SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS
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The present study has sought to focus on the manner in which blacks viewed their situation in the United States of America and the way they responded to the circumstances and events that confronted them. Important studies on the role of blacks in the Civil War and the abolitionist movement, including several recent reappraisals by American scholars have been examined and on the basis of his own research and reflection, the present writer has attempted to present an analytical and interpretive account of an era that involved issues of great importance in the endless saga of the struggle for human dignity and freedom and against the forces of oppression and ignorance.

It has been stressed in this work that racist ideas have persisted in the United States from Colonial times. Jefferson's "suspicion" of black inferiority became a confirmed "fact" to most Americans both in the South and in the North in the 1850s. We have argued that black protest against their degraded position in America also goes back to the earliest days of the induction of black slaves in America. The main focus of the work is on a period which saw the blacks, at the least the "free" component of the community, organize itself for self-assertion and cooperative effort. Working against heavy odds, determined individuals sought to establish groups and to organize forums of their own. These were to be their vehicles of co-operation in the struggle to resist further degradation and, in time, the possible means of leading the race to a new destiny.
Black reaction to theories imputing their inferiority had an unique dimension of its own and was intrinsically linked to their situation in America. With but a handful of educated leaders, many of them self-taught, blacks did not come up with any new theories. They sought to utilize the existing white notions, to prove that they had their own distinct traits and that there was no essential difference between men of different colour and physical appearance.

By the 1850s, the black community faced an ever-growing tide of white racism. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 sent a shock through the black community and propelled blacks to militant protest. This was reflected in black participation in many of the fugitive rescue cases as well as in the alienation of many blacks from America. The emigration movement injected with black nationalist ideas, expressed the belief of one section of articulate blacks that there was no place for them in the U.S. Another section of blacks, aligned themselves to the developments that were taking place in the North. This was the development of a form of white nationalism expressing a desire to prevent the extension of slavery into the Western Territories. Though this movement was essentially against all black labour--free or slave--perceptive black leaders sought to use its anti-Southern edge towards improving the status of their own community. By the end of the decade however, there was little improvement in the situation for blacks. The Dred Scott decision of the U.S. Supreme Court declared that the blacks could not be considered citizens of the United States. Because this
decision also opened the Territories to slavery, it had a revolutionary impact in the North and helped push the nation closer to the Civil War.

The election of Abraham Lincoln precipitated the developing sectional crisis, already red-hot due to John Brown's abortive bid to spark of a slave revolt. Today, the debate as to whether slavery did or did not cause the Civil War rages unabated. It is accepted by most observers, however, that slavery was one of the factors that caused the war. In a recent article, Claudia Dale Goldin has argued that had the protagonists realized the actual cost of the war, which she has calculated to be some $10 billion, a political solution may have emerged. This is, of course, a hypothetical issue. The present study shows that the contending sides at the outset of the Civil War were not very far apart in their thinking on the position of blacks in American society, and, indeed, on the continuance of slavery where it had traditionally existed. Far from any climate favouring emancipation before the war, there was an almost uniform acceptance in the North and among most Republican leaders that slavery could continue if it restricted itself to its geographical limits defined by the Missouri Compromise. Whether slavery as an economic institution could have done so is, however, not in our province to answer.

The emancipation of the blacks was not the issue over

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which the war was fought. That emancipation did occur was due to events outside the control of the protagonists. There were a number of factors which brought about that great event. The role of President Lincoln, however, was not as major as has been generally accepted by at least the layman. Immediate and total emancipation was never part of any of Lincoln's schemes for dealing with the blacks. Charles H. Wesley has criticized the "Great Man" theory of emancipation. Though Wesley has not delved too deeply into Lincoln's beliefs in the essential unsuitability of the black presence in America, he has pointed out that Lincoln's policy was merely that of expediency and not motivated by any high moral principle.

It can be concluded that in the debate on the place of blacks in American society, the crucial element was the perception of blacks by white Americans as being an inferior race and hence unassimilable in their society. This opinion was only strengthened by the trends of the 1850s which saw the rapid expansion of the U.S. across the continent. The self-conscious expression of this development was in the form of a feeling of a racial predestination of white Americans to straddle the continent. This "Manifest Destiny" of America was then a form of nationalism, but in the context of America, white nationalism. Carl N. Degler has ascribed the growth of racism in the U.S. to social and economic factors rather than in any intellectual

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factors. The highly mobile and competitive society that took shape in the U.S. in the antebellum period fostered a sense of individualism that supposedly made every man believe that he was the master of his own destiny. Degler argues that in this upward drive, the blacks were points of reference. Unable to participate in this process of "moving up," due to the fact that they were slaves, or if free, occupying the lowest rung of the economic and social ladder, blacks became the identifiable inferiors of others in the society at large. Such a contention may indicate the reasons for the intensification of anti-black feelings in the 1850s, but it leaves the primary question unanswered, as to why racist ideas took firm root in the otherwise egalitarian environment of the American Republic. It is submitted in the present work that while economic interests prevented the incorporation of any abolitionist sentiments in the Constitution, the perpetuation of black bondage was largely the result of an intellectual effort designed to reinforce and popularize what was simply a primitive exploitative institution. Slavery was buttressed by arguments based on economics, sociology, natural science, politics and even religion. It came to be accepted as a fact of life in consonance with science and theology. This, in the opinion of the present writer, made emancipation improbable if not impossible in the period leading up to the Civil War.

Leading from this fact, we can see that the future of race relations in the United States became seriously compromised by the attitude of the white leadership that did emancipate the blacks in 1863. Lincoln hesitated to take any step that may have altered the nature of the existing relationship between the black and white Americans. James M. McPherson has pointed out that the question that most concerned Lincoln and his contemporaries was that of race adjustment—the role that blacks would play at any point of time in American society. Lincoln's consistent, and sometimes even misdirected, efforts to provide for the deportation of blacks outside the United States reflected essentially a remarkable consistency of attitudes of the white leadership of the U.S. from the days of Thomas Jefferson.

The only official attempt of the Lincoln Administration to comprehend the nature of the problem was reflected by an inquiry conducted by the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission in 1863. The Commission was headed by a long-time abolitionist Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe and among its members were Robert Dale Owen and James McKaye. The conscientious Dr. Howe addressed the leading naturalist of the country, Louis Agassiz, a series of questions to come to grips with the issue. One question pertained to the future of the black race in America to which Agassiz replied that the stock of "pure" blacks could "perpetuate their race" forever in the Deep South. On an answer to a second

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query, Agassiz declared that the blacks of mixed parentage were a degenerate breed tending to sterility and would eventually die out. Emancipation, Agassiz felt, would thus result in a migration of "pure" blacks southwards to the Deep South "while the weaker and lighter ones will remain and die out among us." Such were the thoughts of America's best scientific minds of that time.

It was not surprising then that the Inquiry Commission too came to almost similar conclusions. Many of the conclusions reached by Agassiz were based on a certain degree of auto-suggestion. Emancipation had already taken place, colonization had already proved itself to be a failure, therefore, an answer that suggested that the blacks would mainly remain in the South and indeed drain off there from the rest of the country was a convenient belief. Robert Dale Owen who summarized the major findings of the Commission in 1864, declared that the blacks would indeed move to the South where the climate suited them. "A primary law governing the voluntary movement of peoples is that of thermal lines," he declared. Dr. Howe was even more severe. He believed, as he noted in his report, that there was no "pure" African race in the U.S. The mixed race that did

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5 Howe's three queries to Agassiz are dated 3rd, 9th and 10th August 1863 and can be found in Elizabeth Cary Agassiz, Louis Agassiz: His Life and Correspondence (Boston, 1890), pp. 592-3, 595 and 596-601.

exist as American blacks, by the operations of the "natural law" certified by Agassiz, would eventually die out. When people who were sympathetic to the blacks took this line of thought with regard to the future of blacks in America, there can be little wonder at the inability of the Civil War to solve the issue of race adjustment in a manner conferring complete equality to blacks.

The situation that confronted the blacks in the United States in the antebellum period was an extremely difficult and complex one. The blacks never did accept the fact of their enslavement willingly, or easily. Herbert Aptheker and others have documented the many slave revolts that occurred in the history of black servitude in the U.S. The reasons for their lack of success are many and complex, not in the least the fact that they were an unarmed and unorganized minority subjected to stringent controls. The vigilant white slave-holders were quick to detect any signs of even minor trouble and mete out severe punishment. Nevertheless, Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner were not forgotten men among the blacks. It seems apparent that the black leadership in our period of study had taken its measure of the enemy and realized the futility of any armed insurrection. Yet the militancy was there to be seen in the writings of David Walker, Henry Highland Garnet, Martin

7 Samuel G. Howe, The Refugees in Canada West, Report to the Freedmen's Inquiry Commission (Boston pp. 18, 26 and 33.
8 Herbert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts (New York, 1974 [1949]).
Delany and others. Even blacks like Frederick Douglass who espoused moral suasionism or the use of political platforms, did not at times hide the fact that, if necessary, and the circumstances being propitious, the blacks would rise in an armed insurrection. In this context, it must be pointed out that the almost uniform espousal of some form of black nationalism by black leaders like Martin Delany, Henry Highland Garnet, J.T. Holly and, in a sense, Frederick Douglass, seem to be a reaction to the events of the times. Black nationalism was indeed a useful tactic in the face of the problems that the black community was faced with at that time. The fact that it did not survive the war, indicates this nature of the mid-century manifestation of black nationalism and in some periods, pan-Negro nationalism.

The present writer has come to the conclusion that given its small size, its dispersal in a vast land, its economic backwardness, and the discriminatory constraints under which it lived, the free black community possessed a remarkable wealth of talent and spirit. While this talent in slaves could be seen in the Nat Turners and Denmark Vesey's, others like Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany, Daniel A. Payne, Henry H. Garnet, James McCune Smith, John S. Rock were surely outstanding examples in the history of black Americans. Indeed, there should come a time when they will be easily recognizable figures in American history textbooks as well. They deserve their place in any history of man's struggle against the inhumanity of man.