and supplies, like food and farm equipment, to get the colony started.

Kock’s deal seemed too good to be true, and Lincoln had serious reservations. However, the president promised him he would consider it. In a letter from January of 1863, Kock tried to further assure Lincoln that he did not want to take the money and run. Instead of taking the cash money himself, he offered to let the government arrange transportation and purchase food directly for workers to prove his plan was legitimate. Lincoln and Seward were still not satisfied.

With a deadline set by the Haitian government looming, Kock went to New York in search of fresh investors. He found Paul Forbes, Leonard W. Jerome, and Charles Tuckerman, and offered them 50-percent ownership of the Île-à-Vache colony in exchange for \$70,000 cash. Kock walked away with the funds to move his plan forward.

The first ship was chartered in 1863, and just under 500 people boarded to start the colony. Before the ship set sail, the U.S. government asked for a change to the contract before they would sign off on payment. They wanted a guarantee of the performance outlined in the agreement. At the behest of his lawyers, Kock then signed over control of the contracts to his three business partners. This made the investors a little uneasy, mostly because they were unsure if they would be able to claim the \$50 per person promised by Lincoln. Feeling confident, Kock offered to instead cut his share in half, giving everyone involved an equal 25-percent interest.

Finally, in April 1863, the first ship left the United States. Although the Haitian government’s deadline had long passed, the shiploads of people were welcomed to the island and

¹⁴ Thompson, B. (2011, December 30). Bernard Kock Colonized Cow Island With Freed Slaves. Thompsongenealogy.com.
<https://thompsongenealogy.com/2011/12/bernard-kock-colonized-cow-island-with-freed-slaves/>

immediately began setting up what buildings they could while they awaited a second ship with lumber to build their lodging.

But, it never arrived.

The investors were waiting to see if the venture was worth it before they sunk more money into it. Kock and his workers were livid. The sawmill equipment was supposed to be on the second ship, along with other vital tools to get the colony up and running. Without them, it would be very difficult for them to survive.

In the meantime, Kock had no problem implementing other aspects of the plan, though. The investors had printed money with his name on it to serve as official currency on the island, worthless anywhere else. Kock began charging the new colonists for everything. Eventually, two months after their arrival, the U.S. government sent Haitian consul James DeLong to check in on the operation and was shocked at what he observed.

“Affairs on the Island is kept in the dark as much as possible; no person is permitted to land on the Island without a passport...The goods that [Kock] brought with him from the States said to be for the Emigrants are admitted free of duty; these goods are sold to the Emigrants at an enormous profit...Mr. Kock also after he landed on the Island claimed the right to the title of Governor...the Emigrants that had the Smallpox were put on one end of the Island, in what he called a Hospital: the Physician attending on them told my informant that their position was no better than laying on the sea shore in the open air: the number that have died I have not been able to ascertain but said to be very considerable...Emigrants are not permitted to leave the Island...”¹⁵

DeLong also commented on the amount of weaponry Kock had amassed for the colony and said he believed it would do more harm than good.

He wasn't wrong.

¹⁵ “Abraham Lincoln Papers: Series 2. General Correspondence. 1858-1864: James de Long to Henry Conard, June 25, 1863 (Bernard Kock and Colony on Ile a Vache),” The Library of Congress, 2015, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ma14262000/>.

After much pleading, the second ship finally arrived at Cow Island, but it did not contain any of the much-needed supplies. Instead, the investors sent one of their own people to further investigate the ongoing viability of the project.

Without proper shelter and supplies, many of the original colonists and workers couldn't take it anymore. Armed, they staged a rebellion. Unable to quell it on his own, Kock called on the Haitian authorities, who arrested and imprisoned at least a dozen people.

Following the adverse reports, unrest, and total failure to launch the colony, it was clear that Île-à-Vache, or Cow Island, would not survive. The investors tried to change the contract with the Haitian government, at which point they took over and expelled Bernard Kock from the settlement. He returned to the United States with many of the original 500 colonists in December 1863.

Conclusion

The abolition of slavery and the subsequent reconstruction of the United States was much more complex than just ending the Civil War and the passage of some progressive constitutional amendments. The racist mindsets and divisions that led to war in the first place didn't die with Confederate General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House in April 1865; in fact, they lived on to the point that entire families relocated to a new foreign country to live out their dreams of a slavocracy.

Even though groups like the Knights of the Golden Circle failed because of George Bickley's inadequacy as a leader, he managed to rally tens of thousands of Americans behind the cause of secession and the invasion of much of Latin America. President Abraham Lincoln agreed with colonizer Bernard Kock that the only way to co-exist with freed Blacks was to expel them. American Confederados set up a successful slave colony in Brazil with 20,000 white emigrants, and their descendants still celebrate this history today. Why don't we discuss this in our school books? And why are legislatures across the United States now passing laws to prevent teachers and students from using texts and lessons that do critically examine these parts of our history?

To this day, after nearly every presidential election where a Democrat has been elected, constituents in Texas formulate a petition for secession from the Union. Even former Texas Governor Rick Perry mentioned secession at a rally in 2009, and secession talk often crops up

whenever conservative Republicans see something they don't like being championed by progressives.¹⁶

But, secession fervor isn't just exclusive to Texas or Southern Republicans. The Libertarian Party in the United States was founded in the 1970s with these same secessionist principles built into its party doctrine:

"We shall support recognition of the right to secede. Political units or areas which do secede should be recognized by the United States as independent political entities where: secession is supported by a majority within the political unit, the majority does not attempt suppression of the dissenting minority, and the government of the new entity is at least as compatible with human freedom as that from which it seceded."

We've covered some of the major American efforts to formulate a white-supremacist ethnostate abroad, but what about here at home? Well, we are going to dig into that in the second half of this two-part series, so in the next episode, we will detail specific States' efforts to quash equality efforts and undercut people of color domestically...all while using the recognized laws of the land. From the state of Oregon joining the Union in 1859 with statutes that prevented Black people from settling there, to highway interstate systems intentionally designed to wipe out entire sections of predominantly Black neighborhoods, the extraordinary (but typical) exclusionary methods used throughout our country's history, even in more recent decades, to create prominent white areas provide stunning context to the words "systemic racism."

It's time to open our eyes. And that must start with finally acknowledging that racism was built into our history from day one. It does no good for anyone to ignore our past when people are still being harmed in the present by it.

If you're anything like me, you love America, despite what it was or how deeply we're still struggling through this great democracy in progress. You love and respect it for the promise of what we *can* be: one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for *all*, equally. Maybe, if we start acknowledging how we *all* really got here, we've got a fighting chance to get where we need to be.

¹⁶ Kevin Hall, "Perry's Secession Rhetoric No Joke for Top U.S. Trade Official," McClatchy, March 2010, <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/politics-government/article24575638.html>.

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Source Notes

<https://www.nytimes.com/1861/08/30/archives/the-knights-of-the-golden-circle.html>

- August 30, 1861- NYT Times article called The Knights of the Golden Circle
- The Knights of the Golden Circle may have evolved from the Order of the Lone Star and organization formed to conquer Cuba and Nicaragua.
- With the rise of the Free Soilers, former violent members of Lone Star formed the Knights of the Golden Circle.
 - Aims of the KGC:
 - Raise an army of no less than 16,000 to conquer Mexico and establish a monarchy “resting on the basis of slave institutions.”
 - Once they win the battle, KGC are to go to Guanajuato to form a treaty with the Governor, Michael Doblado, during which Doblado is to pledge 16,000 of his own men to help subdue the rest of Mexico.
 - To become a member, you have to apply. Each applicant is sworn to secrecy under penalty of death before the particulars of the Order are revealed.
 - In order to be admitted you have to be American born, a slave owner (or can produce proof they are loyal to the Southern cause), and is a Protestant he is admitted as a soldier of the Order.
 - If the Chiefs like him, they will admit him to the second degree and tell him where they keep their stores of ammunition in Monterey and tell him who to seek out to get paid for his service.
 - “He is also supposed to be on active service and the President has, we perceive, summoned all Kentukian members to attend a rendezvous where they will be drilled and organized by regular instructors, and whence they are, for the present, to control the Kentucky elections in favor of Southern men.”
 - If he proves himself to be influential, he is admitted to the 4rd degree, the Council of the order, which reports directly to the President George Bickley. He “regulates the affairs of the order,” and is apparently the future monarch.
 - A member of the 4th degree “swears to obtain all the neophytes he can, to support his colleagues of the Knights of the Columbian Star in all efforts to conquer Mexico and Southernize its institutions.”
 - They intend to drive all free Black people into Mexico and turn the entire population of Mexican people into enslaved people. “Dividing them as chattels among the members of the Order.”
 - “He is too content with the exclusion of every Roman Catholic from office and from the priesthood, and to support a system of passports enforced by the penalty of death.
 - “It reads rather like a dream of some mad slaveholder than a grave and definite project, which, nevertheless, we believe it to be. The Order is already powerful in

the South, the alliance with the Governor is sufficiently probable, and the whole plan is strictly in accordance with the views known to be entertained by the most prominent slaveholders.”

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Knights-of-the-Golden-Circle> Britannica Article about KGC

- 1859- George Bickley launched the fraternal order
- He wanted to annex all of Mexico for the Southern United States
- Bickley claimed the order had 65,000 members
- After the Civil War, the Sons of Liberty took its place.
- Fernando Wood, Clement L. Vallandigham were reputed chief officers.
- Treason in Indianapolis in 1864 by the Sons of Liberty- leaders were sentenced to death or imprisonment. 1866, US Supreme court overturned the decisions

https://www.jstor.org/stable/1838769?read-now=1&seq=4#page_scan_tab_contents

- George William Lamb Bickley- Born in southwest Virginia in 1819. He ran away from home and spent “a youth and early manhood replete with adventure.”
- 1850- He pops up on the radar as a practicing medical physician in Tazewell, Virginia.
- Founded the local historical society there and published *History of the Settlement and Indian Wars of Tazewell County, Virginia* in 1852.
- Published a fiction novel soon after called *Adalaska*
- Spent 7 years teaching at Eclectic Medical Institute of Cincinnati from 1851 to 1858.
- Established a literary magazine called *West American Review* and became editor.
- Claimed he went to medical school at the University of London and graduated in 1842, but the college has no record of him, and the famous Dr. Elliston whom he claimed signed his diploma resigned from the school in 1838. FRAUD
- 1858- Bickley retires from medicine and goes to work for the American Patent Company of Cincinnati
- 1859- Establishes the secret society Knights of the Golden Circle
- Styled himself as “General” and signed his manifestos as President General of the American Legion, K. G. C. There is no evidence that he served in the Mexican War or in the Crimean War as some people have claimed.
- “Prepared to hasten the southward march of Manifest Destiny.” (p. 4)
- “Diplomatic relations between the United States and Mexico in the decade prior to 1860 were characterized by friction and mutual distrust. Boundary disputes, the activities of William Walker, the desire of the Buchanan administration to purchase Chihuahua, and Sam Houston’s proposal in 1858 to establish a protectorate over Mexico produced uneasiness in the latter country.
- Mexico was in turmoil since 1858- Conservative and Liberal factions were fighting a guerrilla war.
- “A Southern urban journal stated the axiom, “Territorial extension is the prevailing idea of the present age,” and felt confident that the process of Manifest Destiny would give all Spanish America to the United States.” (p.6)
- Intense newspaper quotes about the US annexing Mexico and driving the “Indians” into the sea while enslaving all Africans and “half-breeds.”

- Newspapers reported that Governor Sam Houston had come to the same conclusion as the KGC and was ready to invade Mexico and annex it to the United States.
- George Bickley outlined his aims for the KGC in a pamphlet for members, then wrote several manifestos and delivered public speeches. Secret society? Not really.
- “The KGC were prepared to colonize Mexico, peaceably and without the violation of any law; indeed, it was claimed that a class existed in Mexico which would welcome them, and Juarez (leader of the Liberal faction) was said to have sought and abstained a promise of their cooperation.
- “In an elaborate exposition, the KGC was declared to be a powerful military organization, around which would rally the forces that would disentrall the cotton states from the alleged oppression of the manufacturing and commercial interests of the North.” (p.8)
- In theory, the KGC would form a new national police force throughout this slave empire.
- “But whatever the future held in store for America, the KGC were to be guided by that chauvinistic principle, “The South, right or wrong.” (p. 11)
- “The Vicksburg *Sun* set forth the two objectives of the KGC as to cultivate a martial spirit in the South and to give the South a military organization capable of defending her rights at home and abroad.”
- KGC- Eligibility for membership: all Southerners, and Northerners who lived in the South and supported their way of life, i.e. white supremacy and subjugation of whole races into slavery.
- “Provisions was made for three distinct divisions, which in turn were grouped into classes, and finally the classes were subdivided into departments.”
- 1st Degree: military division, “appealing strongly to the chivalry and martial pride of our people.” Foreign and Home Guards.. Foreign Guards were the ones to fight in Mexico, while the Home guard would be made up of men too old or injured to fight abroad who would stay and fight for Southern sovereignty in the lower US. (This is very similar to the actual Home Guards established throughout the South during the Civil War)
 - “The army is composed of four divisions of four thousand men each. Each division has four regiments and each regiment ten companies. There is one Major General, four Brigadier Generals, sixteen Colonels, and sixteen Lieutenant Colonels. Thirty two majors, one hundred sixty captains, and staff and department officers. Salaries one-eighth higher than the U.S. Army. Preemption land grants for Privates: 640 acres of land abroad, 320 acres or \$400 in the US.
- 2nd Degree (or Division): commercial and financial division, also separated into Foreign and Home Corps.
 - Foreign Corps: Sutlers, commercial agents, paymasters, postmasters, clerks, physicians, ministers, teachers, editors, hunters, negotiators.
 - Home Corp: Advice, supplies, recruits, and favorable propaganda.
- Third Degree: American Legion, political and governing body of the organization.
 - Foreign and Home Councils
 - Home Council: membership was kept secret even from the lower divisions.
 - Foreign Council: 10 departments- agriculture, education, manufacturing, finance, religion, police, war, navigation, law, and foreign relations.

- “A high court of appeals drawn from three classes of the council, formed the legislative body, which made laws governing the KGC with special regard to numerous capitalist interests. NO WOMEN IN THE THIRD DEGREE.
- “An elaborate ritual, solemn secrets, esoteric codes, signs and passwords known only to the initiated, were all provided, doubtless by the ingenuity of General Bickley, perhaps suggested by the Know-Nothing order, of which he was said to have been a member.”
- Membership dues required: \$1 for the first degree, \$5 for the second, and \$10 for the third.
- “We aim at the establishment of a great Democratic monarch- a Republican Empire, which shall vie in grandeur with the Old Roman Empire, and which shall regenerate and vivify society in Spanish America.”- per the Degree Book by Bickley
- The official organization’s birth is cited as 1859, but organizing by Bickley and his followers might have begun as early as July 4, 1854 (p. 16)
- In 1860, Bickley established a “warlike Manifest Destiny journal in Baltimore called *American Cavalier*.
- Months-long stump speaking campaign throughout the Southern States in 1860- Bickley drew thousands of supporters this way.
- Legal Troubles:
 - While in New Orleans, a group of KGC brought charges against him for being a liar and a cheat, “and that through his misrepresentations they had deceived between five and six hundred of their fellow citizens.”
 - Bickley bugged out, but this severely hurt his reputation.
 - He called a convention to have the organization investigated, and unsurprisingly, he was vindicated.
- Bickley went back to Virginia where he attempted to recruit more followers, but no one was taking him seriously.
- KGC Headquarters were established in Knoxville, TN- interesting, considering out of all the parts of Tennessee, East Tennessee was the least dependent on slavery and held the most pro-Union sentiment.
- Initially, word had spread that the invasion of Mexico was supposed to take place in January in 1860, but the longer the movement dragged on without invasion of Mexico, the more people doubted Bickley. He actually started apologizing at speeches and saying,

“Don’t worry! The invasion will take place at a later date.”

 - He blamed the fate of William Walker in Honduras, and logistical issues with getting his army there.
- Bickley’s hold on the organization dissolved in 1861, and the movement was largely kept alive by rumor and press fights.
- Bickley shows up as a surgeon in Bragg’s army in 1863, and then is summoned to Tennessee by General Rosecrans when he tries to get a pass to go through the lines to his home in Cincinnati. He lied to Rosecrans when asked if he was the “General Bickely,” and said that he was only his nephew, at which point Rosecrans let him go but with a detective to ensure he reported to Union officials in Cincinnati. He escaped to Indiana,

but was captured and his identity discovered. He was imprisoned in various Union prisons before he was released in the fall of 1865. He had to sign an oath of Amnesty to the US before they would release him.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/118133940/?terms=Knights%20of%20the%20Golden%20Circle&match=1>

- Detroit Free Press reprint of a New Orleans Courier March 6, 1860

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/591869141/?terms=Knights%20of%20the%20Golden%20Circle&match=1>

- Scathing article about KGC from the Louisville Courier-Journal

<http://thompsongenealogy.com/2011/12/bernard-kock-colonized-cow-island-with-freed-slaves/>

- Bernard Kock convinced Lincoln to support the deportation of freed Black people to Cow Island (Ile-a-Vache), off the coast of Haiti.
 - Lincoln signed the order the day before he issued the Emancipation Proclamation (December 31, 1862). Kock reported that Lincoln seemed to be in favor of the plan.
 - *The author goes on to make a big deal of this point saying that Lincoln signed this order before he signed the Emancipation Proclamation that made no mention of new colonization efforts. However, Lincoln had been working on the EP for quite some time and had signed it as an executive order on September 22, 1862, to go into effect January 1, 1863.*
 - Kock considered himself an abolitionist and thought that this would give freed people “meaningful work” on the cotton plantations.
- On August 8, 1862, he signed a 10-year lease with an option to extend at roughly 35 cents a hectare or 15 cents an acre plus 35% of the lumber cut on the island.
 - “It was a herculean task, but by dint of proper management and an iron energy, I obtained ... a twenty years’ lease with conditions just as I wanted.”
- An armed rebellion occurred on the island after investors failed to provide lumber to build homes.
- Kock later printed a *Statement of Facts* that attempts to refute his sole responsibility.
- Developed the idea after visiting the Great Exhibition London where he saw Haitian cotton on display.
 - He was also aware of other colonies like Liberia.
- In June 1862, he met President Geffrard of Haiti who promised assistance with the project but wanted to create a Black middle class, not exactly the same vision as Kock.
 - The government offered him protection and exemption from certain taxes/customs imports.
 - Part of the agreement was to only have 10% white overseers and only employ farmworkers of African or Native descent.
 - Any colonist would become a naturalized Haitian citizen on arrival and when the lease expired they would be given preference to become farmers or landholders.

- In September 1862, Secretary of State William H. Seward published a circular that stated that foreign governments looking to enter into a similar agreement must have homes ready on arrival, make adequate compensation, make schools and medical care available, and give emigrants the rights of citizens.
- Antislavery societies from 1816 onwards discussed the idea of colonizing other countries for freed Black people to “remove the cause of disruption” to polite white society.
- The Lincoln administration distinctly linked emancipation and colonization.
- In an attempt to get Lincoln’s attention following the Seward circular, Kock promised almost utopia at Cow Island. He claimed each family would have a “comfortably furnished house, with a garden spot attached.” He also said the community would have a hospital, church, and schoolhouse. And, promised a four-year contract to each family.
 - He also told the president that “the Government of Haiti, by special law, will give each family sixteen acres of good land, and to each single man eight acres, so that, with this grant, and the money earned during the four years of service, the intelligent negro may enter upon a life of freedom and independence, conscious that he has earned the means of his livelihood, and at the same time disciplined himself to the duties, the pleasures, and the wants of free labor.” He also promised that he would enforce “wise and paternal regulation, ... see to the physical and moral wants of those entrusted to my care.”
 - *This seems to be different from what the Haitian government agreed to, which was a land or work offering after the lease agreement was up.*
- He asked the government to pay for transportation, subsistence for a short period, agricultural implements, and machinery.” He offered to refund the money within two years, basing projection on wartime cotton prices (that had gone up by 400% in some places and was totally unobtainable in other places in the world).
- Found three partners; Paul S. Forbes, Leonard W. Jerome, and Charles K. Tuckerman who gained a 50% control for a \$70,000 investment.
- As things carried on Kock started having issues in Washington and was urged by his lawyer to turn over the contracts to his partners, which he did. However, the US government added a clause to their contract requiring Haiti to guarantee the performance of the plantation. To quell partners’ concerns he reduced his share to 25%, which by his calculations would have netted him \$250,000 with the first cotton crop. The partners never signed the new agreement and Kock left with just a promise from each of them.
- Two ships departed for Cow Island. The first made it and they started construction of several buildings and a wharf immediately.
 - The second ship, containing the sawmill, never arrived. The investors refused to send it until they saw how things were playing out.
- The investors stalled to send more money and made demands on how the workers were to be treated and housed.
- Kock and his investors had promised to pay the workers, but in printed money that was Kock’s own currency, only good at “the company store.”
- July 1863, a ship finally arrived with additional provisions, but not the lumber needed to build more housing.

- So began the armed rebellion. Workers were upset that they had been so misled.
 - Kock wrote, “I had only seven white men to rely upon (my cook and steward, both Germans, refusing to stand by me), and in all four rifles and twenty five double-barreled shot-guns). The negroes had nearly all revolvers, but fortunately little or no ammunition, the importation of which into the island, together with that of whiskey, I had forbidden since my arrival. But they had axes, hoes, and machetes—all dangerous weapons, especially the latter.”
- Kock had 15 Haitian soldiers step in and at least a dozen people arrested.
- He then stopped feeding the workers.
- By August, the investors had approached the Haitian government to change the contract and a Haitian organization took over leadership.
- By the end of 1863, it had failed, crops were growing but went unattended and Lincoln sent a ship to bring back the surviving workers.

- Initially, Kock wanted to create a colony for white European settlers.
- There was a rumor that Kock was going to sell the freed people to a Confederate pirate???
 - *The author says this is obviously false, but he is a relation of Kock.*