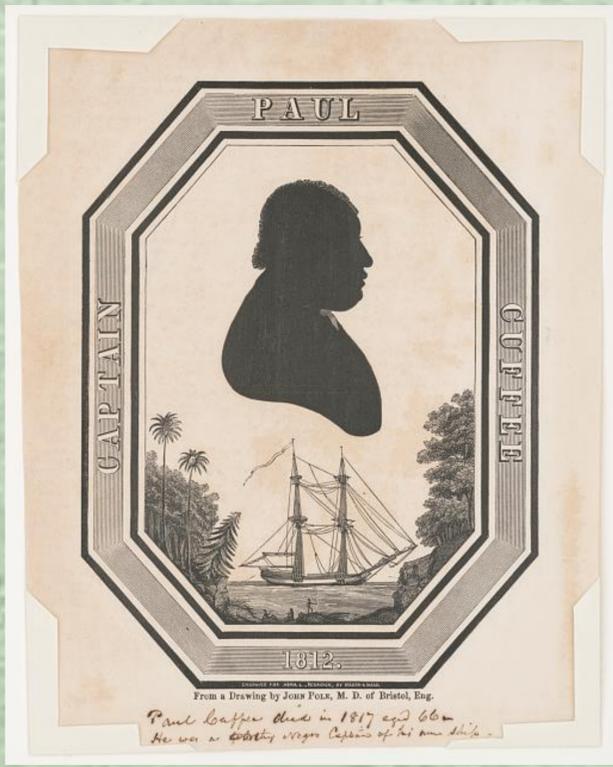


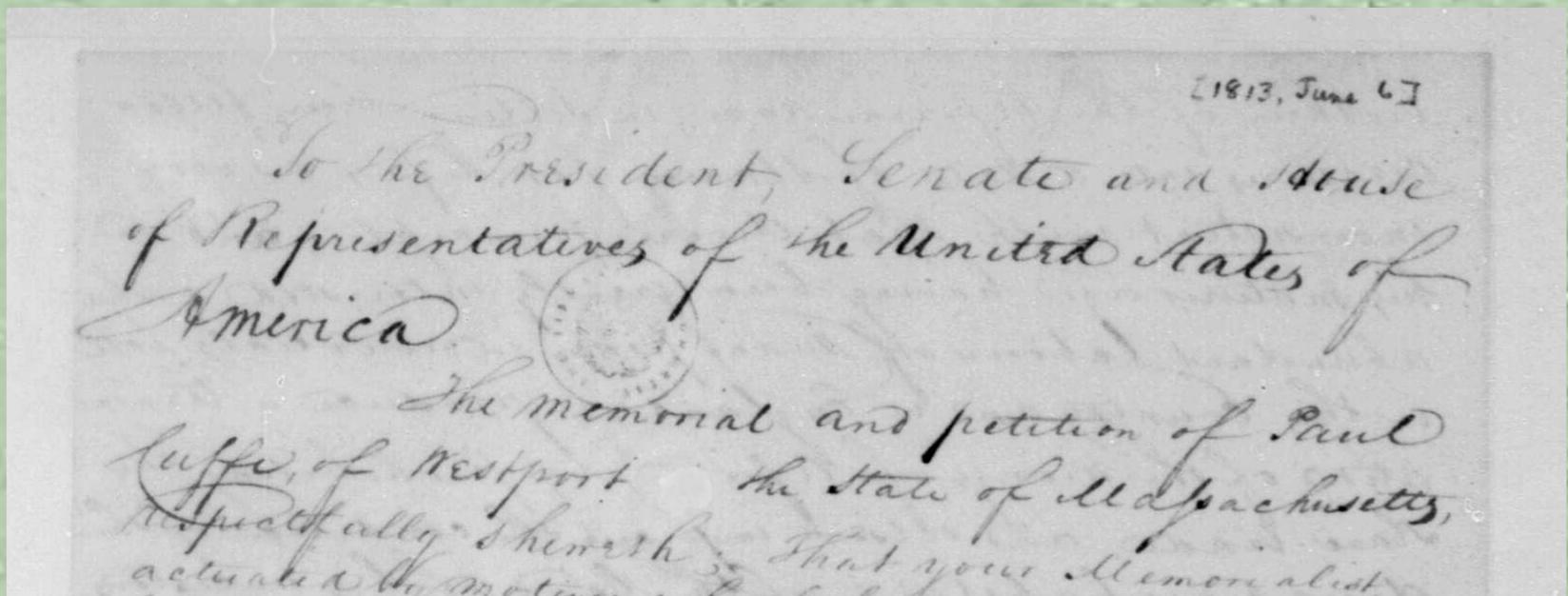
# The Colonization Movement

The colonization movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries referred to the act of sending free people of color out of the U.S. and Europe, generally to Africa. In 1787 Britain established Sierra Leone on West Africa's coast. The colony was meant to be a destination for London's black poor and freed North American enslaved.



Left: Silhouette of Paul Cuffe from 1812. The tropical region below could represent Sierra Leone. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

Below: Letter written by Paul Cuffe addressing James Madison and the U.S. Congress. Dated June 6, 1813 four years before Cuffe's death. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

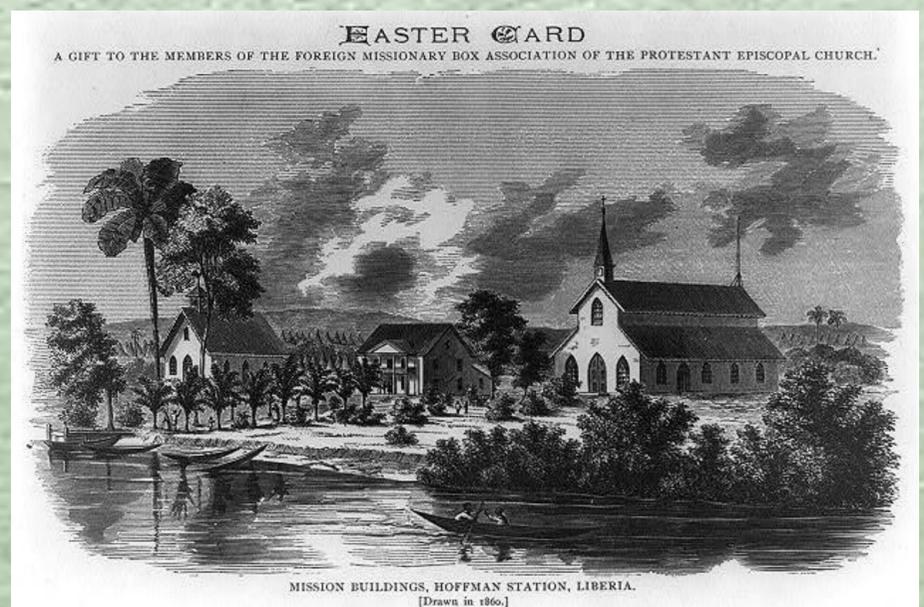


After the American Revolution, many enslaved peoples escaped to the British side and were granted freedom in Canada. These people made up a large part of the movement to Sierra Leone.

In the U.S., colonization spread among abolitionists and slave owners looking to remove free African Americans. Paul Cuffee, a free African American sea captain, took America's first settlement group to Sierra Leone in 1815.

# Colonization in the U.S.

The American Colonization Society (ACS), or the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color in the United States, founded in 1816, was the first organized society for colonization in the states. Bolstered by the perceived success of the Sierra Leone colony ACS gained popular support in the U.S.



Mission Buildings, Hoffman Station, Liberia. Those who saw colonization as an opportunity for conversion built churches and missionaries like this one. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*



Lifetime Membership Certificate for ACS, circa 1840. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Manuscript division, American Colonization Society Papers.*

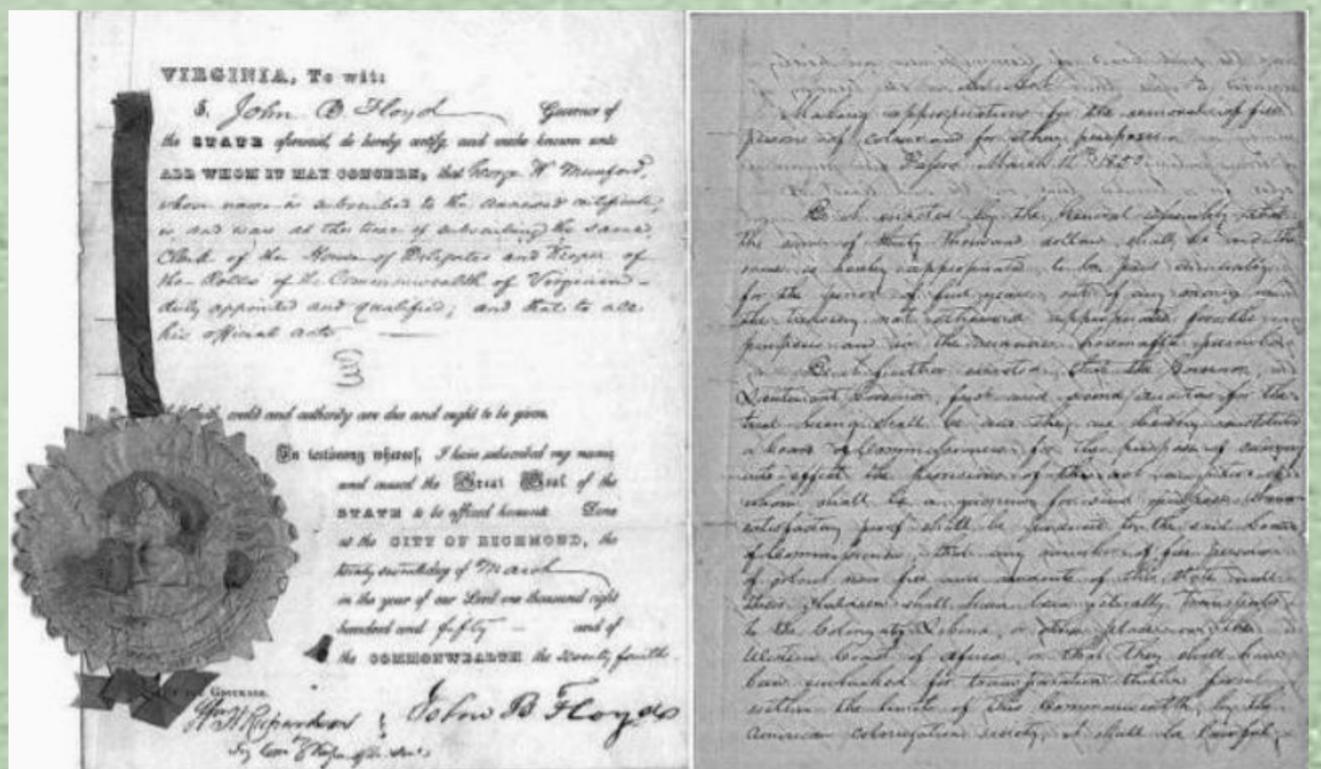
Some people believed that returning to Africa was the only way African Americans could be truly free. Certain abolitionists believed colonization would eradicate slavery. Other groups planned to westernize Africa with Christianity. Many slave owners feared free African Americans in the states would spark slave revolts similar to the one that created Haiti.

# ACS and an African Colony

ACS was founded by Reverend Robert Finely and his brother-in-law, Elias B. Caldwell. Reactions were mixed in the free African American community. Some eagerly supported the return to Africa, while others believed they were and deserved to be U.S. citizens, as they and their families had built the country.

The ACS was not the only group in the U.S. that planned to create colonies in Africa for free African Americans. In Southern states, slave owners encouraged formations of colonization societies to ferry free African Americans away from enslaved before any revolts could be planned. Northern States founded them as well, mostly under influence of Quakers who were trying to abolish slavery.

An 1850 act by the state of Virginia, enacting appropriations for the removal of free African Americans to Liberia. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, American Colonization Society Papers.*



In 1820, enough money had been raised for a voyage. Three ACS members and eighty-eight African Americans boarded a ship and set sail for the British Colony of Sierra Leone. They planned to found a new colony, whose governor would be an ACS member and who would govern by U.S. laws.

These societies eventually also sent emigrants to the ACS colony which had been named Liberia. More freed African Americans settled on the coastal land the ACS had forcibly bought from indigenous tribes and created their own settlements. These were later absorbed into the government of Liberia.

# The Creation of Liberia

The 1820 ACS voyage landed at Shrebro Island off of West Africa. Malaria made the location unsustainable and ACS members Dr. Eli Ayres and Robert Stockton searched for a suitable new settlement. At Cape Mesurado, resistant local leaders sold, at gunpoint, a strip of the coast thirty-six-miles long and three-miles wide. This land was sold to ACS agents for \$300 in trade goods.

The rest of the group landed on April 25, 1822 and tensions between the ACS Governor Jehudi Ashmun and the settlers led to Ashmun leaving. In 1824 he returned and in compromise, settlers codified laws while the ACS held sovereign power. The main settlement became Monrovia, for President James Monroe, and the colony Liberia.

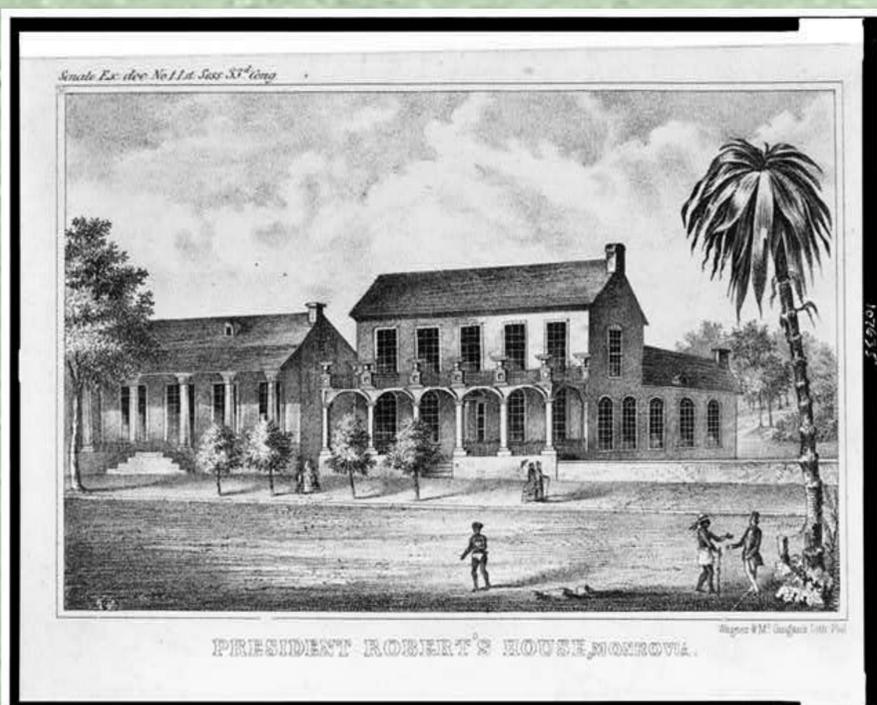


Map of Republic of Liberia, 1853. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, American Colonization Society.*

# Formation of the Commonwealth of Liberia

Indigenous people did not appreciate a colony on their coast and early settlements were attacked. In 1824 Monrovia chose to build fortifications for protection. Colonization society settlements from Virginia and Pennsylvania chose to merge with Monrovia in 1838.

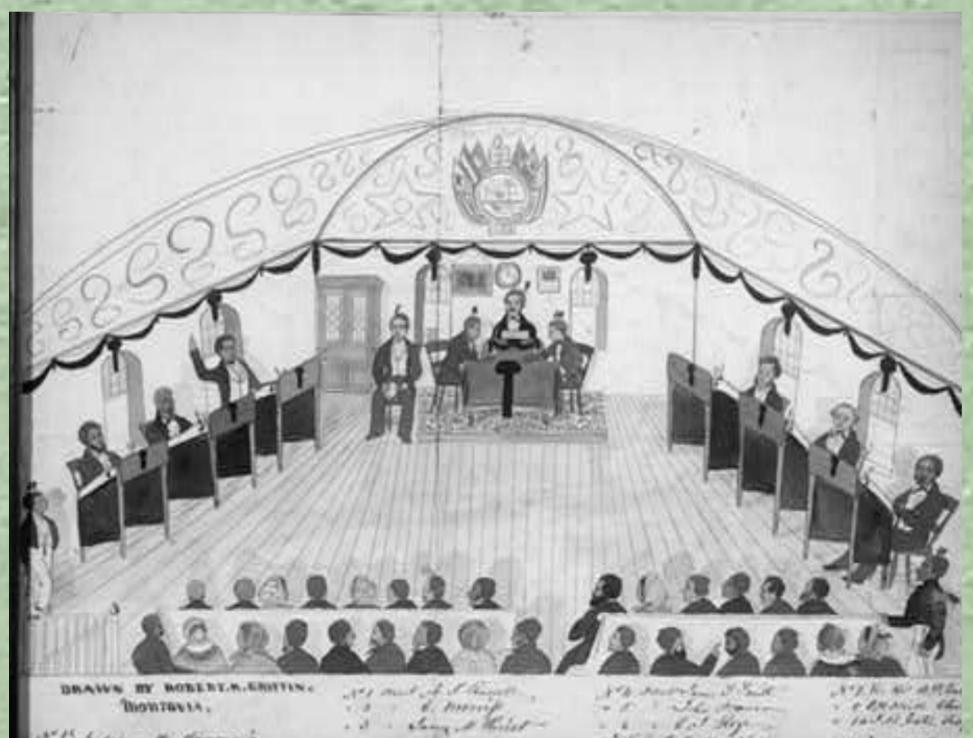
When the British government told Liberia the ACS didn't have a recognized right to levy taxes, colonists were convinced Liberia needed recognized sovereignty and full taxing authority. In October, 1846, the Liberian government voted for independence, declaring it in 1847. Liberia was the second black democracy in the world, after Haiti.



Left: Liberian President Joseph J. Roberts' House, circa 1840. The house was located in Monrovia. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

The merged settlements called themselves the Commonwealth of Liberia and claimed all settlements from Cestos River to Cape Mount. The Commonwealth adopted a new constitution and a new ACS Governor in 1839. Liberia made its revenue through customs duties imposed on indigenous and British traders, which angered both groups.

Below: Drawing of an assembly of the Liberian Senate, by Robert K. Griffin, circa 1856. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*



# U.S. Government Support of Colonization

The U.S. did not recognize Liberia as a sovereign nation immediately. However, the idea of colonization remained popular, even as a government policy. The ACS continued sending emigrants and by 1867 it had sent 13,000.

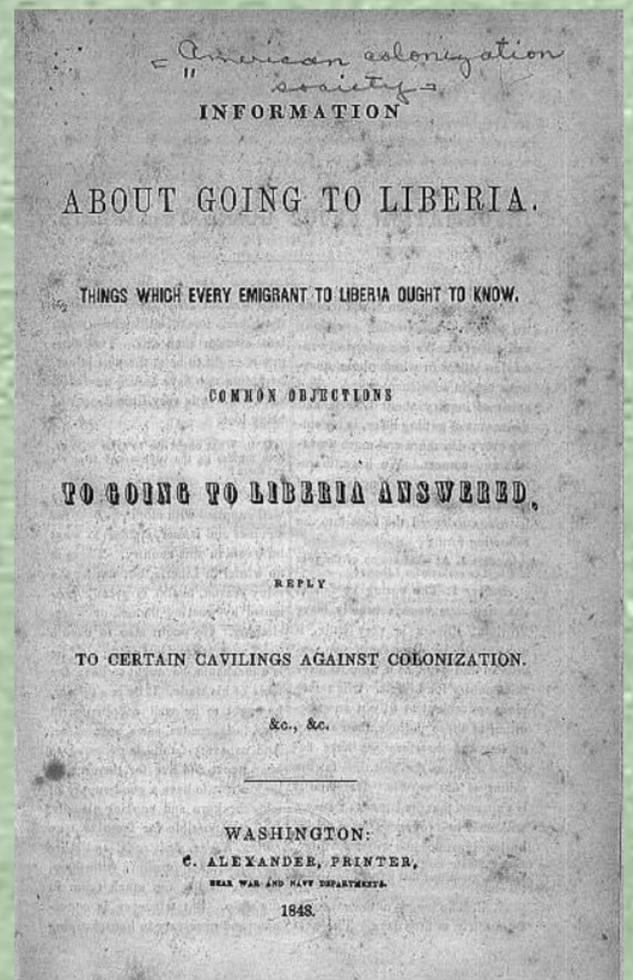
Colonization became an important topic again in the lead up to the civil war.

*“Free them, and make them politically and socially, our equals? My own feelings will not admit of this; and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of white people will not.... We can not, then, make them equals.”*

*~Abraham Lincoln's Peoria Speech*

In the 1830s William Lloyd Garrison's condemnation of colonization threatened the ACS. They responded with this pamphlet to answer questions about Liberia and encourage emigration. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

Colonization was an answer to what would happen to the four million free enslaved. Before his presidency, Lincoln made speeches supporting abolition and colonization.



In the Peoria speech given October 16, 1854, Lincoln considers the option to, “free all the slaves, and send them back to Liberia – to their own native land.” Within a few sentences, he tempers the statement, admitting its logistical impossibility. However, by the time of his presidency, in 1862, congress had appropriated \$600,000 to transport African Americans overseas, either to Africa or South America.

# Colonization during Lincoln's Presidency

In an August 14, 1862 meeting with a delegation of prominent African American abolitionists, Lincoln told them that congress had money to send African Americans wherever they wanted to go. He then stated that “It is better, therefore, for us both to be separated.”

John T. Costin, freemason, was a member of the delegation that spoke to Lincoln about colonization. *Courtesy of the New York Public Library, digital collections.*



President Lincoln gave audience to a delegation of free negroes yesterday, during which the disabilities of the colored race were directly but temperately presented to thir consideration, with advice in the premises. The President, in the course of his remarks, suggested Central America as a suitable place for the colonization of the colored race, and finally dismissed the committee, telling them to take their own time for a reply. The Baltimore American says:—"He told them some plain truths, enforced by sound argument, but we imagine it was time and effort wasted."

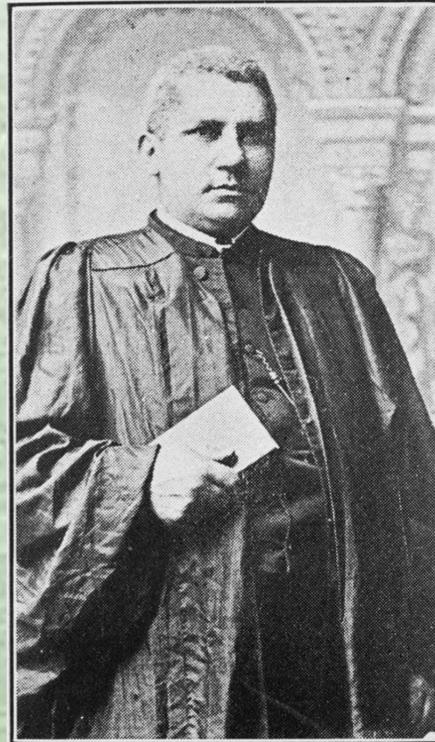
The U. S. War Department has issued an additional regulation in relation to the draft.—  
*Alexandria Gazette August 15, 1862. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Chronicling America.*

The delegation refused; they and many African Americans who read newspaper coverage of this meeting were extremely offended. For many African Americans the U.S. was theirs and they strongly believed they had the right to be full citizens. Support was split in the community, but most favored integration. Lincoln last mentioned colonization to congress in December, 1862; the year the U.S. recognized Liberia and established diplomatic relations.

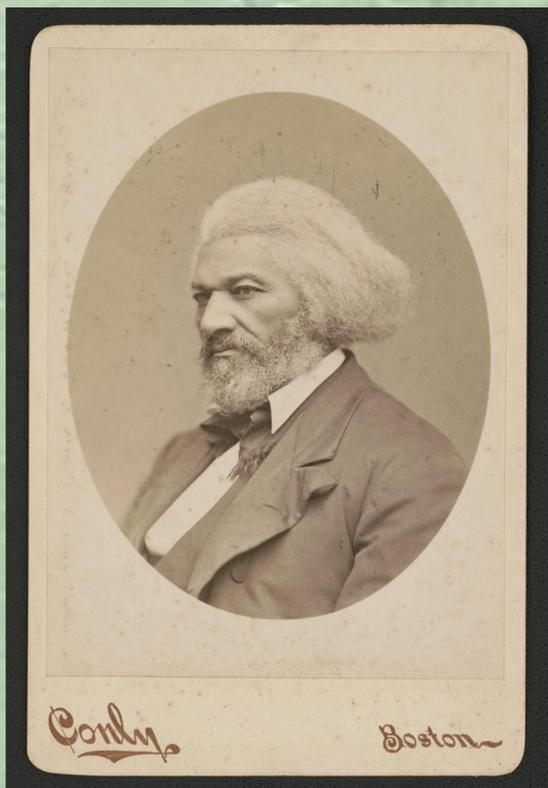
With the Emancipation Proclamation issued January 1, 1863, colonization became a difficult public position. The acceptance of African Americans into the military to fight for their country accepted them symbolically as citizens. The argument that emigration was the best choice for African Americans because the U.S. was not ‘their’ country was then invalidated. From 1863 onward Lincoln never publicly mentioned colonization again.

# Henry McNeal Turner and Colonization

One of the largest proponents of African American colonization in Africa was Reverend Henry McNeal Turner. Turner was an active minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. After African Americans were expelled from Reconstruction politics, Turner believed African Americans would always face subordination in the U.S.



Picture of Turner issued in 1916, a year after his death. *Courtesy of the New York Public Library.*



Frederick Douglass, pictured here in 1884, opposed Turner's colonization plans. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

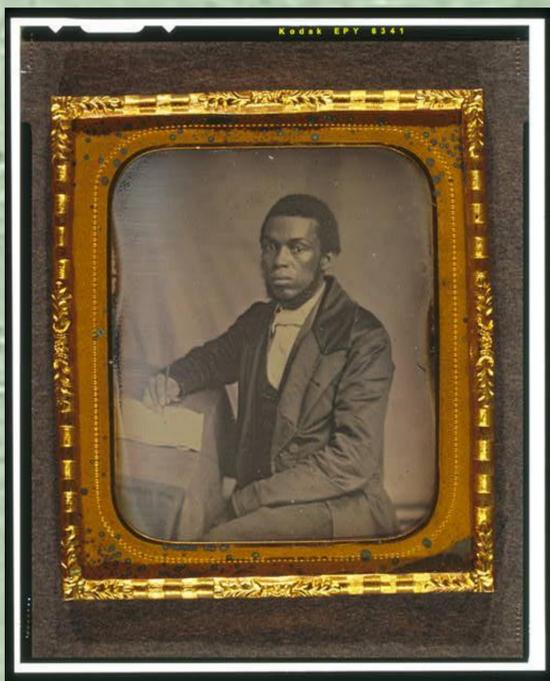
Turner began publicly advocating for a return to and colonization of Africa. Turner believed it was the duty of African Americans to Christianize Africa. He had internalized western paternalism and saw Africa as a land of economic resources with 'morally inferior' people.

Turner believed the U.S. was complicit in violence against African Americans and that integration was impossible. However, by this point colonization was unpopular in the African American community. Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington promoted integration, overpowering Turner's views. Emigration to Liberia continued after the Civil War but was never large scale.

# The Legacy of Colonization

Colonization failed in its main goal. The societies were unable to emigrate every African American out of the U.S. Most freed enslaved were proud Americans, who knew they deserved citizenship. Those who left, for Haiti or Liberia, faced new challenges. In Haiti they were still second-class citizens.

The freed enslaved who remained in the U.S. joined active citizenship enthusiastically in the Reconstruction days. They voted, African Americans became representatives and leaders in local government. They became social activists through their network of churches. Some African Americans traveled north, others went west.



James Skirving, interim President of Liberia from 1871-1872. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

The first African American U.S. National Representatives and Senator, 1872. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

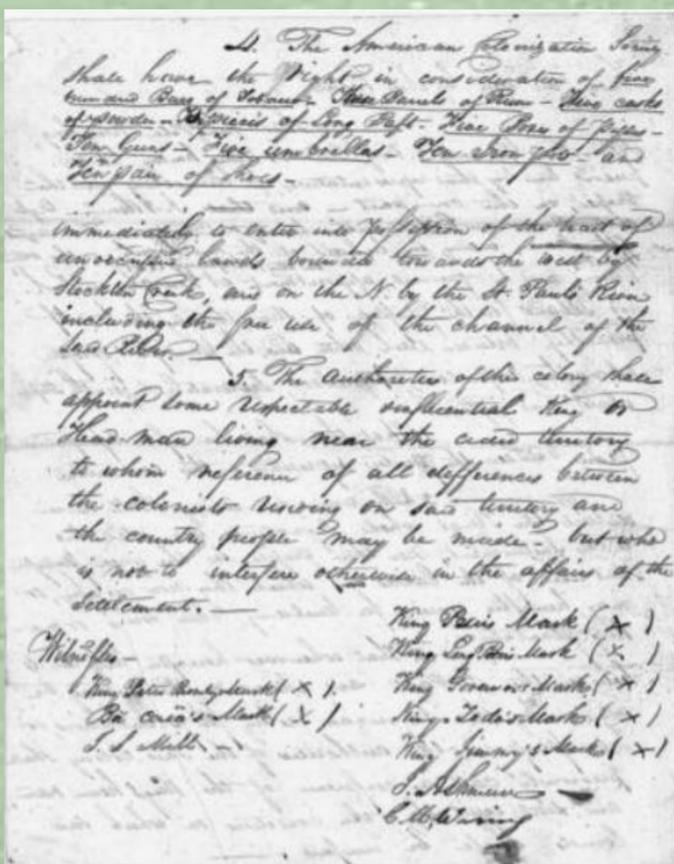


In Liberia, emigrants faced the challenge of building a new country on inhabited land. The indigenous tribes resisted the growth of Liberia, but eventually they were incorporated into the country. The Americo-Liberians, descendants of the American colonizers, controlled the government. Today they make up five percent of the country's population.

Most freed enslaved remained in the South. A want of funds coinciding with a new labor deficit, had tied many freed enslaved to the land again. When Reconstruction ended a decade later, the full citizenship African Americans had claimed was taken away by Jim Crow Segregation.

# Further Resources

- *She Would Be King* by Wayetu Moore  
This is a novel that takes place partly in Liberia in the mid-19th century as the ACS influence is beginning to wane.
- *The African American Mosaic: Colonization* Exhibit from the Library of Congress (digitized on their website)
- NPR's Tracing President Lincoln's Thoughts On Slavery  
Author Interviews: Eric Foner (*The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*)
- The 1619 Podcast and Project by *The New York Times*
- "Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln," from the White House Historical Association (see footnotes and resources)
- The Peoria Speech, October 16, 1854 from the National Park Service
- "Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Negroes," *Collected works of Abraham Lincoln*, on <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/>



Treaty between American Colonization Society and African Kings, May 11, 1825. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, American Colonization Society Papers.*



Current map of West Africa, showing the borders of modern Liberia. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*