



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1998 Volume IV: American Political Thought

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## Land is the Basis of All Independence

Curriculum Unit 98.04.07  
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“ **Go Back to Africa** ” is perhaps the most racially charged political phrase used in connection with Black people in America. Most Blacks, as well as most Whites, have probably come to interpret such an utterance as derogatory. However, Back-to-Africa political thought has not always been looked upon with such derision. Contrary to popular belief, Black leaders in America were the first ones to raise the issue of Black repatriation to the continent of Africa.

This unit is entitled Land is the Basis of all Independence primarily because the history of the development of the United States is a valid historical lesson for many Blacks, as it for many Whites. More specifically, if you do not control your own land, you will never be free. While I do not, in any way agree with the way in which Americans secured the land (they slaughtered and nearly exterminated Native Americans to secure it), I do believe that having control over the land on which you intend to call home is as fundamentally important to the development of a people as would be the food and shelter they would eventually derive from the land.

This unit, Land is the Basis of all Independence, is intended for use in Social Studies, United States history or Black history classes in grades 7-12, and will discuss the development of American political thought regarding the emergence and significance of Back-to-Africa political thought in America between 1790 and 1850. This unit is further intended to serve as complementary information regarding discussions about US history in general, and American political thought in particular in order to address the pervasive dearth of qualitative discussions offered by most textbooks in the area of Black political thought. When textbooks do mention Black political thought, the focus is very narrow and almost always excludes the non-traditional political theories of Black people in America. This is especially true in regard to Black American repatriation issues.

This information is important to know for many reasons. However, what is of utmost importance in this regard is that in order to understand Black people and the diverse roles they play in American life today, and the choices that they have had to make in the face of intense racism and White supremacy, all people generally, and students in particular, need a vivid sense both of how passionate many Blacks have always been about making better lives for themselves here in America, and also how understandably embittered many have always been about the prospects for doing so here. As a result, emigration or repatriation seemed to be the best option for them.

Recognizing both of these as deeply entrenched, enduring features of the Black experience in America helps everyone to understand why many Blacks today have a strong sense of entitlement and ownership toward the

United States, along with a perhaps equally or more powerful sense of alienation from it. This alienation has, in many cases and for many years, manifested itself in a desire on the part of some Blacks to leave this country, and go to the continent of Africa where they could, conceivably, become part of the ruling element. It seems to be a natural inclination for human beings to desire to be part of the ruling element wherever they may be. However, participation in the decision making process in the highest levels of American life is more often than not, closed to Black people. This has been, and continues to be, a fundamental failure of America's version of democracy.

## Narrative

### Part One: Freedom, Justice and Liberty

For Black people in America from the late eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century, integration into American society with Whites was probably the dominant goal, though this is certainly difficult to quantify. However, while most non-enslaved Blacks may have sought full integration and freedom in American society, there was a small group, primarily of Northern Black leaders, who advocated emigration to Africa, Haiti, Canada and various other parts of the Western Hemisphere. In short, there was Back-to-Africa political behavior concurrent with the fight for Black people to enjoy complete citizenship status in the United States.

And while most of the advocates of emigration and Back-to-Africa political behavior were Northern Blacks, it is interesting to note that some of the most noted emigrationists, among them Martin Delany, Robert Purvis and Daniel Payne, were actually Southern-born Blacks. These men, as well as others who were more militant, found themselves in the North due to the exodus of many non-enslaved Blacks from the South during the nineteenth century. Yet, while the Back-to-Africa debate of this period was almost always led by Northern Blacks, it was Southern-born Blacks who actually emigrated to Africa to dominate the government of the Republic of Liberia. As in the case of the internal migration of Blacks from the Southern states of America to the North, the poorest Southern Blacks were mainly the ones to go back to Africa. Clearly, the poorest Southern Blacks sought to escape terribly oppressive political, social and economic conditions in search of the "promised land" even if this "promised land" had to be found on another continent entirely.

Noted historian John Henrick Clarke has suggested that nineteenth century Northern Black advocates of emigration were unable to construct and/or articulate a message that could reach a Black audience. As a result, according to Clarke, Back-to-Africa efforts failed to gain a stronghold among Black political thought until the arrival of Jamaican-born revolutionary Marcus Garvey in the early twentieth century. Clarke, however, seems to overlook one important point in this critique: most Blacks in America were enslaved up until the 1850's and could not be reached by the Back-to-Africa message. In the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Southern Blacks, who far outnumbered Black Northerners, were reduced to another form of oppression and were making little or no progress.

It is important to note here that Back-to-Africa political thought had two distinct sources of origin: One White, and the other Black. There were Whites who wanted certain Blacks, namely non-enslaved Blacks, to be colonized on the continent of Africa. Their position was reactionary, as they felt that non-enslaved Blacks would ultimately threaten the stability of the slave system. The Black advocacy of Back-to-Africa tenets was proactive, a response to White supremacy and slavery in America.

The Whites who advocated colonizing Black people in America on the African continent seemed motivated to do so in order to solve what they called the "Negro Problem." That problem, as they saw it, was the presence

of non-enslaved Blacks in America. They had not envisioned America with a Black population unless they were enslaved. Non-enslaved Blacks could become “troublesome property.” This would create an additional “Negro Problem.” As a solution to either or both of these problems, Whites advocated colonizing non-enslaved Blacks on the African continent. The colonization idea, however, differed dramatically from the Back-to-Africa ideas advanced by Black leaders. The former was essentially a deportation plan, often with Whites willing to underwrite or finance that deportation. Repatriation to Africa, on the other hand, was a program of Black advocacy that had its own distinctive motivations. Many Blacks had hoped to spread Christianity to their “Heathen” African brethren, displaying little if any appreciation for anything African unless it had been exposed and strongly influenced by a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant version of Christianity. Some believed that the slave trade would come to a halt if Africa were made free. Still others asserted that Black people had no future in a country where Whites were the ruling element, and would have to seek their future elsewhere. At times, all these philosophies seemed to dominate Back-to-Africa political thought. It is the latter of these philosophies mentioned above that is central to this unit. In this view, emigration was seen as an activity or program of self-help and self-determination for Blacks. Colonization and repatriation could have the same results, i.e. landing some Blacks in Africa. But the two philosophies had vastly different motivations.

There are historians who have looked upon Back-to-Africa political thought as a Black nationalist activity. In fact, historians have frequently labeled any kind of Black group activity, or Black group migratory behavior, as Black nationalist. To bring some clarity in regard to the use of these political philosophies in the context of this unit, it is worth mentioning here that Black nationalism concerns itself primarily with nation-state construction or nation-state participation. There have been two manifestations of Black nationalist activity in America, both separatist in orientation. The first involves Blacks who sought to emigrate to Black countries. And secondly, other Blacks have been advocates of building a Black country within the territorial confines of the United States. Back-to-Africa would fall under the first kind of Black nationalist activity mentioned above.

Those who advocated the construction of all-Black states within the confines of America would not, in my opinion, be accurately defined as Black nationalists. For as long as they sought to stay on American soil, and therefore under the jurisdiction of the United States Government, they would most be placed in the same category as the Blacks who migrated from the South to North, or from the South to the West.

There are also historians who suggest that those Africans who were kidnapped from their homeland and who jumped off slave ships and were certain to meet their death, were somehow Black nationalists. These Africans were not interested in constructing a new country. They had been captured from countries and simply wanted to return to them. These historians not only misrepresent Black nationalism, but their error helps to strengthen my argument that Back-to-Africa political thought is properly understood as the efforts of Black people in America to repatriate to the land of their ancestors.

### **Part Two:** Black Beginnings of Back-to-Africa Political Behavior

Some Northern Black leaders took an interest in repatriation as early as the 1770’s. Unfortunately, for years many historians - both Black and White- have failed to adequately discuss such involvement by Black leaders.

Prior to the American Revolution, Newport, Rhode Island was America’s main slave-trading port, though the North carried the distinction of being more ‘progressive’ and ‘liberal’ regarding matters of race. Despite Newport’s designation as America’s chief slave trading port, (or perhaps because of it), the Union Society of Africans in that city advanced the cause of emigration for Blacks in America. On October 17, 1789, just two years after the drafting of the United States Constitution, members of the Free African Society of Philadelphia met to discuss the merits of a communication they received from the Union Society of Africans in Newport

inquiring about the possibility of repatriation for Blacks to Africa. The Free African Society debated the Newport proposal and ultimately decided to reject it, believing that in time, conditions would improve for Black people in America.

One can see the dichotomy regarding the future of Black people in America in the debate between the Free African Society of Philadelphia and the Union Society of Africans of Newport in the late 1700's. While the Newport Blacks contended that their allegiance lay with Africa, that there was absolutely no future in America for Black people given the insidious nature of White Supremacy and its resultant Black oppression, the Philadelphia group insisted that their allegiance lay with America, a land in which their forefathers had shed blood, sweat and tears to help develop. Further, the Philadelphia organization believed that conditions would change in America due primarily to the just and good nature of God and the ability of moral righteousness to win a war with evil.

Although the debate discussed may not have resulted in the actual repatriation of Blacks in America to their African homelands, the debate lingered on among Black American leadership. More importantly, the actual emigration of Black people began to take hold with appearance of another New Englander Captain Paul Cuffe.

### **Paul Cuffe: Assured Friend**

Paul Cuffe was born in 1759 of an African father and an Indian mother on the island of Cuttyhunk near Westport, Massachusetts. Though Cuffe never received formal schooling, he learned reading and writing through his own efforts in late adolescence, and gained navigational skills on the job. He went to sea at the age of sixteen, ultimately becoming a wealthy businessman, acquiring a fortune through the shipping industry.

While Cuffe made many contributions to Black Americans, it is his life as an emigrationist that jettisoned him into the international limelight. Because New England had been a hotbed for emigrationist thought and debate, Paul Cuffe, a Black New Englander, found himself swept up in this raging political debate. He had come to contemplate more seriously the conditions facing Black people in America. After giving the idea of emigration much reflection, Cuffe drew the conclusion that if Black people were to be achieve liberation, they would have to do so on the continent of Africa.

Initially, Cuffe wanted to open trade with Sierra Leone, which the British established in 1787 as a place to settle "indigent" Blacks from England. Cuffe believed that such commerce would lead to the repatriation of many non-enslaved Blacks from the United States, and that this repatriation would lead to the uplift of Africa through an evangelization of the continent.

After giving Sierra Leone considerable thought, Cuffe set sail on an exploratory trip to this British Colony on New Years Day in 1811. After finding conditions there favorable for emigration, Cuffe then sailed to England to seek assistance in this undertaking. Cuffe seemed to impress British governmental authorities, abolitionists, and colonizationists with his plan to bring Black people to Sierra Leone.

Upon making an impression upon British authorities, Cuffe received permission to take Blacks to Sierra Leone. In return, Cuffe received trading privileges. On the surface, this deal might appear to be one where Cuffe sacrificed his people to make a profit. After further scrutiny, however, this does not seem to be the case because Cuffe "believed it to be his duty to sacrifice private interest rather than enter into any enterprise harmful to his fellow man."

Opening trade with Sierra Leone was part of Cuffe's plan to liberate Blacks in America by liberating the African continent. Cuffe realized that Africans, though repatriated, still would need to take part in world affairs. Sierra Leone could not simply bury its head in its West African sands and fail to trade and otherwise interact with the rest of the world.

Cuffe then returned to America to begin preparation for the repatriation process. He introduced his plan for repatriation to President James Madison, and then to organizations of non-enslaved Blacks on the east coast. With the latter, he discussed plans to go to Sierra Leone once a year, taking willing Blacks with him and marketing African goods to cover the cost of the journey. The War of 1812, however, made Sierra Leone hostile territory for anyone coming from America and dealt the well-designed plan a damaging blow.

Attempting to circumvent the dilemma that the War of 1812 posed, Cuffe sent a memorial to the President of the United States as well as to both the House of Representatives and the Senate, seeking permission to trade with what now became an "enemy colony." In turn, Cuffe promised to return with goods from Sierra Leone.

Cuffe waited until the end of the war to resume his repatriation activities. In December of 1815, he sailed to Sierra Leone with thirty-eight Black emigrants. He was forced to pay the passage of thirty of these emigrants from his own pocket. After landing in Sierra Leone, Cuffe found that the three year absence had brought with it much change there.

Even though Cuffe suffered great monetary losses, it did not deter him from trying to make Africa and its descendants free. After returning to the United States from his trip to Sierra Leone, Cuffe immediately went about the business of propagating the idea of emigration among Black leaders. He made arrangements to return to Sierra Leone in 1817, but died before he was able to carry out this voyage.

But Cuffe had left the idea of repatriation with some Northern Black leaders. Among them were Reverend Peter Williams of New York, Reverend Daniel Coker of Baltimore, James Forten, Bishop Richard Allen and Reverend Absalom Jones, all of Philadelphia, the fountainhead of Negro thought at the time.

### **Part Three:** The White Man's Burden: How To Solve the "Negro Problem"

Since the eighteenth century, there had been no question more pressing in America than the following: what should American leadership do with non-enslaved Black people in this country? As mentioned earlier, Blacks were not envisioned as permanent residents of the United States.

Therefore, the most common antislavery solution to this "Negro Problem" appeared to have had at its base the great virtue of simplicity: remove non-enslaved Blacks from America. This solution has as its heart the great concern over "race-mixing", as in Thomas Jefferson's allegation that Black men preferred White females over their own. As Jefferson pointed out, this was just as "the Orangutan selected the black woman over those of his own species." As well, many Whites at the time harbored intense fears that non-enslaved Blacks would incite enslaved Blacks to revolt. And although Whites may have believed there was room for Black people in the British empire, they also believed that this room should be far removed from Whites.

To many Whites, the presence of non-enslaved Blacks skewed the line between Black and White. That is, many Whites felt that Black people were not worthy of the same independent or free status for which they had fought the British. This, many Whites believed was true despite the fact that Blacks had fought in the American Revolutionary War and that in actuality, Blacks did not have any freedoms even vaguely similar to those of Whites.

Even in the North, notwithstanding its reputation for egalitarianism as well as its liberal philosophy in the American Revolution, there was general agreement between upper and lower class Whites that something had to be done to solve the Negro Problem. In fact, if they could have found a way to get rid of Blacks in the North, though these Blacks were free, they most certainly would have done so.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, removing Black people from America gained support from a number of prominent Whites. One of the most avid supporters of colonization was Thomas Jefferson. On many occasions, Jefferson advocated that Black people be “removed beyond the reach of mixture” with Whites as not to “add impurities to the blood of his master.”

Given that Black people would not be allowed by Whites to enjoy the liberties and prosperity in American society in any way faintly approaching the enjoyment of White males, it was becoming increasingly clear to White leadership that something had to be done to ensure that consummate power would continue to rest exclusively in their hands. But the question of what exactly to do seemed to resurface constantly. What appeared to arise in this dilemma were three primary choices for White leadership: 1) Amalgamation; 2) Race War; 3) Physical separation of the Races.

For Whites, amalgamation was out of the question. A race war did not seem to be much desired among White leadership as well, due primarily to the notion that Whites did not quite agree with the loss of White life to Black hands. That left only the physical separation of the races. To meet this end, White leaders felt an organization was necessary, and therefore the American Colonization Society was developed.

The American Colonization Society was established on January 1, 1817 by some of the most prominent Whites both North and South. This may explain why initial meetings were held in the chambers of the United States Supreme Court as well as in the House of Representatives. The Society’s first President was Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington, and many congressmen were members. Hence, it was completely understandable that the Society would meet in the core institutions of the United States; it was led by the men who led these institutions.

The Society provided an institutional framework in which White men from various geographical locales within the United States could discuss and map out the future of Black people in America. Men such as Daniel Webster of Massachusetts and William Crawford of Georgia, and Elijah Paine of Vermont could now converse with William Fitzhugh of Virginia, who enslaved more than three hundred Black people. In fact, Fitzhugh believed, and often stated, that Whites were “...cruel and unwise...not to extend the blessings of slavery to the free negroes.”

The establishment of the American Colonization Society flowed freely and naturally out of the kind of thinking evinced by Fitzhugh above. Those involved in the American Colonization Society were far more concerned about what was best for Whites than they were with what was best for non-enslaved Blacks. Thus colonization, despite its oftentimes flowery rhetoric about freedom and independence for Blacks in America, was what Whites thought would preserve “national unity.” This preservation of national unity in fact meant that America should become and stay a country populated and/or ruled exclusively by Whites. Non-enslaved Blacks were viewed by Society members as serious threats to the preservation of national unity. Thus, the Society had to make as its exclusive goal the removal of non-enslaved Blacks from America.

The Society envisioned itself as a vehicle for promoting the spread of civilization in Africa primarily through missionary enterprises, and as useful in the abolition of the slave trade. In October of 1817, United States President James Monroe was interviewed by members of the Society to gauge his interest in the subject of

colonization. They found the President most amenable to the idea. In fact, when the Anti-slave Act of 1819 was passed, President Monroe worked closely with high ranking members of the Society, sending out agents of the United States Government to select a territory on the West African coast in which recaptured Africans could be resettled and cared for by the United States Government. As a result of this collaboration between President Monroe and the Society, in 1820, the United States Government chartered a ship carrying more than eighty non-enslaved Blacks which landed on Sherbo Island by way of Sierra Leone. However, the three United States agents along with twenty four of the Blacks emigrants died shortly thereafter.

Interest in the Society was greatly spurred by Nat Turner's Rebellion in Southampton, Virginia in the summer of 1831. Though individual or private interest in the Society peaked at this point, it did not translate into substantial government support. The Federal government was, for the most part, not involved in the work of the Society, although some of the governments most powerful men (President Monroe and Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky) were directly involved in it. In fact, Clay made national colonization efforts part of his "American System" platform when he ran for President against Andrew Jackson. For Clay, colonization was simply another part of a national strategy to build a better America. Among the most powerful arguments against the government support for this endeavor was the idea that it was simply unconstitutional to appropriate federal government revenue for the purposes of developing a dependent colony (Liberia) that could never become an integral part of the American system and was, therefore, not contemplated by the founding fathers of the Constitution.

Along those same lines, support for the Society and/or colonization required the removal of an important portion of the population, which might result in the federal government being required to pay for the freedom of enslaved Blacks in order to colonize them. There is some irony in the notion that those who were the most staunch advocates of colonization believed that the financial support for the American Colonization Society in fact violated the Constitution, when many of these same individuals did not make mention of the notion that the enslavement of Black people might well have run counter to the language or spirit of the document.

Despite the debate over the constitutionality of federal government assistance to the colonization movement, one thing was certain. In order for colonization to work, Black people would have to leave America. Though it was possible to create an atmosphere which made departure for Blacks desirable (i.e. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the Dred Scott Decision of 1857), anything short of forcibly removing Blacks meant that Blacks would have to make the choice to leave. Generally, this was not to be the case.

It is instructive to note here that although Northern Black leaders led the call for increased Back-to-Africa activity, the Northern masses apparently rejected this call. Of the 2886 people whom the Society sent to Africa between 1820 and 1833, only 169, less ten percent, came from the North.

While Blacks generally denounced the Society, there were some Blacks who supported the organization and its colonizing activities. There was considerable interest in Africa, particularly among Southern Blacks. Letters of inquiry regarding Liberia arrived steadily at the headquarters of the Society because as cotton prices fell, so too did any hopes that some Black Southerners had of staying in America. Many letter cited economic hardships as the basis of their discontent. A Georgia man summed up the situation by stating, "We have little or no voice here & our wages are so small we scarcely have enough means to subsist upon...We feel like children away from home and are anxious to get home. We are quite sure that the U.S. of America is not the place for the colored man."

The twenty year period which preceded the arrival of a new, more militant Black emigrationist leadership (1830-50) saw the issue of colonization and emigration hit a lull. Many historians have characterized this

period as the nadir in Black emigrationist thought. Though the Society was still functioning, it began to lose some of its viability during this period.

African emigration activity picked up in the late 1840's. When this happened, integrationist leaders responded in kind. For when the campaign to send Blacks back to Africa moved into high gear, some of Black leaders urged Black people to abandon use of the word "colored" and to remove the title of African from their institutions. Some of Philadelphia's Black leaders went as far as to recommend the term "Oppressed Americans" in place of both colored and African. Many leaders felt this was necessary in order to send a message to the larger White community that Black people considered America their home and that they considered themselves as American as any White person. To purge all associations with those things African, some Black leaders believed, was simultaneously to affirm their desire to be "American." As such, the persistence of compound names (i.e. Anglo-African, Negro-Saxon, Colored-American, etc.) appears to "symbolize the reluctance of even the most racially assertive black Americans to divorce themselves spiritually from the white American mainstream."

With the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, emigration once again became a prominent theme in Black American political thought. Non-enslaved Blacks, many of whom were relatively secure in their non-enslaved status, now felt not only betrayed by America's egalitarian pronouncements regarding freedom and liberty, but also felt threatened with re-enslavement at any time, irrespective of any documentation they were able to produce. If they were not protected under the law, then no Black people could be protected. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 served as cannon fodder for White Colonizationists as well as for Black emigrationists. In fact, the most notable and vocal emigrationist between 1850 and 1870, Dr. Martin R. Delany, decided to advocate emigration primarily, if not exclusively as a result of this Act. Certainly, he was not alone in being so pointedly motivated.

### **The Resurgence of Back to Africa Political Thought**

On September 18, 1850, President Millard Fillmore signed the Fugitive Slave Act. This Act dealt a powerful blow to the aspirations that many Blacks held in regards to their full participation in the civic, political, and economic life of American society. Under the Act, which was ex-post facto, those persons accused of being fugitives from slavery were denied a jury trial. Instead, their cases were adjudicated at hearings where the alleged fugitive was not allowed to testify on his own behalf.

Proposed by Kentucky Senator Henry Clay as part of the Missouri Compromise of 1850, the Act was designed to stem the tide of runaway slaves to the North and thereby give further assurance to the Southern slavocracy that Congress intended no prohibition of the interstate slave trade.

The entire enforcement process of the Act was prejudiced against Black people. Hearing officers were encouraged to find favor of the slaveowner by section eight of the Fugitive Slave Act which stipulated that they would receive a five dollar fee for rendering a verdict in favor of the Black defendant, but would get ten dollars for finding in favor of the claimant. The fugitive was denied a writ of Habeas corpus and was simply denied anything even vaguely similar to civil liberties. All that remained, as Robert Weisbord comments, "was for the judiciary to state that persons of African descent were not citizens of the United States and were incapable of becoming citizens, that they had no rights which a white man was bound to respect. This was precisely what the Supreme Court was shortly to do in the infamous Dred Scott decision."

The Act so moved Black leaders in 1850 that it (1850) was a "crucial point in the development of American Black nationalism; it was a point at which many Black Americans despaired of ever finding a place within



American society and culture and turned to...emigration..."

Many Northern Black leaders who were, up to this point, enjoying a quasi-free status, were given a clear and chilling message that enslavement or re-enslavement was simply a "hearing" away. In short, "the personal freedom of individuals from the economic status of slavery did not necessarily mean that the group status of slavery was less shared by the race as a whole. Free blacks enjoyed a modicum of personal liberty, but their collective status was that of slaves to the community."

Black people did not simply acquiesce to the Slave Act. Several courses of action were taken by Blacks to fight back in the face of a growing Southern slavocracy influence in governmental matters. Some Blacks favored the use of physical force to resist those attempting to recapture fugitive slaves. Non-enslaved Blacks in New York "announced that the new law would simply "have no binding force" upon them and pledged to resist it by all possible means, even "the sacrifice of life". Others favored rescuing those who were taken into custody by slave catchers whenever and wherever the opportunity presented itself.

Clearly the Act helped to regenerate Black American interest in emigration and repatriation. According to Fred Landon in his study of Black migration to Canada, an estimated 3,000 fugitive slaves crossed the border into Canada within three months after the signing of the Act.

While it is difficult to quantify the direct impact that the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 had upon Back-to-Africa political thought, it is clear that this Act effected emigrationist behavior generally. Emigration to neighboring Canada was sharply escalated. This, when added to Liberia's declaration of independence in 1847, a waning antislavery movement, and ever-increasing economic disfranchisement faced by non-enslaved Blacks, caused a number of Black leaders to rethink any previously hostile posture on the issue of returning to Africa.

As a result of the issues mentioned above, Back-to-Africa political thought not only resurfaced in debated concerning the future of Blacks in America, but at times was the central topic. While those advocating Back-to-Africa solutions were almost always Northern Blacks leaders, a new Black leadership, represented most fully by Dr. Martin Delany, appeared to be more militant and Black nationalist-oriented than any preceding it.

The new Black nationalist thought more prevalent among Black leaders in the late 1840's and early 1850's, represented a renewed interest in, and advocacy of both emigration in general, and Back-to Africa political thought in particular. This thought, more aggressive and confrontational than any Black nationalist thought which preceded it, was led by some of America's most able, educated and distinguished spokesmen. This new group of leaders, in espousing a new form of Black nationalism, were only making a rational attempt to manipulate the hostile environment in which this nationalism was conceived.

Prior to this renewed Black nationalism, protest rhetoric portrayed the struggle as one between abolitionists and slaveowners, or between non-enslaved Northerners and the Southern slavocracy. The renewed Black nationalist thought, however, made the focus more narrow, and the enemy more identifiable. Now, the enemy was seen in racial terms the enemy was white people.

Black leaders, many of whom were not in leadership positions in the White-led antislavery organizations, began to move away from them. Frederick Douglas, whose involvement with abolitionist movements is perhaps unparalleled in American history by either Blacks or Whites, "announced in the summer following the Taney decision [the Dred Scott Supreme Court decision], that after a ten-year shift, he now considered himself primarily a black rather than an antislavery leader." This sentiment became increasingly common amongst many Black leaders during this period.

One of the most notable Black advocates of emigration whose shift, like Douglas's, forced him to abandon White-led antislavery groups was Dr. Martin Delany, perhaps the most multi-talented Black nationalist of the late 1840's and early 1850's. During his lifetime, he was an author, physician, abolitionist, emigrationist and first Black Union army officer during the American Civil War.

In 1843, Delany initiated publication of the first Black newspaper west of the Alleghenies called the *Mystery*. A short five years later, this publication would cease due to a lack of financial backing. Shortly thereafter, Delany joined Frederick Douglass as co-editor of the abolitionist oriented newspaper the *North Star*.

After serving nearly a year as co-editor of the *North Star*, Delany left to continue his medical studies in Pittsburgh. After being rejected by the Pennsylvania and New York medical school in 1850, he was admitted to Harvard Medical school, where white students quickly and persistently protested his presence. Delany was subsequently expelled from Harvard. Delany, however, continued to study medicine under the tutelage of two White doctors who saw in him great promise despite his expulsion from Harvard. In 1851, he returned to Pittsburgh to help doctors there battle an outbreak of cholera. Despite his adroitness in the field of medicine, it was Delany's Black nationalist advocacy that propelled him into both the national and international limelight.

Prior to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Delany could have been considered an integrationist. He often advocated an end to slavery as a solution to the serious problems faced by Blacks in America. The passage of the Act, however, seemed to radically change his thinking.

In 1852, Dr. Delany wrote and published in four weeks, one of his best known works, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered*. This work drew severe criticism from White and Black abolitionist alike. The Black press and Black leaders, most notably his former co-editor Frederick Douglass, either rebuked or ignored the book.

The book had two broad objectives. The first was to provide Black people with a view of what Delany believed was their true position in America, with an emphasis upon causation and solutions. The second objective was to rhetorically awaken the African manliness that would induce the Black man to act upon Delany's observations and solutions.

The book, while speaking of the glorious African past, also directed piercing blows at what Delany saw as a lack of commitment on the part of those involved in the abolitionist struggle. Further, the book suggested that Black people emigrate from the United States, preferably to Central or South America. Delany advocated emigration even though he despised colonization schemes devised by Whites, considering them to be "monsters" that were "crippled" in their infancy by the agitation of enlightened abolitionists.

Though Delany's book did advocate emigration for Blacks in America, it must be noted here that Delany was caught between conflicting theoretical concepts. That is, Delany had a "love-hate" relationship with America. Though he recognized that America had some value to Black people, (he himself had benefited from a quality education), he stood staunchly against American leadership in its relationship with Black people. Delany realized that Blacks were always in a precarious situation in America, and that no amount of insightful articulation could end the powerlessness felt by Black people in relation to Whites. Hence, he advocated emigration.

Initially, Delany totally rejected Liberia, though not all of Africa, as an alternative for Black people. He considered Liberia a dependency colony of the American Colonization Society and thus under its direct

influence and control. To Delany, Liberia was “the product of a slaveholders’ conspiracy to purge the United States of its African population. Liberia was also unappealing because of its unhealthy geographical position.” Where Africa was concerned, Delany appeared to be concerned primarily about the extent to which racist Whites would be involved in emigration projects.

In the mid-1850’s, due primarily to accounts of West Africa by various explorers, Delany took a greater interest in the continent of Africa. Delany turned his sights now to eastern Africa, which he maintained was not yet corrupted by the Europeans and Americans. In fact, prior to the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Eastern Africa was inaccessible to Europeans.

In 1859, Delany served as the chief commissioner of an exploration party sent to the Niger Valley. The party’s work was supposed to be strictly scientific. But Delany and his companion Robert Campbell has other things in mind. Delany thought that if Blacks who were emigrating to Eastern Africa could open up trade with the Europeans, the slave trade would be destroyed. Delany also believed that native Africans could benefit from the evangelization of their Black American brothers.

Delany did not permanently resettle in Africa, he remained in America. Aside from his involvement in the exploration party in 1859-1869, he never maintained physical contact with those on the African continent. Further, despite the privilege of resettling in West Africa which he obtained in treaties by West African chiefs, no emigration resulted from his efforts.

With the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, Back-to-Africa political thought was put on the back-burner. The war seemed to suggest to Blacks that their chances for equality and freedom in America were attainable, even if those elusive entities had to be secured through Civil War. With such hopes on the horizon, Black leaders began to see the possibility of a brighter day for Black people on American soil. Delany was no different in this regard.

Yet, despite this renewed optimism in America that many Blacks garnered, emigrationist desires did not, perhaps could not be completely extinguished. For even the “Civil War did not entirely eliminate [emigrationists] efforts. Even during Reconstruction significant interest was manifested...and the number of [e]migrants ran into the thousands. Thereafter, there were always some who thought of emigration...as the best solution of their difficulties.”

In conclusion, Back-to-Africa political thought was, at times, a central theme American political thought, though it certainly has not been given adequate attention by most historians and/or American political theorists. When discussed in its proper context, Back-to-Africa political thought is not only thought-provoking, but also provides greater insight into American history generally.

## Lesson One

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Objective: To gauge students general knowledge of Back-to-Africa political thought.

Entry Point A: Teacher should instruct students that they will be exploring a topic with that is no widely discussed. Teacher should then distribute pre-test (see next page) to students and inform them that this pre-test will not be graded, but will be used to help teacher evaluate student knowledge of the content.

Entry Point B: Teacher should encourage students to read some of their responses aloud. After this, teacher should refer to narrative to begin the unit/lesson.

Entry Point C: Teacher should distribute part one of the narrative to students and have them read this section. If time does not permit the class to finish this reading aloud, assign the rest for homework.

Name\_\_ Back-to-Africa Pre-test Date\_\_\_\_\_

1. Which group, Black or White leaders in America, were the first ones to have public discussions about Blacks going back to Africa?
2. What was the basis for your choice in question number one?
3. In your opinion, Blacks in which part of the United States (North, West or South) would most likely want to leave America and go back to Africa? Explain your answer.
4. What role do you think racism and prejudice played in public discussions about Blacks going back to Africa? Explain your answer.
5. Based upon your current knowledge of American/Black history, if both Black and White leaders agreed that going back to Africa was the best thing for most Blacks during the years 1790 and 1850, would you agree? Explain your answer.
6. Who was Paul Cuffe, and why is he an important part of the Back-to-Africa Debate?
7. Knowing what you do about Thomas Jefferson, how would you say that he felt about Blacks going back to Africa? Explain your answer.

## **Lesson Two:**

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Objective: To sharpen critical thinking skills by having students discuss two opposing points of view.

Entry Point A: Teacher should give overview of last nights (or yesterday's) reading.

Entry Point B: Teacher should inform students that they will be reading essays (see next page) which have opposing viewpoints and that as they read, they should look for weaknesses and strengths of both essays.

Entry Point C: Teacher distributes essays and has students read the aloud. Discussion should follow.

America is my home, for another I shall not want

Recently, there has been a great deal of talk about both enslaved and free Blacks going back to Africa to live. In all my years, I never thought such foolishness would be widely discussed. America is my home, and the home of the American Black, from here I shall not be moved.

Firstly, my father and grandfather both helped to build this great Christian nation to be what it is today a land of the free and a home of the brave. They have toiled and given of their blood, sweat and tears so that I may be able to live freely and succeed. To leave this land would be to betray all that they have worked for, and to

betray all that they have hoped for me.

As well, there is no other country that can be found where liberty is of such great importance. This country was founded upon the principles of justice, fairness and equality of all men. If we were to leave, we know not what we face elsewhere.

Unfortunately, there are free Blacks among those who fight so hard to send the Black man and his family to a land of heathens and pagans known as Africa. They act as if they have not had some measure of success in this great country; as if they are themselves in bondage. Why is it that some many of our educated and well-off are leading the call for a return to Africa? Is it that they too have been fooled into believing in the “romantic” Africa of the past? Well, this is not the past, it is the present and Africa is not a place I would choose to be.

I know that there is slavery here. Many of our brethren are currently in bondage amidst those of us who have never known the cruel system of slavery. But if we leave this country, we also leave them behind to face a life perhaps more cruel than ever. We, the free Blacks, have a history of fighting for the end of slavery and without us, how would our shackled, illiterate brethren give voice to the cruelty and immorality of this system? We cannot leave them here to suffer.

We must not, nay we cannot, leave these American shores. One day, slavery will end. It must, because God is good and good will prevail against evil. We must stop this talk of leaving America and think of ourselves of Americans, simply Americans.

### **Africa is the natural home for the Black Man**

We, Africans have been in this God-forsaken place known as America for over two hundred years, and we have yet to receive the justice and equality so often spoken of, but never practiced where we are concerned. Africa, therefore is our natural home, it is where God put us, and where we would be right at this minute if the European had not stolen us from our Mother country.

Any Black man who fights to have Blacks stay in a country where most of us are enslaved, beaten, lynched and denied anything even similar to rights either is foolish, or does not understand history. At times, some of our so-called leaders seem to suffer from both illnesses. My father and grandfather gave their lives to make this country what it is, and this country still turns its back to me, still makes laws to prevent me from succeeding simply because of the color of my skin, still holds my brethren in shackles.

It should be crystal clear to us then that the Whites who run this country do not like us, and do not want us here, except as slaves. I will not be a slave to any man, and neither should any of my people. The God that I know and love treats all men equally, loves all men the same and does not say that you may vote because you are White, and will be a slave because you are Black. What kind of God sanctions such evil behavior?

Some of us, who have been lucky enough to be “free” in this country question why other free Blacks want to go back to Africa. It is simple. No Black man is free until all are free, and all will not be free unless we are in a country where we are a part of the ruling element. Anything less than absolute control over our own destiny is slavery, and we will not reach the glorious heights of our past unless or until we come up from underneath the White man.

To those who say that we know not what we face in Africa I say this. It is better to face the unexpected in Africa, than to face slavery in America, that is the truth. We can stand by no longer while our brethren, whose

blood we share, toil away for master and has no future to speak of in a land of plenty. All of us deserve to be truly free, and until we have a land of our own, where we can grow and succeed, we shall be forever stuck in the lowly position of society and never do any better.

We are not Americans, we just happen to live here. The White man, he is an American because he has all the benefits of being an American. We are, at best, second-class citizens whose rights are not worth the paper upon which they are written. We must do for ourselves and leave this country, our very future depends upon it.

## Lesson three:

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Objective: To develop debating and analytical thinking skills.

Entry Point A: Teacher informs students that they will be required to take a position in the Back-to-Africa discussion, based upon any readings (especially the two opposing essays).

Entry Point B: Teacher informs students that they will be required to write an essay from the vantage point of either a non-enslaved or an enslaved black which discusses Back-to-Africa political thought. Teacher should inform students that this will suffice as a test grade.

Entry Point C: Students write essay during class, though teacher may want to assign this for homework.

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### ENDNOTES

1 In this context, integration should be understood to be the enjoyment by Blacks of the social, political and economic rights enjoyed by Whites. This should not necessitate, as would assimilation, the blending of the ethnic groups to form only one group "Americans."

2 Gus J. Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969). pp. 11-14.

3 Edwin Redkey, *Black Exodus*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 18-21. It is worth noting here that many emigrationists, including Marcus Garvey, often times referred to Africa as a country instead of a continent. Consequently, many thought that they entire continent could and would be uplifted through evangelization of one region or area. Mistaking Africa for a "country" may have led many to underestimate the massive task that awaited them.

4 Adelaide Hill and Martin Kilson, *Apropos of Africa: Sentiments of Negro American Leaders on Africa from the 1800's to 1950*. (London: Cass Publishers, 1969). p. 10.

5 Phillip Foner, *History of Black America: Major Speeches by Negroes in the United States, 1797-1973*. (New York: Capricorn Books, 1972). pp. 580-584.

6 Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 546.

7 William Penden (ed.) *Thomas Jefferson: Notes on the States of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), p. 138.

8 Alfred Eisner and Eli Ginzberg, *The Troublesome Presence*, (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), pp.75-77.

9 Jordan, *White Over Black*. p. 546.

10 Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975) pp. 198-200.

11 Early Fox, *The American Colonization Society*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1871), p. 9

12 Gilbert Osofsky, *The Burden of Race*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p.57.

13 Fox, *The American Colonization Society*. p 55.

14 Jane H. Pease and William Pease, *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom. 1830-1861*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 21-25

15 Quoted in Redkey, *Black Exodus*, p. 32.

- 16 Lerrone Bennett Jr., *Before the Mayflower* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) p. 144.
- 17 Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). p. 32.
- 18 Robert Weisbord, *Ebony Kinship* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973), pp. 25-27. p. 19.
- 19 William Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) p.19
- 20 *Ibid.* 9.
- 21 Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*. p. 37.
- 22 Fred Landon, "The Negro Migration to Canada After the Passing of the Fugitive Slave Act", *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. V, No. 4 (January, 1920), Pp. 1-13.
- 23 Redkey, *Ebony Kinship* pp. 19-26
- 24 Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*. pp. 29-35
- 25 Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*. pp. 244-265
- 26 Quoted in *Ibid.* p. 245.
- 27 Howard Brotz, (ed.) *Negro Social and Political Thought, 1850-1920*. (New York: Basic Books, 1996), pp. 1-36.
- 28 *Ibid.* p. 47-49.
- 29 Quoted in *Ibid.* p. 55.
- 30 Weisbord, *Ebony Kinship*, pp. 22-25.
- 31 August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966) p. 63.

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