

### **USA in support of a “free” Liberia:**

We Americans are not interested in colonizing land in Africa, but we do support this European foray into Africa. We are simply here to ensure that the small country of Liberia remains free from European control. We Americans have recently fought a war to finally put an end to the oppressive systems of slavery in our Southern States, and many Africans in our land are eager to move back to Africa. The American Colonization Society has recently purchased land in Africa and has arranged passage for those wishing to emigrate to Africa. Over four thousand black colonists now live in Liberia. Liberia has been an independent nation since 1846, and we wish that it shall remain so.

### **USA in support of Congo**

Well, this Treaty was not signed by France, Germany, or Belgium, so it is invalid. Sorry Portugal. We support the work of King Leopold in the Congo and believe that the colony should go to him. King Leopold and his International African Association “offers freedom to commerce and prohibits the slave trade. The objects of the society are philanthropic. It does not aim at permanent political control...” After all, King Leopold was the one who started the International African Association. He was the one who send Mr. Stanley to map and improve the area. King Leopold doesn't want to simply make money like the rest of you, his goal in Congo are purely philanthropic. He wants to spend his own money to make Congo great again, and we support him.

### **Berlin Conference USA Speech: Instructions to students**

On \_\_\_\_\_ you will be participating in a mock-Berlin Conference. The real conference was held in 1884, and it decided which European countries got to rule over which parts of Africa. No Africans were invited to the Berlin Conference. You represent the USA, a country with no interest in colonizing Africa, but wants to support King Leopold's claim in Congo and ensure Liberia remains free. You will read about American claims to Africa and then give a speech about those claims.

### **Reading and Speech preparation**

Answer the following questions in your notebook, using complete sentences. Be sure you thoroughly understand the questions/answers, because your speech must include information from each question.

1. Why does the USA want Liberia to remain free?
2. What is the American Colonization Society and what have they been doing?
3. How many African Americans have emigrated to Liberia? Why?
4. Why does the USA support King Leopold's claim to Congo?

### **Berlin Conference Speech and Participation**

Write a speech to give during the Berlin Conference.

- Your speech must be in first person (“We Americans believe...”)
- Your speech must be at least one minute long (no longer than 5 minutes)
- Your speech must include information from each question
- Your speech must include at least one quote (use “quotations”) from *King Leopold's Ghost*

### **Speech:**

- Speak so everybody in the room can hear you
- Use eye contact, gestures, and your voice to engage others in your speech
- Take turns speaking during the general debate.

### **During the Berlin Conference:**

- Listen to all speeches, but non-verbally react as someone from your country would react to each speech
- Only speak when it is your turn, or during general debate time.
- Complete the “Berlin Conference” worksheet throughout the Berlin Conference.

### **Map: Draw in the areas that the USA wants to remain free**



## USA: Speech guide

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## **Overview**

The migration of African Americans to other lands in search of freedom during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was an expression of their belief that they would never achieve a position of true equality in the United States. The only solution to this problem, they felt, was to establish separate, self-governing societies or nations. Though migrants found their way to Canada, Haiti, the West Indies, and Mexico, Africa was, most often, the refuge of choice. Emigration and colonization were controversial within the African-American community, and some of the consequences of these migrations were negative for the receiving populations.

## **The Reasons for Emigration and Colonization**

African Americans' interest in colonization was engendered by the dramatic increase in restrictions placed on them during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The slave system in the South was progressively intensified. The region's agriculturally derived economic prosperity depended on slavery: one-third of its population consisted of African-Americans in bondage. Throughout the South, laws were passed that prohibited their manumission.

Meanwhile, rising racism made conditions for Northern blacks more oppressive. The growth of the free black population - 500,000 by 1860 - was yet another factor in the effort to keep the nation's African Americans on an ever-tightening leash. They faced voting restrictions and were, for all intents and purposes, excluded from the justice system. By the 1830s, state and federal regulations, popular pressure, and social custom had dispatched them to the very bottom rungs of the social, economic, and political ladders.

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, the constitutional amendments giving them citizenship and voting rights led many African Americans to hope they would finally be integrated into American society; but by the end of Reconstruction in 1877, white Northerners' interest in the problems of recently freed slaves had cooled. The return of the Democratic Party to power in the South was accompanied by mounting Ku Klux Klan violence and intimidation.

Ways were found - election fraud, poll taxes, confusing balloting schemes, and suffrage disqualification - to nullify black political strength. Supreme Court decisions declaring the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional and upholding legal segregation sped up the process of black subordination. The federal government also enacted immigration and naturalization laws that effectively limited citizenship to whites.

In the South, African Americans were relegated back to the farm and, with little or no money to buy land, they had no choice but to work as tenant farmers or sharecroppers on white-owned property or as agricultural laborers earning meager wages. By the turn of the twentieth century, only 20 percent of African Americans owned their property and were able to maintain some small degree of independence.

Though people had continuously struggled against bias and oppression, there were always some who believed that ameliorating their condition was ultimately impossible. They favored emigration, and some advocated the establishment of colonies in Africa.

## **The Colonization of Liberia**

Though Sierra Leone would continue to receive African-American immigrants over the years, their primary destination soon became Liberia, the country of the Vai, Kru, Kissi, Grebo, Bassa, Kpelle, Mandingo, and other populations. The controversial American Colonization Society (ACS) helped them in this endeavor.

It was founded in 1816 with the expressed aim to colonize free African-Americans in Africa or wherever else it saw fit. An organization with mostly white members and supporters, many of whom were slaveholders, the ACS did not gain widespread support among African Americans, who saw it as a means by which whites hoped to deport free blacks. Nonetheless, some people, dissatisfied with their lives in the United States, sought help from the society. Its first vessel, the *Elizabeth*, set sail in 1820 with some eighty migrants on board. They were unable to acquire land in Liberia and took refuge in Sierra Leone.

A year later, the ACS was successful in obtaining acreage, and a ship carrying thirty-three African Americans landed at Cape Mesurado - later to become Monrovia, after U.S. President James Monroe.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the ACS transported an estimated sixteen thousand migrants to Liberia. The migration peaked between 1848 and 1854; during this period, the ACS chartered forty-one ships, carrying over four thousand colonists to new lives in a new land. Most were free blacks who had either lived in the North all their lives or had been born in the South and later moved across the Mason-Dixon Line.

They came from almost all the Southern states and from as far west as Colorado. Many of the Southern migrants were born free, but a large number had been freed from enslavement on the expressed condition that they leave the United States.

Gen. Robert E. Lee freed most of his slaves before the Civil War. He offered to pay the expenses of those, like William and Rosabella Burke and their children, who wanted to go to Liberia. Burke went to the seminary in Monrovia and became a Presbyterian minister in 1857. A year later, he wrote a friend back home:

Persons coming to Africa should expect to go through many hardships, such as are common to the first settlement in any new country. I expected it and was not disappointed or discouraged at any thing that I met with; and so far from being dissatisfied with the country, I bless the Lord that ever my lot was cast in this part of the earth.

In a letter to Mary Custis Lee, Rosabella Burke noted, "I love Africa and would not exchange it for America."

The colonists were predominantly male, and often traveled in family groups. Many were under twenty years old. During the 1820-1828 period, women made up 43 percent of those going to Liberia. Freeborn migrants were mostly artisans, involved in agriculture in some way, or skilled and unskilled laborers; a few were professionals.

As the nineteenth century progressed, an increasing number came from the middle and professional class.

The migration was not always without problems - many prospective settlers died en route. They succumbed to fevers, tuberculosis, pleurisy, and other lung diseases. The primary reason for African Americans to seek freedom through emigration was their perception that there was no other alternative to a hopeless situation. But they also came to Africa because it was the land of their ancestors. Another reason was that the American Colonization Society paid their passage. Most could scarcely have afforded it and would have remained in the United States had the society not paid their way.

In the early years the ACS ran Liberia's government, but the settlers soon demanded control of their own affairs. In 1837 the Commonwealth was formed, and virtually all power devolved to the emigrants. The society retained only the right to choose the governor. A decade later, Liberia became an independent nation, and in 1848, Joseph Jenkins Roberts - a Monrovia merchant who had emigrated from Virginia twenty years earlier - was elected president.

Even as they left the United States behind, the colonists made concerted efforts to create a sort of "little America" in their new surroundings. They spoke English, and their manners, clothing, and even the construction of their homes reflected their previous place of residence. They were not always welcome in Liberia. Heavily influenced by Christian values, many exhibited a missionary zeal toward the indigenous Africans. They wished to "civilize" and Christianize people whom they often perceived as "heathen savages."

Emigration to Africa continued on a small scale into the twentieth century.

Between 1890 and 1910, some one thousand African Americans immigrated to Liberia. In 1913, sixty Oklahomans settled in the Gold Coast under the leadership of Chief Alfred Sam.

Though small in number, these efforts were not insignificant, as in most cases they represented self-initiated migrations, heavily influenced by nationalist ideas. Although individuals continued to migrate to the continent, there were few organized movements. Events in Africa itself may have been the reason. The 1884 partition of the continent resulted in full-scale domination by Europe. African nations, with the exception of Liberia and Ethiopia, came under European rule. In this climate, it was difficult for African Americans to consider emigration schemes.

For many years the ACS tried to persuade the United States Congress to appropriate funds to send colonists to Liberia. Although Henry Clay led the campaign, it failed. The society did, however, succeed in its appeals to some state legislatures. In 1850, Virginia set aside \$30,000 annually for five years to aid and support emigration. In its Thirty-Fourth Annual Report, the society acclaimed the news as "a great Moral demonstration of the propriety and necessity of state action!" During the 1850s, the society also received several thousand dollars from the New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Missouri, and Maryland legislatures.



[Act by State of Virginia making appropriations for removal of free persons of color to Liberia], 1850. American Colonization Society Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (7)

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By the 1840s, Liberia had become a financial burden on the ACS. In addition, Liberia faced political threats, chiefly from Britain, because it was neither a sovereign power nor a bona fide colony of any sovereign nation. Because the United States refused to claim sovereignty over Liberia, in 1846 the ACS ordered the Liberians to proclaim their independence. This map of the newly independent country shows the dates that the various territories were acquired. Settlements were located primarily along the coast and the many rivers leading inland. Inset maps highlight important areas of the country.



Republic of Liberia. Drawn under superintendence of Com. Lynch, USN, 1853. Map. [Geography and Map Division](#), Library of Congress (9)

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## From *Liberia and the United States: A Complex Relationship*

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/liberia/essays/uspolicy/>

In 1847, Liberia became a **republic**, with a constitution and flag modeled after America's. The relationship of the U.S. to Liberia changed from one of control to one of assistance. Settler values, however, still dominated, especially as settlers benefited from an educational advantage, often having attended missionary schools in Liberia or gone to school in America. The first president, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, and his **Cabinet** were all American, born and educated in the U.S.

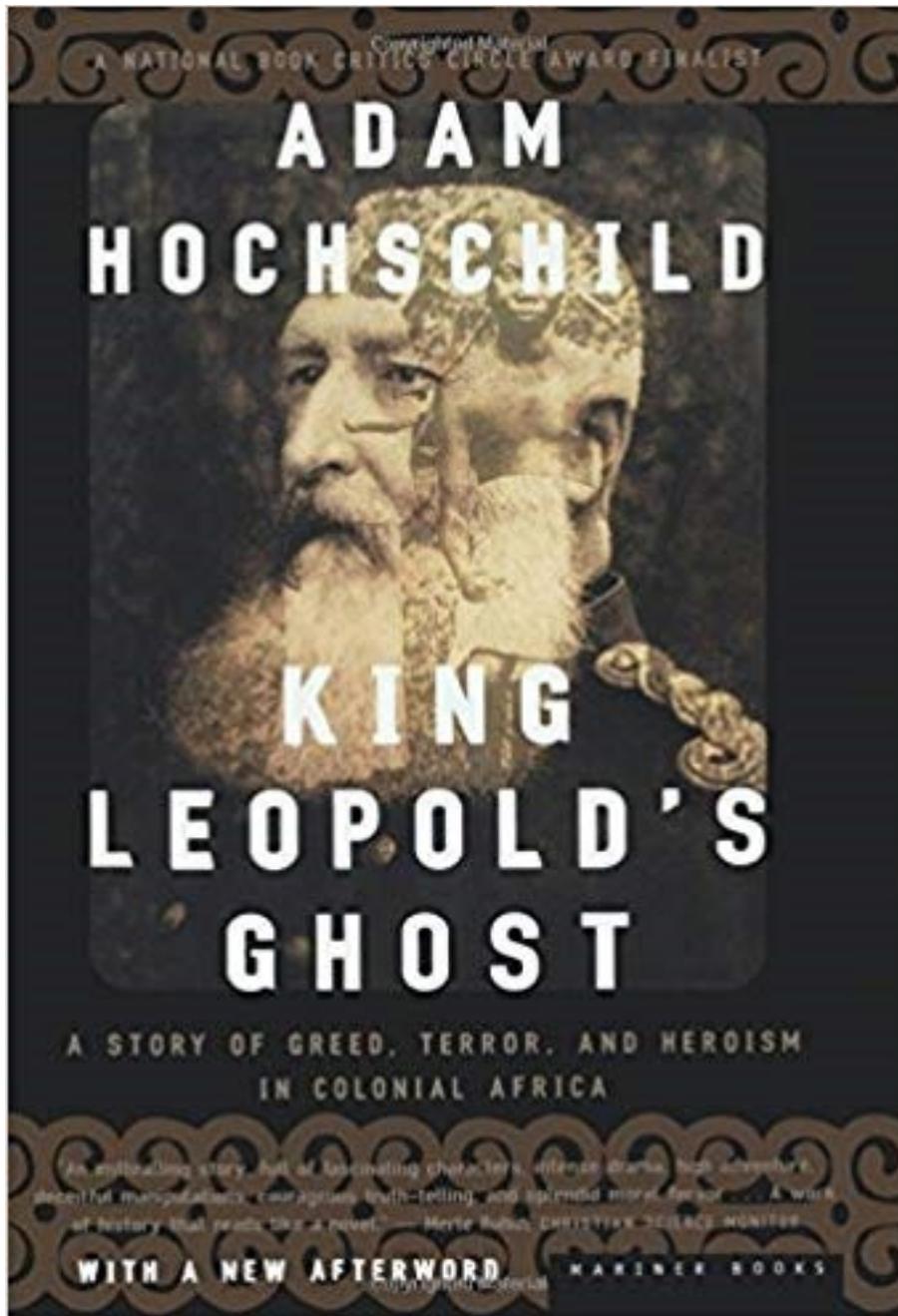
American, but Black. And this was an important fact. In 40 years, Liberia had gone from being a white-run colony of America to a Black-run republic, with formal **diplomatic** relations with the United States. Despite this transformation, however, Liberia still relied on, and expected, financial assistance from the U.S.

### **Financial dependence continues**

Liberia had a thriving and prosperous agricultural sector, but, lacking an industrial base at a time when industrialization was critical for economic development, Liberia began to face financial troubles in the 1860s. By the 1870s Liberia was forced to accept high-interest government loans from Europe and the United States. Thus began a long period of Liberian financial and economic dependence on other nations. During World War I, Liberia declared war on Germany, previously a major trading partner, in order to appease the U.S. As a consequence, Monrovia was shelled by a German U-boat, and the Liberian economy was crippled as a result of cessation of trade with Germany.

In the 1920s, the United States seized on this vulnerability to initiate the exploitation of one of Liberia's natural resources: rubber. The rapidly growing automobile industry was creating a massive world demand for rubber, the main component of tires, and the U.S. wanted to compete with Britain's near **monopoly** of the industry.

The Firestone Tire and Rubber Company of Ohio, therefore, began negotiations to acquire a rubber plantation in Liberia. The result was an agreement, supported by the U.S. government, that clearly disadvantaged Liberia: Firestone would lease one million acres for 99 years at the annual rate of six cents per acre; any gold, diamonds, or other minerals discovered on the land would belong to Firestone; and Liberia would accept a \$5 million loan from Firestone for a 40-year period with which to settle all outstanding foreign loans, in effect taking on new debt to pay off old debt. The company made huge profits and enriched some of the Liberian elite, thus ensuring their support for the venture.



Pages 77 – 79 (not included here)