

Exclusion through Removal, Citizenship through Whiteness: Rethinking Colonization
and Black Resistance in the U.S. Midwest

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This presentation examines the construction of racially-determined citizenship in the mid-nineteenth century American Midwest with a particular emphasis on the interrelationships between colonization societies, laws of Black exclusion, and the challenges Black people made to such racial exclusionary projects. Based upon archival research in the states of Indiana and Wisconsin, I focus on local and state level bans on Black people and examine how these bans were connected to colonization projects emerging from each state. Critically, the paper considers how such bans force us to reconsider the changing nature of colonization projects to not just encompass projects of Black removal from the United States entirely but also to consider how local and state bans make us consider how colonization operated as a simultaneously regional and international project. In the state of Indiana, from the time of the emergence of the American colonization society in 1813 to the passage of the 1851 constitution which banned Black people entirely from the state, exclusion transformed from a project of national removal to a project of state exclusion. In the state of Wisconsin, following statehood in 1848, early state senators aggressively sought to articulate homesteading projects that had Black removal and white immigration at their core as the demographic basis for state population growth. Ultimately, by considering the different trajectories of these histories, this presentation further argues for a reconsideration of the centrality of colonization and exclusion in so-called free states as essential to the racial construction of citizenship in the nineteenth century United States.