

Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation

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Abraham Lincoln was an American lawyer and politician, who wanted to end slavery. Born into poverty, in a log cabin in Kentucky, on 12 February 1809, he was self-educated, and served as a statesman and moderate republican at the House of Representatives. He was elected as the 16th president of the United States of America, in 1861 until his assassination in 1865. He has frequently expressed his moral opposition to slavery in private and in public. He was often heard, repeating that:” I am naturally anti-slavery and ... if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong”. Pro-slavery in the South viewed his election as a threat to slavery.

A newly formed Confederate States of America began seizing federal military bases in the South, soon after Abraham Lincoln took over the presidency (1861). Fort Sumter, at the Charleston Harbor, was taken over in the South during the civil war when Lincoln mobilized forces to suppress the rebellion and restore the union. His address, at Gettysburg, PA. after the Union armies defeated the Confederated forces, was interpreted as one of the greatest and most influential statements of American History. After, he supervised the selection of the generals, implemented a naval blockade of the South’s trade and averted war by diffusing the “Trent affair”. (Argument between Great Britain and the United States on an incident which created a diplomatic crisis after an US navy officer captured two confederate envoys aboard British ships), After all this in 1863, the “Emancipation Proclamation” is finally issued.

Slavery was still unaffected in the state of Texas and the federal troops arrived in Galveston Texas in 1865 to take control of the state, two months after the rendition of Confederate General Robert E Lee in Virginia. It took the presence of US General Gordon Granger who stood in Texas to read again the proclamation from the Executive of the United States and inform the people of Texas that all slaves are free. “June Nineteenth marks that day when the federal troops stepped in Texas to inform them the abolition of slavery, in 1865, two and half years after the

signing of the document by Abraham Lincoln. Nowadays, as of June 17, 2021, the day “17 of June” has become a federal holiday called “Juneteenth”.

Abraham Lincoln tried to settle “Free Black Americans”, into the Caribbeans because he wanted to end slavery but it was not that easy to integrate African Americans in the American Society. His first attempts to send them offshore proved to be disastrous. The day before the proclamation, he even signed a contract with Bernard Kock, a cotton planter living in Florida to use federal funds to facilitate the relocation 5000 free black men from the United States to an island in the south portion of Haiti (Ile-a-vache or Cow-island). This island has around 20 square mile in superficies, one of the little islands off the southwestern coast of Haiti which lies in the Baie des Cayes, third larger city of the island-country of Haiti at around 7 miles from the main land. This attempt at encouragig the immigration of the blacks has nothing to do with the desire of the Haitian government to attract foreigners especially blacks from the United States, dating from the end of the independence war of Haiti.



This “Ile-a-vache” colonization project was a sponsored emigration by Abraham Lincoln himself using federal funds to relocate American Blacks to the country of Haiti which was known to be the second country on the American Continent to have taken its independence. The United States wanted to facilitate the exode of free blacks toward Haiti. 455 blacks’ settlers departed from Virginia in April 1863 for better tomorrow hoping a prosperous life at Ile-a-vache, Haiti. This venture

proved to be disastrous while the island was marred by disease and administration malfeasance. Soon, there was mutiny and within two years, 350 of these emigrants returned to the United States, tattered by the experience. Abraham Lincoln had no choice than to accept the failure of Ile-a-vache venture and embrace the nation's multiracial future and facilitate the transition toward an integrated future.

This colonization project was in the mind of many dating as early as the 1850's. It was a remedy for a gradual emancipation of the enslaved population. Although he was against slavery, Abraham Lincoln did not agree either with any racial equality, nor that he was accepting the injection of almost 4 million of Black into a White American society. Despite the facts that most of the blacks were born on US soil. This is why he opted for shipping them to Central America (Panama) or to the Caribbean countries like Haiti or even send them back to Africa and Panama. He found in the process of colonization, the most practical way to free the slaves after the Emancipation Proclamation in order to please all the political groups. As such, the Blacks would not overrun the North. The American Colonization Society chose to send many in Liberia and in 50 years, 12,000 of Blacks went to west Africa to create Liberia.

Abraham Lincoln and Frederic Douglas had much respect for each other. Although Frederick Douglas was born into slavery in 1818, on a Virginia plantation, the owner's wife of the plantation, taught him how to write and read, although slave literacy was forbidden. He realized that "Education was the pathway from slavery to freedom". He fled to the North in 1838 by posing as a free black sailor, he arrived in New-York, definitely as a free man with the will to relocate in Massachusetts. There, he attended anti-slavery meetings and become an abolitionist and editor of a journal: the Liberator. He later, published many books notably Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas: He published also "An American slave" in 1845. and founded his own antislavery newspaper: "The North Star". Soon, he was considered as the most famous African American in the country.

Both leaders had a complicated relationship. Douglas was infuriated over Lincoln support for colonizing African Americans outside the United States after the emancipation. He opiated in the "Douglas Monthly" frequently on this proposal as a reflection of Lincoln "inconsistencies" and hypocrisy. After the republican party dumped Lincoln approach in the integration of the free slaves in the American society, Douglas criticized the president openly. Soon after, he was summoned to the white house by an Abraham Lincoln who was facing enough criticism from all sides, during a bloody war. They had a private meeting and

Douglas was given entry to the white house because the president was also worry about his re-election bid.

At the historical society founded in 1817, pictures are exposed to support the return of the free African Americans (1837), pictures where Lincoln proposed a constitutional amendment to colonize African American outside of the United States. The amendment included federal compensation for slaveowners who lost their proprieties due to the emancipation. We have already discussed the settlement at Ile-a- vache (Haiti), further settlements were tried to relocate the free Black American in the Chiriquí province of Panama. There, the former slaves will work on a cotton plantation and each family will receive a home, and have access to hospital and schools for a four (4) years contract. And then, they would receive 16 acres of land plus the wages they earned over that period. This colonization was voluntary for the former slaves and Lincoln was deeply encouraging. This proposal was written in the goal of impose “discipline to the free slave”.

Lincoln met a delegation of Black leaders and abolitionists to present the voluntary emigration of African Americans to countries outside of the US after the emancipation and on August 14, 1862, he told them that “your race suffers from living among us while, ours suffer from your presence... It is better for both of us to be separated”. Douglas was not invited in such meeting but wrote in the Douglas Monthly that the proposal “reminds one of the politeness with which a man might try to bow out of his house some troublesome creditors or the witness of some old guilt”.

Meanwhile, the vessel “Ocean Ranger” departed with 453 African Americans emigrants from Monroe VA for Ile- a-vache, Haiti. The mission was a failure as we have already described. Before reaching the island, 30 colonists died from Smallpox and a second ship which was supposed to follow never set sail. They did not have any decent living accommodations nor the conditions were acceptable. It was a catastrophic situation. The emigrants threatened to revolt. This was the end of the project. The inhumane conditions on the Ile-a-vache reached Lincoln, who sent a naval vessel to rescue the group. Abraham Lincoln started exploring the way to integrate the free Blacks into the post emancipation society. This disastrous island project led to the deaths of many African Americans who were opposed to emigrating in another country.

Others found support in the Black communities, especially when they saw the need for enlistment as a venue to support the nation and the president who had granted them freedom. Later as the civil war was ending, the freed blacks were promised

land (40 acres) and a mule to start independent lives but Lincoln's assassination cut short to these plans.

Many Haitians are unaware that on January 14, 1804, our Jean-Jacques Dessalines, days after declaring Haiti Independence, had his own proclamation, offering 40 piastres (40 dollars) to any ship captain willing to repatriate any formerly slaves who fled during the war of independence. He was trying to replenish a population which was decimated by the conflict. He tried to recruit half a million Africans, indigenous and Black American, offering them, freedom and citizenship once they set foot on the Haitian soil. Many responded to the publication of the decree but Dessalines did not live long enough to see the realization of his dream. He was assassinated at Pont Rouge in 1806 by a group of soldiers unhappy with his way of governing the country.

Soon, Haiti become divided in two: a kingdom on the Nord of the island with King Henry Christophe and a Republique in the south with Alexandre Petion. The initiative of Dessalines was formally codified into an article 44 of the 1816 constitution of the Republique stipulating that "All Africans and Indians and their blood descendents, born in the colonies or in foreign countries, will be recognized as Haitians" once they come to reside on the island for one year. King Henry Christophe become close to the British, fearing French and American interventions, and encouraged also migration by recruiting the assistance of the African Institution (abolitionist society) to investigate the possibilities of settling American freedmen in his kingdom.

An organization called the American Colonization Society which was founded to resettle formerly enslaved people in Africa, became interested in sending people to Haiti. A member, Prince Saunders was planning to move to Sierra Leone but changed his mind after meeting with Christophe. Saunders was able to recruit a large group of American Freemen to emigrate to Haiti. Saunders himself was hired to become Henry Christophe personal secretary.

At the death of King Henry Christophe in 1820, the North and the south reunited and the United States continued to relocate settlers to Haiti. In 1823, President Jean Pierre Boyer renewed the call for the American Colonization Society to send Americans not in West Africa but in Haiti. He promised Jonathan Granville, a leader of the migration project to pay for all migrant's personal expenses and pledged that his government will offer fertile lands to whomever wish to cultivate them and will offer tools, nourishment and whatever necessary to help in their migration. Grandville recruited 13,000 freedmen to move to Haiti. The migrants

found themselves resented by Haitians who were jealous of their special status. All but 13 remained in Haiti.

The initiative to resettle formerly enslaved people in Africa and Haiti found strong support from some sectors of the U.S. Black intelligentsia. In their view, it was the best means for escaping discrimination and oppression in the United States. The first African American Journal, "Freedom's journal" which was owned by John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish, gave a credible platform to the "colonization movement" and demonstrated in their first edition (16 March 1827) that Haitians have shown the way they were able to progress despite of discrimination and injustice they faced. They tried to propose Haiti as a champion of Black Freedom and the place for new comers to find safe refuge.

Other abolitionist leaders like Frederick Douglas, Sojourner Truth and Reverend Richard Allen turned against the movement. They pointed out that the United States was their country and they did not have any intention of leaving it for elsewhere. They demanded the immediate abolition of Slavery and with it full and equal rights to all in the United States. This is when President Abraham Lincoln urged Congress to find appropriate funds to purchase new territories that could be colonized by former enslaved people. 600,000 dollars were allocated to finance emigration from the District of Columbia.

President Nicholas Geffrard of Haiti continued to lend support to the formerly enslaved of the USA willing to emigrate. He looked for the services of abolitionist James Redpath and appointed him as the "General Agent of the Haitian Bureau of Emigration" with a salary of 20,000 US dollars to open offices in Boston. 5000 prospective immigrants were recruited but only 2000 actually moved to Haiti between 1860 and 1862.

The immigrants were rapidly disillusioned by the unstable political situation and the proliferation of deadly diseases like Malaria, Typhoid, smallpox, Cholera, Yellow Fever which decimated their rank. The survivors informed their relatives in the States and the American public of their setbacks in Haiti, which prompted others prospective migrants to change their mind and refuse to travel.

The Haitian government disengaged from the colonization ideas bringing to a close the efforts of United States and Haiti migration. Further efforts for the migration of black residents will be directly linked to the emancipation Proclamation that we have already discussed while encouraged by the presidency of Abraham Lincoln in 1861.

I wanted to bring to light, facts that have antedated Abraham Lincoln Emancipation efforts to offer migration as a solution after abolition of slavery. Our ancestors in Haiti, have indeed, tried for longtime before Lincoln to encourage other islanders or American free slaves or other foreigners to migrate to Haiti because of the decline of the population following our revolutionary war (1791-1804). We will remember the Polish soldiers who refused to continue the fight with Napoleon Army but willing to re-join the army of Indigenes.

I have tried to relate on the migration of the free enslaved American, way before the proclamation of the emancipation, offered by Abraham Lincoln (1861). I hope that I was able to convince the lector that the problem for the republican administration once slavery was abolished and the emancipation offered after the civil war, was more related to the mixture of the population. HAITI, being the torchbearer of liberty, was simply used to divert the many oppressed populations and became a destination for all who wanted to enjoy liberty. May I mention the United States, Venezuela, Columbia, Ecuador. Greece, Santo Domingo, Cuba etc...

If earlier generations of immigrants to Haiti were rapidly disillusioned for their experience in living a dream, the political turmoil and the deep poverty mixed with natural disasters, have not helped to encourage the perception that Haiti was a migrant destination for all the Caribbean neighbors, the American free enslaved population after their civil war and later many Europeans populations.

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