

Dollars and Dominion

“The harbour is a great basin, capacious enough for a small navy; and its entrance, though safe and easy, is through a narrow strait, which even the diminutive forts and antiquated ordnance of the Danes are able to defend.”¹ Thus wrote William Seward’s son Frederick, alluding to the fact that the secretary of state’s 1866 trip to the Caribbean had a dual purpose, part recuperation and part reconnaissance. To achieve an American toehold in the Caribbean, Seward, travelling on the steamer USS *De Soto*, had decided to dip his own toe in first. When the Seward family arrived at St. Thomas on January 9, 1866, they found conditions favorable, though dated, for strategic and economic purposes. “It has as peculiar advantages for a naval station as it has for commercial support,” Frederic Seward wrote.² From an American perspective, it was lucky that this island had fallen into Denmark’s “possession” as the Northern European nation was “strong enough to keep it, but not aggressive enough to use it as a base for warfare.”³ By 1866, however, Denmark was in decline, and the islands’ revitalization through American strength and energy, Seward believed, would be an advantage for all involved.⁴

¹ Frederick W. Seward, *Reminiscences of a War-Time Statesman and Diplomat, 1830–1915* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1916), 263, 301–302.

² *Ibid.* ³ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁴ Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 22. Frederick Seward’s emphasis on strength and aggression lends support to Hoganson argument that the “Civil War intensified the emphasis on manhood in U.S. politics” and that the “postwar era was a time of mass male political participation.” In myriad ways, these years were years of national revitalization. Reunion, the constitutional abolition of slavery, and the

After his personal inspection and visit to other Caribbean localities, Seward was therefore well-prepared to make a concrete offer when he returned to the United States on January 28, 1866.⁵ Equally importantly, Danish politicians were willing to listen.

American strength and Danish weakness, along with timing, were key variables as the negotiations moved forward. By the late summer of 1865, Seward had recovered enough from the April assassination attempt to resume negotiations, and Raaslöf, realizing Denmark's *Kleinstaat* status, kept advising Danish politicians to engage in negotiations.⁶ Raaslöf by late 1865 acknowledged that the domestic situation in the United States was deteriorating but nonetheless said he "expected that there would be considerable patriotic support for a policy of strengthening the country militarily and strategically through annexation of the Danish islands."⁷ Raaslöf's initial optimism was not unfounded. The American government, authorized by President Lincoln, had initiated negotiations, Seward was personally invested, and the American secretary of the navy, Gideon Welles, during the Civil War described St. Thomas as a potentially "desirable acquisition as a coaling station and central point in the West Indies."⁸

However, by March 30, 1866, Welles was already starting to think more critically about spending millions of dollars on an island group that could, essentially, just be taken by force:

Mr. Seward brought up in the Cabinet to-day, the subject of the purchase of the Danish islands in the West Indies, particularly St. Thomas . . . He proposes to offer ten millions for all the Danish islands. I think it a large sum. At least double what I would have offered when the islands were wanted, and three times as much as I am willing the Government should give now. In fact I doubt if Congress would purchase for three millions, and I must see Seward and tell him my opinion.⁹

In the preceding months, however, Raaslöf was assured that the American interest remained intact. Through dinner parties with Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Vasa Fox (at which Raaslöf also urged the US government to resume Caribbean slave patrols and revive the 1862 colonization agreement) Raaslöf got a feel for the

14th Amendment, tying representation to "eligible male voters" and thereby for the first time "putting the word *male* into the U.S. Constitution."

⁵ Erik Overgaard Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865–1870* (Frankfurt am Main: Haag + Herchen, 1997), 23–25.

⁶ Charles Callan Tansill, *The Purchase of the Danish West Indies*, reprint ed. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 14.

⁷ See also *ibid.*, 20. ⁸ Quoted in Tansill, *The Purchase of the Danish West Indies*, 19.

⁹ Quoted in Tansill, *The Purchase of the Danish West Indies*, 19, 28.

American political climate, and a Danish cabinet change moved the negotiations concretely forward.¹⁰ On November 6, 1865, the large Danish landholder Count Christian E. Frijs assumed power and worked closely with Raaslöff on foreign policy hereafter.¹¹ By December 1865 Raaslöff could finally notify the American government that Denmark was ready to sell St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John if the price was right.¹²

Finding the right time and the right price, however, proved challenging. William Seward's return to political life in 1865 saw him increasingly tied to Abraham Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson; though the new president generally supported expansion into the Caribbean, he also urged that "negotiations rest a short while" to avoid a too direct connection, in the public's eye, between Seward's St. Thomas visit and concrete discussions.¹³ Moreover, Johnson was becoming increasingly involved in a struggle over Abraham Lincoln's legacy with the Republican-controlled Congress after it convened in December 1865.¹⁴

Raaslöff, who stressed that Denmark needed a sizable offer to overcome domestic diplomatic doubts about the sale, reported home on February 8, 1866, that he had suggested \$20 million as a minimum amount.¹⁵ But crucial leverage was missing. As Erik Overgaard Pedersen has noted, "Danish possession of the islands had become insecure," and if the United States, England, or France went to war there was a sense that the islands might well be taken by force.¹⁶ American negotiators shared the same view.

¹⁰ "[S]hould any of our vessels succeed in making captures of the character indicated, it may be practicable to secure the object which you so much desire," wrote Fox, but no such occurrence ever materialized. See Gustavus Vasa Fox, "June 24, 5. [Col. Wm Raasloff]," in *Gustavus Vasa Fox Collection 1823-1919 (bulk 1860-1889). Letters sent* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1865). See also Waldemar Raaslöff, "Col. De Raasloff Requests the Pleasure of the Honb. Capt. Fox's Company at Dinner on Tuesday Next 19th at Six O' Clock P.M.," in *Gustavus Vasa Fox Collection 1823-1919 (bulk 1860-1889). Letters received* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1865). See also Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865-1870*, 20.

¹¹ Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865-1870*, 22.

¹² Tansill, *The Purchase of the Danish West Indies*, 17-18.

¹³ Quoted in Tansill, *The Purchase of the Danish West Indies*, 21.

¹⁴ Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 36-37.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

¹⁶ Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865-1870*, 19.

After several months of meetings between Raaslöf and Seward, the latter, on July 17, 1866, finally offered a concrete sum of \$5 million, which was in line with American military officers' assessments. Brevet Major-General Richard Delafield took Denmark's vulnerable geostrategic position into account when stating that \$5 million would be more than the Danish government could expect by "holding a prize that can be taken from him at any moment he become at war with a strong maritime nation."¹⁷

Between Seward's and Raaslöf's conversation in early 1865 and 1868, the prospect of a Danish-American treaty for the sale and purchase of St. Thomas, St. John, and possibly the agriculturally based island of St. Croix waxed and waned, but talks were generally considered promising by both parties.¹⁸ Yet, as Pedersen has succinctly noted, the negotiations hinged on balancing domestic and international politics on both sides of the Atlantic.

Seward had tactically declined to make an offer owing to the conflict with the Radical Republicans and the division in the Cabinet on the issue. Only when it had become evident that Denmark, hoping for French support in the Schleswig Question, was definitely refusing to make an offer, was Seward finally moved to make a definite offer to buy the three islands.¹⁹

Raaslöf, on his part, likely believed that the personal relationships he had cultivated in Washington, DC, during his appointment as charge d'affaires and minister resident allowed him to gauge the American political climate well enough to secure a favorable outcome in the negotiations. As it turned out, Raaslöf's good relationship with William Seward and Charles Sumner (who in 1861 had described Raaslöf as "a most agreeable and accomplished gentleman") proved much less important than the two Republican leaders' own clashes over ideas of territorial expansion from 1865 and forward.²⁰

By January 1867, Seward was urging the United States minister in Denmark, George H. Yeaman, to speed up negotiations, and the

¹⁷ William H. Seward, "(Confidential) Department of State. Washington July 17th 1866," in *Collection 0002. Udenrigsministeriet. 1856-1909 Samlede sager. Vestindien 1865-1909. Box 771* (Copenhagen: Rigsarkivet, 1866). Also Tansill, *The Purchase of the Danish West Indies*, 38-39.

¹⁸ Eric T. L. Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 27-30.

¹⁹ Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865-1870*, 38.

²⁰ Jessie Ames Marshall, ed., *Gen. Benjamin F. Butler During the Period of the Civil War*, 5 vols., vol. 1 (Norwood, MA: Plimpton Press, 1917), 159.

American ambassador, according to Pedersen, shortly thereafter “assured Raasl[ö]ff that the President could request the Senate to remain in session and that it was unthinkable that Congress would refuse to appropriate the necessary money.”²¹ In the following months, Seward’s ability to get congressional approval of the Alaska treaty, which was negotiated on March 30, 1867, and the territorial transfer from Russia finalized by October 11 helped support Yeaman’s argument.²²

On May 17, 1867, Frijs and Raaslöff met with Yeaman and made a concrete offer: “the two islands St. Thomas and St. John for ten millions and Santa Cruz for five millions, with the option of taking the two former and rejecting the latter.”²³ Seemingly encouraged, Seward within a week formulated a draft for a treaty, predicated on Danish ratification before August 4, 1867, and American approval by May 1868, and an offer of \$7.5 million for all three islands.²⁴

Since France had originally sold St. Croix to Denmark in 1733, with an option to purchase the island again if offered for sale, it was necessary for the Danish authorities to consult the original colonizers before finalizing a treaty. Yet the idea of parting with additional territory in the wake of 1864 again sparked debate. On the Danish side, the main opposition to a sale was tied to the threshold principle. The Danish king, Christian IX, and minister of the navy, Carl van Dockum, both believed that Denmark, at least theoretically, would be better served strategically and internationally by holding on to the islands, but *realpolitik* weakened their position.²⁵ A handful of other politicians and powerful public servants also indirectly opposed the sale through delays, but Prime Minister Frijs and Raaslöff continued to push negotiations forward.²⁶

Importantly, the Danish government’s insistence on a referendum on the islands was accepted by Seward on October 5, 1867, as Denmark’s

²¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

²² *Ibid.*, 3, 68. Also Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865–1900*, 32–33.

²³ Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865–1870*, 49–50.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 63–64. As Pedersen has shown, “Admiral van Dockum was the only member who opposed the transaction outright. He could not accept the cession of territory and an important naval base after the losses of the recent War of 1864.” The Danish king “shared van Dockum’s feelings about the cession, but he also attached great weight to the argument that Denmark would probably be unable to uphold the neutrality of this islands in a war and, indeed, might lose them without compensation.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 60–68.

hope of, and strategy for, reclaiming northern Schleswig by the late 1860s rested on the possibility of an internationally recognized referendum. For such a claim to be internationally plausible, Danish politicians believed they needed to give the voting-age West Indian population an opportunity to determine whether the islands should be Danish or American.²⁷

Thus, on October 24, 1867, the American diplomatic representative in Copenhagen, George H. Yeoman, met with Prime Minister Frijs a little past noon and signed the treaty which would transfer the islands of St. Thomas and St. Jan to the United States in exchange for \$7.5 million in gold.²⁸ To the main negotiators, the treaty seemed to benefit both sides. Raaslöf privately noted in a letter to Seward on October 27, 1867: “Your interests and ours in this matter were not only not incompatible, but on the contrary, in all essential points identical or nearly so.”²⁹ The question was, would Congress agree?

The ratification of Seward’s Alaska Purchase set an important example in terms of the negotiation and ratification process, and Senator Charles Sumner’s approval was especially critical. Sumner’s importance in the ratification process was underscored by Danish diplomats such as Franz Bille, who succeeded Raaslöf in late 1866 and sent home an “extract” of Sumner’s April 9, 1867, speech regarding the Alaska treaty.³⁰ The summary stressed Sumner’s point that “it is with nations as with individuals a bargain once made must be kept” but also foreshadowed political conflict.³¹

The problem, from an American constitutional perspective, was the fact that the Senate expected its role to “advice and consent” would be honored, and Sumner expressed the wish that the Alaska purchase – where a treaty had been negotiated without Senate content – would not set “a

²⁷ Tansill, *The Purchase of the Danish West Indies*, 97; Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865–1870*, 53, 60–61.

²⁸ Geo. H. Yeoman, “24. October 1867,” in *Collection 0002. Udenrigsministeriet. 1856–1909 Samlede sager. Vestindien 1865–1909. Box 771* (Copenhagen: Rigsarkivet, 1867).

²⁹ Quoted in Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865–1870*, 68.

³⁰ “Extract of a Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner on the Cession of Russian America to the United States. Shall the Treaty Be Ratified?,” *ibid.* (undated); Edward Lillie Pierce, *A Diplomatic Episode: The Rejected Treaty for St. Thomas* (Boston, MA: 1889), 4. See also Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865–1870*, 44–45.

³¹ “Extract of a Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner on the Cession of Russian America to the United States. Shall the Treaty Be Ratified?”

precedent.”³² Moreover, in the extract Bille or a recipient in Denmark underlined part of Sumner’s concluding remark, “I would save to the Senate an important power that justly belongs to it.”³³

As Eric T. L. Love has shown, the Alaska treaty was relatively easily ratified due to geography (continental “expansion” rarely needed justification) and widely accepted Old and New World scientific racism (“the temperate zone was the one proper field on which to raise an empire of Anglo-Saxon peoples”).³⁴ Lastly, the international respect a geopolitical rival such as Russia commanded, likely combined with bribes to American officials, prompted Senate ratification in 1867.³⁵

For all the same reasons, Caribbean expansion proved more challenging. The Danish West Indies were noncontiguous, the climate deemed less “congenial” to Anglo-Americans, and the stakes of ratification much lower with a less powerful treaty partner (who was disinclined to pay bribes). Seward seems to have realized some of the challenges, as he wrote to Yeaman in Copenhagen in September of 1867 that hesitation by Danish politicians could be costly:

The delays which have attended the negotiation, notwithstanding our urgency, have contributed to still further alleviate the national desire for enlargement of territory. In short, we have already come to value dollars more and dominion less.³⁶

³² Ibid. ³³ Ibid, emphasis in original.

³⁴ The scientific racism that helped undergird the Alaska purchase was tied to some of the Old World research networks that Scandinavians, such as Anders Retzius, were also part of. Swiss-born Jean Louis Agassiz wrote specifically to Sumner in 1867 to persuade him of Alaska’s attraction due to the connection between climate and potential “settlement by our race.” Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865–1900*, 31. For the connection between Retzius and Agassiz, see Alan Mann, “The Origins of American Physical Anthropology in Philadelphia,” *Yearbook of Physical Anthropology* 52 (2009): 160–161. See also Alan Levine, “Scientific Racism in Antebellum America,” in *The Political Thought of the Civil War*, edited by Alan Levine, Thomas W. Merrill, and James R. Stoner Jr. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 98.

³⁵ Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865–1900*, 14; Lee A. Farrow, *Seward’s Folly: A New Look at the Alaska Purchase* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2016), 114–117. Charles Sumner biographer Edward L. Pierce also makes the argument that “continental” versus “extra-continental” location of territory was of importance in the ratification process, a perspective supported by some members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations such as James W. Patterson. See Pierce, *A Diplomatic Episode: The Rejected Treaty for St. Thomas*, 3; Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865–1870*, 170–171.

³⁶ William Seward quoted in Pierce, *A Diplomatic Episode: The Rejected Treaty for St. Thomas*, 30.

Despite Seward's worries, and Sumner's warning not to negotiate a treaty without the Senate's involvement, the secretary of state agreed to the treaty with Denmark in late October 1867. Underlining the importance of personal relations to the treaty's initial completion and eventual ratification, Raaslöff on November 2, 1867, wrote directly to Charles Sumner, introducing his successor and urging the senator to help move the West Indies sale forward:³⁷

I have told Mr de Bille that as the Representation of Denmark he might Count upon you as a friend, and I beg of you that you will Kindly ratify that apportion of mine, and be as good and valuable a friend to him as you were to me.³⁸

Domestic politics in the United States, however, far outweighed any personal relationships that Raaslöff had cultivated, though initially the transfer proceeded according to plan. As a first step in the successful acquisition of the West Indian islands, Secretary Seward on October 26, 1867, sent the New York Reverend Charles Hawley to the West Indies as an election commissioner and instructed Rear Admiral Palmer, in command of the North Atlantic Squadron, to proceed with the flagship *Susquehannah* to oversee the election (and help ensure a favorable outcome).³⁹ After the Civil War, Seward had abandoned any practical support of colonization, but the secretary of state's instructions revealed his continued emphasis on territorial expansion and population growth that, in the case of the United States, was accompanied by seemingly ever-increasing military and economic might, while the opposite, Seward intimated, was true of the Danish Kingdom. Writing to Hawley before the referendum, Seward pointed to the explicit advantages the islands' white and nonwhite population would gain from being part of an expanding nation-state:

The market of this country, even now, is an eligible one for their products. It must become much more so in the event of their annexation. As one of the purposes of this Government in the acquisition, is to secure a naval station, the inhabitants of

³⁷ Yeaman quoted in Tansill, *The Purchase of the Danish West Indies*, 77. On Raaslöff's role in the 1867 negotiations, the American minister to Denmark, George Yeaman, wrote that his "moderation, activity and quickness of perception" had "undoubtedly very greatly aided the progress of the business" and added that he doubted the October 24 treaty "could have been completed" without Raaslöff.

³⁸ W. Raaslöff, "Copenhagen, November 2, 1867," in *Charles Sumner Correspondence 1829-1874* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Library, Harvard University, 1867).

³⁹ William H. Seward, "Department of State. Washington, 26th Oct. 1867," *ibid.*; Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865-1870*, 48-61.

the Islands will derive benefits from that, which it is needless to expatiate upon. If, too, they should become a part of the domain of the United States, they and their property will have the same right to protection by a powerful Government in war, and to those advantages in time of peace which are enjoyed by other citizens.⁴⁰

The referendum, which excluded a large swath of freedmen living on the Danish West Indies, underlined the Danish authorities' general disregard for "subjects" of African descent. White men from Europe and North America constituted the bulk of the voters when the referendum was held on January 9, 1868, and had at least some say in the islands' future.⁴¹ Out of a population numbering approximately 38,000 on the three islands combined, only 2,000 to 4,000 were white, and people born in Denmark were actually a minority compared to the relatively large number of Americans, Englishmen, Germans, and people from other parts of Europe, and voters left no doubt about their preferences.⁴²

In a telegram sent from Washington, DC, on January 17, 1868, the Danish diplomat Frantz Bille concisely summed up the decisive results of the St. Thomas referendum. Based on information received in a dispatch from Havana, Bille wrote that there were "twelve hundred forty four in favor [and] twenty two against" cession.⁴³

This result – overwhelming support for American takeover – was followed by extensive celebrations, music, songs, and speeches in the streets of St. Thomas, which underscored the lack of enthusiasm for Danish colonial rule and the optimism associated with future prospects under American jurisdiction, not least increased political participation.⁴⁴

The referendum thereby demonstrated at least two things in relation to citizenship and American empire. First, the Scandinavian-born elite in both the Old and the New World were generally not concerned with freedpeople's rights or opinions in post-emancipation societies, whether

⁴⁰ Seward, "Department of State. Washington, 26th Oct. 1867."

⁴¹ Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865–1870*, vii. As Pedersen notes, "suffrage was extended to any male citizen of 25 with certain residential, property, and income restrictions, which actually disenfranchised most of the blacks."

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ [Frantz] Bille, "Telegram No. 2683. Indleveret i Washington Den 17 Januar 1868 7t42 Formiddag," in *Collection 0002. Udenrigsministeriet. 1856–1909 Samlede sager. Vestindien 1865–1909. Box 771* (Copenhagen: Rigsarkivet, 1868), 97; Tansill, *The Purchase of the Danish West Indies*, 97.

⁴⁴ "Nyeste Postefterretninger," *Aarhus Stifts-Tidende*, January 22, 1868. See also "Salget Af De Vestindiske Øer [the Sale of the West Indian Islands]," *Folkets Avis*, January 31, 1868. See also Isaac Dookhan, "Changing Patterns of Local Reaction to the United States Acquisition of the Virgin Islands, 1865–1917," *Caribbean Studies* 15 (1975): 57–58.

in the Caribbean or the United States. And, second, the margins by which the inhabitants on St. Thomas and St. Jan voted for the sale demonstrated the woeful legacy left behind by the Danish government in pre- or post-emancipation matters.

In the end, however, American acquisition of the islands would not be decided through local votes or Danish politicians but hinged entirely on Seward's relationship to Johnson – and Johnson's relationship to Congress.

President Andrew Johnson spoke warmly for the West Indian acquisition in his third annual address to Congress on December 3, 1867. In the recent Civil War, “there was then a universal feeling of the want of an advanced naval outpost between the Atlantic coast and Europe,” Johnson argued and added:

A good and convenient port and harbor, capable of easy defense, will supply that want. With the possession of such a station by the United States, neither we nor any other American nation need longer apprehend injury or offense from any transatlantic enemy. I agree with our early statesmen that the West Indies naturally gravitate to, and may be expected ultimately to be absorbed by, the continental States, including our own. I agree with them also that it is wise to leave the question of such absorption to this process of natural political gravitation. The islands of St. Thomas and St. John, which constitute a part of the group called the Virgin Islands, seemed to offer us advantages immediately desirable, while their acquisition could be secured in harmony with the principles to which I have alluded. A treaty has therefore been concluded with the King of Denmark for the cession of those islands, and will be submitted to the Senate for consideration.⁴⁵

Less than a month later, Raaslöf's successor in Washington, Frantz Bille, alluded to the potential ratification trouble brewing when he sent his first report home. The treaty, which had been sent to the Senate for ratification in October 1867, was now held up in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chaired by Sumner. Ratification of the treaty, Bille assessed, was therefore “subject to influence of several special circumstances, several of whom are unknown.”⁴⁶ The uncertainty, Bille added, was tied to the domestic political situation's volatility.

Domestic political tension was heightened in Washington, DC, in 1868. On February 21, 1868, three days before the deadline for ratifying

⁴⁵ Andrew Johnson, “Third Annual Message” (online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29508, 1867).

⁴⁶ F. Bille, “Kongeligt Dansk Gesandtskab. Washington. D.C. Den 31te December 1867,” in *Collection 0002. Udenrigsministeriet. 1856–1909 Samlede sager. Vestindien 1865–1909. Box 771* (Copenhagen: Rigsarkivet, 1867).

the St. Thomas treaty passed, President Johnson removed Secretary of War Edwin Stanton from office. Shortly thereafter, between February 29 and March 3, 1868, the United States House of Representatives reviewed and – for the first time in American history – adopted Articles of Impeachment against a sitting president. The resulting impeachment trial, as Bille alluded to in a dispatch dated April 7, 1868, swallowed all domestic political energy until the middle of May and left little, if any, room for discussions of the Danish American treaty.

“I have had a conversation about the St. Thomas treaty’s present status with Senator Charles Sumner,” Bille wrote, “I fear that Mr. Sumner’s opinion on this matter must be attributed an almost critical importance.”⁴⁷ The formal Articles of Impeachment, written by such prominent Republicans as Thaddeus Stevens, George Julian, and Hamilton Ward broadly charged President Andrew Johnson with neglect of the “high duties of his office, of his oath of office, and of the requirements of the Constitution that he should take care that the laws be faithfully executed.”⁴⁸ Specifically, the trial centered on President Johnson’s violation of the Tenure of Office Act, which passed in early March 1867 over the president’s veto, stipulating that the Senate was to give permission to remove any official it had previously confirmed.⁴⁹

In the Scandinavian press, the proceedings in Washington were met with a sense of sensation. “A court of impeachment, already a rarity in the country’s history, have never before been brought against the highest executive authority, the President,” wrote *Hemlandet* in Chicago. *Fædrelandet* from Wisconsin noted: “Not since the news of the first shot fired against Fort Sumter, has all of America, to a man, been as desirous of news as now.” And a few weeks later, *Emigranten*, in an editorial, called the trial “the most important question of the day.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ “Washington Den 7de April 1868. No. 21. (Confidentielt),” in *Collection 0002. Udenrigsministeriet. 1856–1909 Samlede sager. Vestindien 1865–1909. Box 771* (Copenhagen: Rigsarkivet, 1868). Bille’s analysis was based on an expected “change in government this month as a result of the impeachment process against the president.”

⁴⁸ Donald E Heidenreich Jr., *Articles of Impeachment against Andrew Johnson*, *Defining Documents: Reconstruction Era* (History Reference Center, EBSCOhost [accessed April 7, 2017], 2014), 105–114. See also Anders Bo Rasmussen, “‘The States’ Readmission Puts an End to All Civil and Political Questions’: Scandinavian Immigrants and Debates over Racial Equality during the Impeachment of President Andrew Johnson,” *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (2017): 202–217.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵⁰ “Præsidentens Anklagande [The President’s Trial],” *Hemlandet*, March 3, 1868. Also “Præsident Johnson Sat under Tiltale [President Johnson Indicted],” *Fædrelandet*, March 5, 1868. Also “Madison, 28de Marts 1868,” *Emigranten*, March 30, 1868.

The Reconstruction contest between the Republican Congress and the president, a former War Democrat, had been a regular topic in the Scandinavian press at least since the congressional election of 1866. Here the editor of the Chicago paper *Skandinaven*, Knud Langeland, predicted that the president's "dismissal of Republican officials" and attempts to defeat the 14th Amendment, which had established birthright citizenship and legal protection for "life, liberty, and property," would come back to haunt him in the 1868 presidential election.⁵¹

To *Fædrelandet*, Andrew Johnson's unilateral appointment and removal of officials reminded the editors of the absolutist and monarchical actions they had all experienced in the Old World.⁵² As such, the trial only magnified the issues and divisions that had come into sharper focus since the end of the Civil War and the 1866 midterm elections. The Scandinavian-American press coverage of the trial revealed the fact that all attention was directed at domestic politics, with foreign relations pushed into the background. The connection between the Johnson administration and Caribbean expansion largely went unreported, but Scandinavian editors' opposition to the sitting president's obstinate style would have made it difficult for them to simultaneously advocate for the Johnson administration's policy of noncontiguous expansion.

With an eye to describing the proceedings for a Swedish-American audience in *Hemlandet*, Pastor Eric Norelius made his way to the United States Capitol a little past noon on Friday, April 3, 1868. Norelius, aided by his local representative, managed to get into Congress and follow the impeachment trial, witnessing a high-level legal battle that most involved knew served as a proxy for deep underlying political divisions. Norelius' observations in April led him to confidently predict that President Andrew Johnson, seemingly guilty of a "high misdemeanor in office," would have to resign in the face of the Republican Senate majority.⁵³ Yet the reality of the trial, and the machinations of American politics, proved to be more complex. In Congress, the Republican Party's different factions had by 1868 increasingly united in opposition to President Johnson's approach to Reconstruction, but it was unclear if moderates and radicals would eventually vote united.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Arlow W. Anderson, "Knud Langeland: Pioneer Editor," *Norwegian-American Studies* 14 (1944): 122–138. See also David Herbert Donald, Jean H. Baker, and Michael F. Holt, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 544–549.

⁵² "Washington," *Fædrelandet*, April 9, 1868.

⁵³ Heidenreich Jr., *Articles of Impeachment against Andrew Johnson*, 112.

⁵⁴ Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 112–114.



FIGURE 13.1 Before embarking on an Old World visit from New York City, Pastor Eric Norelius, here with his wife Inga, found time to visit Washington D.C. and reported frequently back to *Hemlandet*, mixing commentary on religion with observations related to social and political issues. Courtesy of Gustavus Adolphus College.

Herein lay the seeds for political conflict at the highest level. The Republican Party attempted to maintain a coalition of business interests and Midwestern farmers and simultaneously to protect freedpeople against post-war vigilantism in the form of southern paramilitary groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. At the same time, the president, elected by the Republican-backed National Union Party, seemed intent on restoring and protecting former rebels' political rights, to a greater extent than was the case for the party that had helped secure his vice-presidential nomination in 1864.⁵⁵

Consequently, between the midterm elections of 1866 (the starting point of so-called Radical Reconstruction) and the spring of 1868, American politics was defined by a power struggle between the executive and legislative branch that culminated in impeachment.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ "National Union Convention," *New York Times*, June 8, 1864.

⁵⁶ Heidenreich Jr., *Articles of Impeachment against Andrew Johnson*, 105–114.

The Scandinavian-American press followed the case closely, and the coverage revealed that the Scandinavian-American editors took the impeachment of Andrew Johnson as a sign that the Republican-led Congress was finally bringing a perceived Southern sympathizer to heel and thereby imposing terms for reconstruction on the former Confederacy, which they argued might enable the nation to move forward on matters of more direct pressing economic interest.

The coverage of Andrew Johnson's impeachment trial therefore served a snapshot of how and why the Scandinavian elite's commitment to racial equality was overshadowed by economic concerns. Scandinavian editors (as was the case for most middle-class white Midwesterners) proved to be Republicans, not abolitionists.⁵⁷

By the time slavery was abolished within American borders, the Scandinavian-American elite interpreted Republican ideology as free land (exemplified by the Homestead Act) and free labor (understood as compensated employment but not reparations) that would lead to free men (meaning social mobility through property-owning independence). Such views were at the forefront of the newspaper pages at the expense of foreign policy and expressions of racial equality in both heart and mind.⁵⁸

In short, to the Scandinavian press, the proceedings in Washington had powerful implications in terms of racialized understandings of citizenship, not least in terms of voting. During the impeachment trial, the more "established" Scandinavian press outlets *Emigranten*, *Fædrelandet*, and *Hemlandet* adopted the main talking points of nonradical Republican congressmen and a conservative undercurrent in relation to racial equality generally ran through the newspaper pages.

Hemlandet implicitly questioned freedmen's right to serve in Congress as it reminded readers that the Constitution required representatives to have been citizens for seven years and senators to have held citizenship for nine. The question was, *Hemlandet* wrote, "when did a colored man become a citizen?"⁵⁹ At a time when the 14th Amendment had not been ratified nationally, *Hemlandet's* lingering answer, while not directly stated, implied that freedmen had only been citizens for such a short period, if at all, that they should not yet serve in Congress.

⁵⁷ Stephen Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom: Fighting for Black Citizenship in a White Republic, 1829–1889* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 230.

⁵⁸ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 27, 61.

⁵⁹ "Kunna Negerer För Närvarande Blifwa Kongressmän? [Could Negroes Presently Become Congressmen?]," *Hemlandet*, March 31, 1868.

Hemlandet's position on Black people's fitness for political office tied into a longer debate in the Scandinavian press about Black people's intellectual abilities that seemed to overlook several decades of important writings from Black abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and John S. Rock, among others.⁶⁰ Also, an opinion piece published in *Emigranten* in early 1867 claimed that "freed negroes" should not presently be allowed to enjoy citizenship rights such as voting.⁶¹ Since Black Americans' "intellectual faculties" had remained "dormant" during slavery, as education was denied the enslaved, the anonymous correspondent – who claimed to have spent nineteen years in a slave state – argued that educational level alone should keep Black people from voting in the "first 5 to 10 years."⁶²

In short, what was suggested in the Scandinavian-American press – and what became increasingly clear as the impeachment trial was covered in the newspapers' weekly play-by-play format – was the fact that questions of racial equality took a back seat to issues of economic opportunity for Scandinavian immigrants. Or put in another way, while Scandinavian editors were generally supportive of slavery's abolition, they were far more guarded in their support for freedmen's civil and political rights. Moreover, the Scandinavian-American editors proved to be contiguous settlers and colonists, not Caribbean expansionists.

Either through editorial decisions of exclusion or through genuine lack of subscriber interest, almost all the letters to the editor published in the Scandinavian newspapers in the first half of 1868 dealt with issues of landownership, the Homestead Act, and religious issues, while issues of race and Caribbean acquisition were almost entirely absent from the newspaper pages.⁶³

⁶⁰ See for example, Benjamin Fagan, "The North Star and the Atlantic 1848," *African American Review* 47, no. 1 (2014): 51–67; Beverly C. Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 245; John S. Rock, "Speech of John S. Rock, Esq., at the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Thursday Evening, Jan. 23."

⁶¹ "Bør De Frigivne Negere Have Stemmeret? [Should the Freed Negroes Have the Vote?]," *Emigranten*, January 28, 1867.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ See, for example, "Atter Om Homesteadloven [Once Again on the Homestead Act]"; "Wigtigt För 'Homesteadsettlare' i Minnesota [Important for Homestead Settlers in Minnesota]"; Sando, "Til Fædrelandets Redaktion"; Ole Engebrigtsen, "Til

The newly emerged Scandinavian-American Democratic press, however, complicated the prevalent public-sphere narrative by exposing the discrepancy between rhetorical equality and racial practice. *Fremad*, published out of staunchly Democratic (and heavily German) Milwaukee, was the first Democratic newspaper launched in the Midwest since 1860.⁶⁴

The press debates between *Fremad* and the Republican-leaning Scandinavian-American press testified to the sharp political divisions between Democrats and Republicans and the disdain held for the Democratic Party's constituency by the more established Scandinavian editors. *Hemlandet* reminded its readers that the Democratic Party had written derogatorily about Scandinavian settlers in Minnesota, and the newspaper's editor added an appeal to Scandinavians to avoid degrading themselves by voting with German saloon-keepers and uneducated Irishmen as well as former slave-owners and slave drivers.⁶⁵ Additionally, the Republican-leaning Scandinavian papers moved quickly to portray themselves as independent guardians of the ethnic and national interest, while the newly arrived *Fremad* was depicted as completely beholden to the Democratic Party.⁶⁶ As it turned out, *Fremad*'s emergence laid bare the fact that the zeal of the Scandinavian press in advocating abolition, which was achieved with the 13th Amendment's de jure abolition of slavery, did not translate into the same commitment to de

Fædrelandets Redaktion. Medo Tp., Blue Earth Co.," *Fædrelandet* May 14, 1868; H. Borchsenius, "Fra H. Borchsenius [From H. Borchsenius]," *Emigranten*, June 8, 1868.

⁶⁴ Borchsenius, "Cirkulære Til Nordstjernens Abonnenter [Circular to the North Star's Subscribers]"; Robert Booth Fowler, *Wisconsin Votes: An Electoral History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 36–37. Abraham Lincoln, who won Wisconsin with 56 percent in the 1864 presidential election, received less than 40 percent of the vote in Milwaukee.

⁶⁵ "Demokraterne Lægga an På Att Wärfwa Skandinaverne För Sitt Parti [Democrats Aiming to Recruit the Scandinavians for Their Party]," *Hemlandet*, May 5, 1868.

⁶⁶ These charges were probably not unfounded, as *Fremad*'s editor Just M. Caen, a Danish immigrant of Jewish descent, took time and space on the front page of his May 14, 1868, issue to note: "We are obliged for the kind support we have received from all the English and German Democratic Newspapers throughout the West, and we take this opportunity to return our best thanks, and hope that the 'Fremad' hand in hand with its many friends shall do its part of the great work of enlightening the people of the true course of American liberty." See The Editor, "To the American and German Democratic Press," *Fremad*, May 14, 1868.

facto equal rights for freedpeople, despite the promises of the 14th Amendment, ratified in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois in 1867. Where discussions of race were at times hidden between the lines in the mainstream Scandinavian newspapers, they almost jumped off the page in *Fremad*.

In its first issue, published on April 23, 1868, *Fremad* took the position that “to stay in power, [the Republican Party] will give complete voting and civil rights to the newly freed Negroes in the South.”⁶⁷ Going forward, *Fremad* promised, among other things, to fight for a “reasonable arrangement of the freed negroes’ circumstances, so that these could be trained as useful citizens in our society, without simultaneously making slaves of our white brothers.”⁶⁸ In the weeks to come, *Fremad* continued its attacks on the Republican Party and on Scandinavian press support of the Republican Party. On May 7, 1868, *Fremad* accused the Scandinavian press, not wholly without merit, of being elitist.⁶⁹

While *Fremad* was clearly exaggerating the Republican Party’s past, present, and proposed policies, the Republican-leaning *Fædrelandet* seemed to sum up the Scandinavian immigrant elite’s feelings toward Reconstruction by late April 1868. On April 30, 1868, *Fædrelandet* argued that, for as long as Andrew Johnson was given free rein, reconstruction of the Southern states had proceeded (too) slowly.⁷⁰ What was left unwritten was the fact that *Fædrelandet*, while supporting Reconstruction, saw the readmission of the former Confederate States by their acceptance of the United States Constitution with its new and proposed amendments as the natural end to the government’s efforts on behalf of securing freedpeople’s rights.

As such, the Scandinavian ethnic elite’s public retreat from Reconstruction predated that of its German-born counterparts. As Alison Clark Efford has shown, German Republicans’ support for Reconstruction mainly waned after 1870, when Old World exclusionary ideas of a German *Volk* impacted New World interethnic ideology.⁷¹

⁶⁷ “Vor Politiske Trosbekendelse [Our Political Creed],” *ibid.*, April 23, 1868. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ “Washington-Nyheder [Washington News],” *Fremad*, May 7, 1868. In bold letters, *Fremad* reported that “the latest news suggests that President Johnson will be acquitted, Senator Fessenden will vote with the Democrats” and ended with a question for fellow Scandinavian editors: “How are you [feeling now]?”

⁷⁰ “Rekonstruktionen [The Reconstruction],” *Fædrelandet*, April 30, 1868.

⁷¹ Alison Clark Efford, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era* (Washington, DC: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 143–146. For a Scandinavian immigrant perspective, see also Anders Bo Rasmussen, “‘On Liberty and Equality’: Race and Reconstruction among Scandinavian Immigrants, 1864–1868,” in *Nordic*

Fædrelandet's position, as expressed on May 14, 1868, less than a week before the impeachment trial for all intents and purposes came to a close, seemed to encompass a larger Scandinavian reconstruction story.⁷² Republican resolve in regard to the former Confederate States had forced these states to adopt the United States Constitution with its newly added provisions for slavery's abolition and birthright citizenship and signified a "crowning achievement" of Reconstruction:

The states' readmission puts an end to all civil and political questions that people are now quarreling over. It will end military rule and let civil authorities regain control. It averts people's attention from rebellion and lawlessness and lets them consider the necessity of commerce, agriculture, and production.⁷³

Fædrelandet thereby established a link between congressional Republicans' hard line toward the president and the former rebels and the fact that Southern states were now beginning to formally accept the reconstruction demands imposed upon them.⁷⁴

In other words, *Fædrelandet* argued that Southern paramilitary violence, such as murders of "union men and negroes" by the Ku Klux Klan, would be curtailed now that Republicans, through their resolve against President Johnson, had forced the former rebel states to accept congressional reconstruction by adopting new state constitutions.⁷⁵ Now, former Confederates, rededicated to national loyalty, would win political representation, and the country could leave violence behind while reawakening industrial and agricultural production, which in turn would greatly benefit Scandinavian immigrants in the Midwest, *Fædrelandet* argued.

This line of reasoning, a return to free labor with emancipation without compensation, instead of expressions of racial equality, was a departure from *Fædrelandet*'s March 10, 1864 editorial where it was pointed out that "negroes everywhere" were supportive of the North and in numerous cases had helped Union soldiers escape Southern prisons during the war. In that same editorial, *Fædrelandet* called it "foolish prejudice" to voice opinions against "the poor negroes, who in chains, that is against their

Whiteness and Migration to the USA: A Historical Exploration of Identity, edited by Jana Sverdljuk, Terje Joranger, Erika K. Jackson, and Peter Kivisto (New York: Routledge, 2020).

⁷² "De Rekonstruerede Staters Gjenoptagelse i Unionen [The Reconstructed States' Readmission to the Union," *Fædrelandet*, May 14, 1868.

⁷³ Ibid. ⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Rekonstruktionen [The Reconstruction]," *Fædrelandet*, April 30, 1868.

will, were brought to America and whose greatest crime consists of the creator having given them black skin color.”⁷⁶

The inconsistency between the Scandinavian press’s attack on “foolish prejudice” as well as support for the universal rights embodied in the 13th and 14th Amendments and their regular advocacy for a return to “normalcy,” which, in the final analysis, meant pulling federal troops out of Southern cities and leaving freedpeople with little political, economic, or legal support, did not go unnoticed by *Fremad*’s editor, whose editorial page succinctly pointed out the hypocrisy between the Republican press’s anti-slavery and pro-amendment stance and their actual actions.

In an editorial, *Fremad* detailed its view on issues of race and reconstruction and tied these views closely to the Democratic Party’s politics ahead of the 1868 election while drawing a clear distinction between a perceived self-reliant Scandinavian-American “we” and a dependent freedpeople “other.”

“Our Scandinavian farmers and artisans are not under the slightest obligation to work for the Negroes while these [Black people] only have to work on election day by voting the Republican ticket,” *Fremad* wrote:

[If Scandinavian-American editors] personally want to wash the negroes’ children’s clothes and affectionately place them on their laps and feed them gruel and sweets, then it is something these noble and empathetic souls should do on their own account and not force it upon their subscribers and readers to emulate.⁷⁷

While the Republican-leaning editors, as opposed to *Fremad*’s, did not specifically advocate returning freedpeople to plantation and servant work, they also did not get to work personally feeding the formerly enslaved or even organize aid initiatives.⁷⁸ On the contrary, as *Hemlandet* revealed on May 19, 1868, just three days after Andrew Johnson had been saved from impeachment by a single vote (35–19 with 7 Republicans voting against impeachment), there was still significant skepticism regarding freedpeople’s ability to manage the rights of citizenship after the Civil War.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ “Negernes Opførsel [The Negroes’ Behavior],” *Fædrelandet*, March 10 1864.

⁷⁷ “Hvad Vil Det Demokratiske Parti Gjøre for Negerne? [What Will the Democratic Party Do for the Negroes?],” *Fremad*, May 14, 1868.

⁷⁸ Ibid. According to *Fremad*, freedmen would need to “learn to read and write and remember their own name” in order to become self-sufficient without the Freedmen’s Bureau “stealing immense sums annually” instead of the present situation where “4 million ignorant, unlearned, and raw creatures” were alleged to hold the United States’ welfare in their hands by exercising their newly acquired franchise.

⁷⁹ “Rekonstruktionswerkets Framgång [The Progress of Reconstruction],” *Hemlandet*, May 19, 1868; Donald E Heidenreich Jr., *Articles of Impeachment against Andrew*

After South Carolina adopted a state constitution recognizing Black people's right to freedom and electoral equality on April 16, *Hemlandet* essentially argued that, if the former Confederates had been more sensible in defeat, electoral politics could have returned to "normal" more quickly – meaning white men voting without freedmen's political representation.⁸⁰ President Johnson's policy had emboldened "the once conquered rebels," and if that had not been the case, "a majority in Congress would not have had to declare themselves in favor of the Negro's right to vote in order to overcome the rebel element."⁸¹

Thus, the Scandinavian-American press opposed President Johnson's leniency toward former Confederates but also, time and again, failed to recognize freedpeople as equally deserving fellow citizens. While the relationship between foreign policy and the conflict over freedpeople's position in post-war America received less attention in the Scandinavian-American public sphere, Andrew Johnson's policies had important ramifications for the signed Danish-American treaty as well. Among the thirty-five senators who voted for Johnson's impeachment was Charles Sumner.

When Henrik Cavling, a famous Danish journalist, traveled through the United States and the West Indies in the 1890s, he became interested in the attempted sale of the Danish colonies in the 1860s. Why, Cavling wondered, had the sale not been concluded? After all, Seward's interest in St. Thomas led to a signed treaty on October 24, 1867. Based on interviews and letters, not least from Christian T. Christensen (the Civil War officer who had later served as Danish consul), Cavling in the end suggested that the sales treaty was never ratified because Denmark did not bribe American politicians like the Russians had done during the 1867 Alaska sale. Cavling's conclusion was likely based on Christensen's assessment in 1894:

I know rather certainly that Russia in the Alaska Sale paid a half million dollars as private commission to distribute in places where it would have good effect and I also know that the Danish treaty could have been pushed through on similar conditions but General Raaslöff would not enter into those.⁸²

Johnson, *Defining Documents: Reconstruction Era* (History Reference Center, EBSCOhost [accessed April 7, 2017], 2014), 104.

⁸⁰ "Rekonstruktionswerkets Framgång [The Progress of Reconstruction]." ⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² C. T. Christensen, "Brooklyn Trust Co. Brooklyn, N.Y. D. 31te August 1894," in *Dansk pressemuseum og arkiv. Håndskriftsamlingen. NSA2-A04990. Acc. 1989/174. Box 46* (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Bibliotek, 1894).

Since Cavling, scholars relying less on information gathered decades after the negotiations have chalked the failed treaty ratification up to lack of domestic American popular support for territorial expansion, Danish diplomatic naivety, and the political struggle between the White House and Congress.⁸³ Of all the factors, the most important issue, as Erik Overgaard Pedersen reminds us, was the Johnson administration's continued expansionist vision having "no possibility of winning support in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee" after 1867.⁸⁴

Yet, in Seward's office, it was hoped, at least officially, that Johnson's survival of the impeachment proceedings would provide new opportunities for American expansion.⁸⁵ As Bille reported home to the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May 18, 1868, he had visited Secretary Seward in the evening two days earlier to congratulate him on the impeachment trial's expected outcome. Seward, according to Bille, used the occasion "to express that he now had renewed hope to soon process the treaty regarding the cession of St. Thomas."⁸⁶

Still, Seward's alleged hopefulness may have been more about diplomatic courtesy than realpolitik-based optimism. Edward Pierce, at least, who wrote a biography of Charles Sumner, argued in his *A Diplomatic Episode* in 1889 that the treaty was "dead" by the time "Mr. Seward handed it to the Senate, as he well knew at the time."⁸⁷ In addition to Sumner's April 1867 warning and Seward's correspondence with Yeaman, Pierce based his argument on a November 25, 1867, House resolution introduced by Wisconsin representative C. C. Washburn

⁸³ Henrik Cavling, *Det Danske Vestindien [The Danish West Indies]* (Copenhagen: Det Reitzelske Forlag, 1894), 148–149. See also Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865–1870*, 199–201. See also Tansill, *The Purchase of the Danish West Indies*, 149–151. Tansill rejects the idea that the treaty failed because of personal quarrels between President Johnson and congressmen like Charles Sumner and claims that the "real reason for the rejection of the Danish treaty was the evident disinclination of the American public to follow Seward in his schemes for colonial domination."

⁸⁴ Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865–1870*, 140.

⁸⁵ F. Bille, "Washington, D.C., Den 18de Mai 1868," in *Collection 0002. Udenrigsministeriet. 1856–1909 Samlede sager. Vestindien 1865–1909. Box 771* (Copenhagen: Rigsarkivet, 1868).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ United States Congress, ed. *The Congressional Globe: Containing the Debates and Proceedings of the First Session Fortieth Congress; Also Special Session of the Senate* (Washington, DC: 1867). See also Pierce, *A Diplomatic Episode: The Rejected Treaty for St. Thomas*, 9–10.

resolving that “in the present financial condition of the country any further purchases of territory” were “inexpedient” and that the House would refuse to “pay for any such purchase” unless conditions changed.⁸⁸

To this, Nathaniel Banks, former speaker of the House, objected, as he wanted an explanation of Washburn’s understanding of “further,” to which the Wisconsin politician replied that he did not “intend the resolution to apply to the purchase of Walrussia” as it had already taken place:

But it is rumored in the papers – whether it is true or not I cannot say – that the Secretary of State has been making another purchase without consulting with any one, in the absence of any public sentiment requiring it, or of any demand from any quarter. I intend that that action shall be covered by the resolution. I intend to serve notice upon the kingdom of Denmark that this House will not pay for that purchase.⁸⁹

Still, Danish politicians and diplomats held out hope for ratification, in part, based on the optimism expressed by Seward to Bille on May 16, 1868, and also because high-level interest in the Caribbean was on full display during the latter half of the 1860s despite opposition in the Sumner-led Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

The Danish West Indies, Santo Domingo, and even Cuba were part of American expansion discussions after 1865, and Caribbean communities at times also sought to “influence annexationist initiatives,” as Christopher Wilkins has demonstrated.⁹⁰ In short, the attempt to build expansionist support in Congress occupied a great amount of diplomatic energy between 1868 and 1870, and Danish envoys worked hard to get the United States Senate ratification process going.

⁸⁸ United States Congress, *The Congressional Globe: Containing the Debates and Proceedings of the First Session Fortieth Congress; Also Special Session of the Senate*, 792–793.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Dominican president José María Cabral, who had proposed leasing “Samaná to the United States in exchange for weapons and funding,” was overthrown by Buenaventura Báez in early January 1868, but the change in power did little to interrupt dealings with the United States. Báez “promptly began his own negotiations with Seward and in late 1868 proposed the admission of Santo Domingo in to the Union. Seward agreed to Báez’s proposal but left office in March 1869, before he could attempt to build sufficient support for annexation in Congress.” See Christopher Wilkins, “‘They Had Heard of Emancipation and the Enfranchisement of Their Race’: The African American Colonists of Samaná, Reconstruction, and the State of Santo Domingo,” in *The Civil War as Global Conflict*, edited by David T. Gleeson and Simon Lewis (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2014), 214–218. See also Gregory P. Downs, *The Second American Revolution: The Civil War-Era Struggle over Cuba and the Rebirth of the American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 112–118.

On May 24, 1868, Waldemar Raaslöff wrote to his friend Gustavus Fox, the assistant secretary of the navy, to say that he has received a parcel “containing diplomatic Correspondence, with your compliments,” and added: “My thoughts are very often in the U.S.”⁹¹

As the presidential election of 1868 drew nearer, Danish diplomats and politicians tried to spur ratification by entreating American politicians and officials personally. In Denmark, the St. Thomas treaty was perceived as a badly needed foreign policy success in the wake of the disastrous 1864 war and the even more disastrous peace negotiations conducted in London that summer. Raaslöff explained what was at stake for his government and himself in a “Private & confidential” letter to Gustavus Fox on September 14, 1868, which perhaps also suggested that Fox was the inspiration for Lincoln and Seward’s interest in the Danish West Indies in the first place:

[I was most happy to see] that you were not hopeless in regard to a satisfactory arrangement of the St. Thomas affair. As you have started the idea of the purchase it is quite natural that you should feel a considerable interest in the accomplishment of it, but I was nevertheless extremely glad to see from your letter that you continue to identify yourself with the measure, and that you will give it attention, and labor for it with all your well-known energy. I need not say how much I and the Danish Government will appreciate your most valuable assistance in this matter.⁹²

Toward the end of the letter, Raaslöff added that he would have to resign if the treaty was not ratified by the United States, as he had staked his political career in Denmark on ensuring its passage. Given Denmark’s *Kleinstaat* status, however, little changed, as Washington, DC, was – not surprisingly – mostly concerned with the 1868 presidential election and its domestic consequences.

In a last-ditch attempt to keep options open, Denmark on October 15, 1868, agreed to extend the ratification deadline by one year and shortly thereafter sent Raaslöff to the United States hoping that he could draw on personal connections, not least his relationship to Charles Sumner.⁹³ On

⁹¹ Waldemar Raaslöff, “Copenhagen May 24. 1868,” in *Gustavus Vasa Fox Collection 1823–1919 (bulk 1860–1889). Letters received* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1868). Also F. Bille, “Washington Den 7de April 1868. No. 21. (Confidentielt).”

⁹² Waldemar Raaslöff, “Private & Confidential. Copenhagen Septbr. 15. 1868,” in *Gustavus Vasa Fox Collection 1823–1919 (bulk 1860–1889). Letters received* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1868).

⁹³ Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865–1870*, 97–100.

Thursday, December 17, 1868, Raaslöff wired the following message to Fox from New York indicating increased desperation on the Danish government's part: "Just arrived. Leave Friday night for Washington."⁹⁴

Using all his diplomatic experience, Raaslöff pulled every possible political string he could find until his departure in April 1869. The frequency of Raaslöff's correspondence after his arrival in Washington, DC, at least thirty letters sent to Fox between January 3 and March 21, 1869, along with more than twenty to Sumner, testify to the Danish minister's urgency.⁹⁵ Between February 15 and March 20, 1869, Raaslöff, with the help of Christian T. Christensen, even commissioned writer James Parton to make the case for the treaty's ratification. The resulting book – *The Danish Islands: Are We Bound in Honor to Pay for Them?* – opened with Lincoln and Seward initiating negotiations to purchase the Danish West Indies and thus made the only argument still believed by the Danes to be convincing: American politicians had wanted to buy, Denmark had reluctantly sold, and now the only honorable course of action was ratification of a signed treaty.⁹⁶

Raaslöff sensed that the honor argument resonated personally with Sumner, which also fit well with the senator's 1867 point that "a bargain once made must be kept" even if the foreign relations chairman had also emphasized a need for the Senate to maintain the "important power" to ratify treaties.⁹⁷ Trying to appeal to a sense of American obligation, Raaslöff therefore met personally with several high-ranking American administration officials such as William Seward, Gustavus Vasa Fox, and Hamilton Fish and continued to send numerous letters to key congressional figures such as Sumner and Banks.

⁹⁴ *A Nineteenth Century Diplomat at Work: W. R. Raasloeff's Letters to Gustavus Vasa Fox, 1866–1873*, 32.

⁹⁵ W. Raaslöff, "181 G Street. Sunday January 31," in *The Papers of Nathaniel Banks. Box 44* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1869). See also Waldemar Raaslöff, "Private & Confidential. Washington March 8th 1869," in *Gustavus Vasa Fox Collection 1823–1919 (bulk 1860–1889). Letters received* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1869). See also James Parton, *The Danish Islands: Are We Bound in Honor to Pay for Them?* (Boston, MA: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1869).

⁹⁶ Parton, *The Danish Islands: Are We Bound in Honor to Pay for Them?*

⁹⁷ "Extract of a Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner on the Cession of Russian America to the United States. Shall the Treaty Be Ratified?"

In the end, however, despite his considerable effort to save the treaty and his own political career, Raaslöff realized the futility of his mission. After the election of Ulysses S. Grant in 1868, there was no longer any incentive for Congress to ratify the treaty. Raaslöff's efforts in some ways culminated with two appearances before the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee on January 26 and January 28, 1869, but the tension between the executive branch, which had negotiated the treaty, and the legislative committee he tried to convince was too deep to overcome.

A similar impression, one of a deep divide between two crucial branches of government, was given to Scandinavian-American readers in the Midwest when *Hemlandet*, in one of its rare articles on the topic, matter-of-factly observed that Sumner's committee considered the treaty a solely nonbinding "piece of paper" until it was ratified.⁹⁸ The lack of Scandinavian-American editorial energy regarding territorial expansion into the Caribbean stood in stark contrast to the emphasis in the ethnic press on westward expansion through Indian removal on the continent. Scandinavian-American editors and their readers strongly supported contiguous American empire but took a guarded approach, which stretched back to Even Heg in 1848, against incorporating territory south of the current border into the United States.⁹⁹

When William Seward retired as Secretary of State on March 4, 1869, it proved to be the end of Danish hopes to sell their West Indian "possessions." Seward had worked relatively closely with Raaslöff for almost a decade, but by 1869, Seward's influence, due to his relationship with the outgoing president, Andrew Johnson, was negligible.

After Ulysses S. Grant took office, the White House was occupied by yet another president sympathetic to American expansion. But where Johnson had specifically talked about the importance of St. Thomas,

⁹⁸ "Washington. Kongressen [Washington. Congress]," *Hemlandet*, February 9, 1869.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Arlow William Andersen, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand: The Norwegian-American Press and Public Affairs, 1847-1872* (Northfield, MA: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1953), 34. Since American Indians were not deemed sufficiently civilized to be incorporated into the United States either, Scandinavian editors and correspondents, as we have seen, took it for granted that they would be removed outside of current borders, and one correspondent in 1863 even suggested removing all native people within Minnesota to "a big island in Lake Superior" where they could learn "agriculture" and "acquire Christianity and civilization." See N. "Til Red. Af Hemlandet [To the Editor of Hemlandet]."

Grant focused his energy on Santo Domingo.¹⁰⁰ According to Pierce, Grant took the position that the St. Thomas treaty was “a scheme of Seward’s and he would have nothing to do with it.”¹⁰¹

At this time, Raaslöff had likely also given up hope. By March 28, 1869, Hamilton Fish, recently appointed secretary of state, wrote to Sumner: “Raasl[ö]ff does not wish any action on his treaty” knowing it would fail in a Senate vote.¹⁰² Due to the poor prospects for ratification, Sumner delayed reporting the treaty to the Senate for ratification.¹⁰³

Seen from Copenhagen, the lack of ratification was a sign of the international immaturity of the United States. As *Dagbladet* (The Daily) editorialized, it would have been “honorable” and “justifiable” for the Americans to officially have said no, but, by letting the “matter go by default,” the young nation’s politicians showed a lack of international etiquette.¹⁰⁴ Where President Johnson “could not” do anything to further the ratification process, it seemed to *Dagbladet* that President Grant “would not” do anything.¹⁰⁵

An editorial in the *New York Times*, however, summed up the American perspective: *Dagbladet*, and Danes in general, had forgotten that there were “new ideas working on the American mind,” and the main idea now was that “we can annex[,] protect, or ‘take’ all we want of the Western hemisphere, without the trouble and cost of purchase.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 536.

¹⁰¹ Pierce, *A Diplomatic Episode: The Rejected Treaty for St. Thomas*, 15. Trying to overcome opposition to expansion, and once again appealing to American honor, Raaslöff wrote to Nathaniel Banks on March 27, 1869, and implored the former general to help rally support for the Danish West Indies treaty. “I had a long conversation with the Secy of State – last night. He expected to see you to-day and will ask you whether – the treaty being ratified – the appropriation could pass the house. I trust you will encourage him . . . The members of the Administration are as far as I can find more or less convinced [that] the honor of the country is at stake, and I think prompt action can be brought about if those who wish the thing to be done will show some decision & determination.” See W. Raaslöff, “Saturday Morning [March 27],” in *The Papers of Nathaniel Banks. Box 45* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1869).

¹⁰² Pierce, *A Diplomatic Episode: The Rejected Treaty for St. Thomas*, 12.

¹⁰³ According to Pedersen, Raaslöff in his own assessment “felt that the Committee was well-disposed towards him personally, but overtly hostile to Seward.” See Pedersen, *The Attempted Sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America, 1865–1870*, 121.

¹⁰⁴ “Kjøbenhavn, Den 24de April [Copenhagen April 24],” *Dagbladet*, April 24, 1869.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. ¹⁰⁶ “St. Thomas,” *New York Times*, May 26, 1869.

In other words, the Danish government did not have enough influence on the international stage to make an emerging great power respect a mutually agreed-upon treaty, even one initiated by the stronger power.¹⁰⁷ Where Sumner in April 1867 had difficulty seeing how the Alaska treaty could possibly be refused without putting “to hazard the friendly relations” existing between the United States and Russia, there were few such fears in dealing with Denmark.¹⁰⁸

Danish politicians officially held out hope until 1870, but lobbying efforts had run their course. The aftermath of Charles Sumner’s closed Senate Foreign Relations committee meeting on March 24, 1870, formally concluded the matter. According to newspaper reports of the meeting, and the memory of Nevada Senator William Stewart, Sumner argued against the imperialism that was inherent in the St. Domingo scheme (and indirectly in the St. Thomas scheme) as “the proposed annexation would probably encourage further American acquisitions of Caribbean territory.”¹⁰⁹ After the meeting, Sumner reported the St. Thomas treaty “adversely” to the Senate and officially put an end to the process as “the Senate declined to ratify it.”¹¹⁰ The St. Domingo treaty suffered the same fate in June 1870.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Isaac Dookhan aptly pointed out in his study of local reactions in the Danish West Indies to the prospect of American annexation: “The reasons for the sale of the islands by Denmark and their purchase by the United States were varied and complex, but they turned upon the question of imperialism – declining in the case of Denmark and increasing on the part of the United States.” See Isaac Dookhan, “Changing Patterns of Local Reaction to the United States Acquisition of the Virgin Islands, 1865–1917,” *Caribbean Studies* 15 (1975): 50. See also Theodore Clarke Smith, “Expansion after the Civil War, 1865–71,” *Political Science Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1901): 412–413.

¹⁰⁸ “Extract of a Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner on the Cession of Russian America to the United States. Shall the Treaty Be Ratified?,” in *Collection 0002. Udenrigsministeriet. 1856–1909 Samlede sager. Vestindien 1865–1909. Box 771* (Copenhagen: Rigsarkivet, undated).

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Charles Callan Tansill, *The United States and Santo Domingo, 1798–1873: A Chapter in Caribbean Diplomacy*, reprint ed. (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1967), 406.

¹¹⁰ *64th Congress, 2d Session. House of Representatives. Report No. 1505. Cession of Danish West Indies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1917), 2.

¹¹¹ Tansill, *The United States and Santo Domingo, 1798–1873: A Chapter in Caribbean Diplomacy*, 407. As Frymer notes, Sumner again used race and climate as part of his reason for not supporting ratification: Sumner “ended with ‘one other consideration, vast in importance and conclusive in character, to which I allude only, and that is all. The island of San Domingo, situated in tropical waters and occupied by another race, never can become a permanent possession of the United States.’” See Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 214.

As we have seen, however, Sumner's opposition to expansion was most forceful in relation to noncontiguous expansion. On the American continent, the Republican Party's support for territorial growth remained strong, and in the following years its policy of landtaking only attracted Scandinavian immigrants in ever-increasing numbers.¹¹²

¹¹² Jørn Brøndal, *Ethnic Leadership and Midwestern Politics: Scandinavian Americans and the Progressive Movement in Wisconsin, 1890–1914* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 22–29; Karen V. Hansen, *Encounter on the Great Plains: Scandinavian Settlers and Dispossession of Dakota Indians, 1890–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2–7; Erika K. Jackson, *Scandinavians in Chicago: The Origins of White Privilege in Modern America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 41–46.