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Critical of Compromise: Henry McNeal Turner and the Rise of the Emigration Movement in Post-Civil War America

Bianca Dang

History 209S
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Allyson Hobbs
History
"We were born here, raised here, fought, bled and died here, and have a thousand times more right here than hundreds of thousands of those who help to snub, proscribe and persecute us, and that is one of the reasons I almost despise the land of my birth," declared Bishop Henry McNeal Turner in an 1883 editorial blasting a fellow bishop's rejection of the burgeoning emigration to Africa movement occurring in the United States. ¹ Turner advocated emigration in part because of the rampant inequality that existed in America at a time when many held new hope for African Americans in the United States. He wrote this eighteen years after the end of the Civil War, the same year that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was repealed. His words expressed the deterioration of the optimism in many African American communities that had originally been spurred by emancipation. Whereas the earliest parts of the postbellum period have been described by historian Eric Foner as the time where "blacks probably considered themselves more fully American than at any time in the nineteenth century," in these later years, the potential for equality slowly faded. ² White lawmakers' suppression of African American rights as well as a surge in sustained violence against African Americans shattered dreams of an equal America. This shifting environment revealed that the Civil War had not brought about significant change, a reality that angered Turner and instigated his turn toward emigrationism.

As the country was slowly turning away from Congressional Reconstruction and the gains made by a Union victory in the Civil War, Turner gradually shifted away from an attitude

of compromise and conciliation. His rhetoric, in large part influenced by ideas about emigration that came before him, became steadily more radical as the majority of the country began to reject many of the radical changes enacted after the War. As the United States moved toward reunification, Turner encouraged a division of America. Through his support of the emigration of African Americans, Turner rejected an American unification that depended on the loss of African American rights and safety. A gradual change is evident in Turner's writings and editorials, progressing toward his final conclusion that there was no positive place in the United States for African Americans because of the country's rampant and imbedded racism. Turner used strong rhetoric in his later life, influenced by the many experiences he had compromised on in the past, to attempt to convince African Americans to separate from a country that was unifying through African American disenfranchisement. Turner's change in attitude laid the groundwork for and became a fundamental feature of his emigration rhetoric, drawing upon his newfound confidence in himself as a leader and his belief in the justice of his movement.

In order to trace Turner's shift away from compromise, this essay will focus on three main issues: Turner's role in and reactions to the Civil War, Turner's rhetoric after the collapse of Reconstruction and finally Turner's defense of his emigration movement and his utilization of previous ideas concerning African colonization to support his movement. Turner's role in the Civil War and his speeches during this time reveal his growing confidence in the possibility for equality after the War as well as his openness to negotiate with white Americans in order to gain full rights for African Americans and protect African Americans' political and social participation in the United States. This contrasts with Turner's reaction after Reconstruction had crumbled, at a point when the suppression of prospects for African Americans pushed Turner to the resolution that African American's would never be fully incorporated into America. An
analysis of Turner's emigration rhetoric will further exemplify Turner's unyielding attitude toward compromise by the late Reconstruction period and will also illuminate continuities in African American civil rights movements in the nineteenth century. This will help illustrate the way in which African American leaders utilized the movement and rhetoric of their predecessors in order to gain rights for African Americans, a trend that continued into the twentieth century when many leaders used Turner's ideas to support their movements. Turner's role in the Civil War reveals a much different persona than the one that Turner became famous for in his later years, one that very much reflects the optimism that resulted of the Union's successes in the War.

**African American Involvement in the Civil War and the Potential for Compromise and Citizenship in Its Aftermath**

During the Civil War, new hope emerged for African Americans regarding their status within the United States, illuminated by the idealism of Henry McNeal Turner's writings from this period. In the later years of the Civil War, the focus of War had become emancipation of slaves. Not only did the Union's fight for emancipation gesture toward new opportunities and rights for those who had been enslaved, but it also produced new ideas of citizenship within African American communities. For over a century, African Americans had been grappling with how to approach and define their position in a country so dependent on and supportive of slavery. African American participation in the War resulted in a new sense of self-confidence toward claims of equal citizenship because of their substantial contribution to the Union's victory over the Confederacy.  

Henry McNeal Turner was among those convinced of new opportunities for African Americans during this period of uncertainty about the country's future. He spoke optimistically about a new, improved period for African Americans.  

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3 Foner, "Rights and the Constitution," 865.
confidence and assertiveness during this period is evident through his speeches and writings.

This was an important point in Turner's career not only in terms of the formation of his character but also because it was the tail end of his complicity in concession to white pressure for limited African American rights. Turner's role in the War was a catalyst for his positivity toward the immediate post-War period and was Turner's introduction to participation in the American political system.

Turner's war experience aided his movement for African American rights because it provided him with skills and experience that would help him appeal to average African Americans and provided him with non-violent tools that would be integral to his later achievements as an orator. Turner was an important part of the movement to recruit African Americans to the Union Army. During his time in the army, he became one of the first African Americans chaplains appointed during the War and witnessed sickness and the deaths of many of the men with whom he fought. Even in the context of these hardships, the War was a productive experience for Turner because according to religious historian Stephen Ward Angell, "Blacks had used the full range of non-violent and violent techniques in order to assist northern whites in defeating the Confederacy and restoring the Union. Now Turner wanted to reserve the same range of tactics for the even more important future struggle to guarantee full human rights for African Americans." The War became an important source of memory to support African American civil rights in the post-War period. It provided Turner with the experience and imagery of African American participation in American causes that he later utilized in the fight for African American equality. He was able to argue for African American rights through the

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lens of African Americans' contributions to the Union cause, contributions that he made public during his time in the War through his correspondences and writings.

In the midst of the War, Turner corresponded with the *Christian Recorder*, the weekly newspaper of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.), and described his experiences as a chaplain. It is evident through some of these letters that Turner's confidence was growing in regard to how the position of African Americans had improved during the War. In May 1865, Turner wrote a letter that encapsulates this confidence about the rising status of African Americans in the United States. In the letter, Turner described a time where Turner's regiment of African American soldiers had to ford a river in North Carolina and remove all of their clothes in order wade through the water. He wrote, "brave boys would disrobe themselves, hang their garments upon their bayonets and through the water they would come, walk up the street, and seem to say to the feminine gazers, 'Yes, though naked, we are your masters.'"6 This scene contains sexual and political symbolism that remained in the minds of Southern whites for generations and was central to their negative perceptions of the Civil War.7 His description of these African American soldiers as the "masters" of white women inverted the power dynamics of the country, rejecting the previous role of African Americans as slaves and whites as masters. This play on the terminology of slavery suggests Turner's belief in the changing status of African Americans, where African Americans could be more powerful than whites. It also emphasizes Turner's boldness because such statements would have been considered unacceptable because they shattered racial and sexual proprieties. Fear spread in white communities because of the

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potential destruction of their values about race and sex, which Turner further intensified through some of his other writings.

Turner asserted the ability of African Americans to act as they pleased and as they must to be successful, in both war and in life, likely fueling white fears concerning African American strength and the potential for miscegenation. Another letter, published in a public weekly newsletter by the A.M.E. Church, was Turner's way to publicly assert a change in American society as well as the power of African Americans. In this letter, dated March 1865, Turner discussed how African American soldiers responded to insults, both of language and action, by Southerners. Turner wrote, "When the rich owners would use insulting language, we let fire do its work of destruction. A few hours only are necessary to turn what cost years of toil into smoke and ashes." This description of the property being a result of "years of toil" references African American labor, both slave and free, toward white prosperity. The products of this labor represented the injustices inflicted upon African Americans for the benefit of the white owners. The aggressive actions of these white owners toward African American soldiers revealed their prejudices and racism, in Turner's mind justifying the soldiers' destructive actions. The complicity of whites in the oppression of African Americans made such actions seem legitimate, and perhaps also encouraged Turner to make the actions of both the white property owners and the African American soldiers known through the publication of his letters. Turner published this description in spite of the potential repercussions by whites for the forceful responses of African Americans. Turner used his role as a correspondent during the Civil War as a way to document the War as he saw it, emphasizing, rather than hiding, African American actions that would have been considered improper. The confidence imbedded in his message and in his

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position became a foundation for Turner's rhetoric during his support for emigrationism. In his emigration movement, Turner openly criticized the actions and values of white America and the federal and state governments. Though Turner's experiences in the Civil War helped provide this foundation for his future, they did not immediately convince him of the necessity of emigration. Victory and emancipation made the possibility for African American rights seem possible to many, including Turner.

Immediately after the Civil War, hope toward a unified America based on racial equality permeated Turner's writings. In 1866, Turner gave a speech entitled "On the Anniversary of Emancipation" during the Emancipation Day Anniversary Celebration in Augusta, Georgia. In this speech, Turner gave an optimistic outlook about the future of African Americans in the United States after the abolition of slavery. He declared, "[White Americans] ought to thank God that they are relieved of that burden [of being afraid of being murdered by and of watching African Americans], and we of our fears - neither party having to watch the other, but all can attend to their own business."9 To Turner, the outcome of the Civil War would not only benefit African Americans, but whites as well. He described the environment of antebellum America as one of mutual fear and distrust, a burden to everyone regardless of skin color. Therefore, the emancipation of slaves had dissipated this weight, revealing his optimism toward a future where both blacks and whites could coexist without injuring and distrusting each other. Though it could be argued that the statement "all can attend to their own business," suggests that Turner was advocating for separation, other parts of his speech encourage integration.

In this emancipation speech, Turner discussed his optimism toward the formation of relationships between African Americans and whites that would now be possible because of the abolition of slavery. He stated,

The fact is, we have a better heart than the white people. We want them free and invested with all their rights. We want to treat them kindly and live in friendship... I believe, that as soon as old things can be forgotten, or all things become common, that the Southern people will take us by the hand and welcome us to their respect and regard.\textsuperscript{10}

Turner asserted the good intentions of African Americans while also placing African Americans in a higher moral position than whites. His confidence in African American morality is evident through his disregard for propriety according to race. His elevation of African American hearts over white hearts reveals his confidence in his message because such language would be especially abhorrent to Southerners who lost the War. To write such things would have likely put him in danger, suggesting he was willing to take that risk in order to spread his message. His description of African American intentions as kind and friendly supports his assertion that African American had better hearts, especially in contrast with the images of white hatred and anger in Turner's Civil War correspondences. His declaration that "We want them free," also suggest that Turner was using this speech as a way to alleviate white fear and show that it was not the intention of African Americans to reenact the wrongs done against them. Even though he makes distinctions between African Americans and whites, Turner retained an optimism for the potential relationships that could be built by African Americans and whites after the passage of time.

His optimism did not only focus on the position of white Americans, but also the new opportunities for African Americans. Turner idealized the future of African American through his belief that they would be accepted as full citizens of the United States. He declared, "The nation's great emblem is no longer against us, for we claim the protection of the Stars and Stripes... The constitution has covenanted with us for mutual protection." His belief in the connection between emancipation and the "pledge of the nation to the eternal security of all the

\textsuperscript{10} Turner, "On the Anniversary of Emancipation," 9.
blessings" reveals Turner's belief that the government had pledged its support for full African American citizenship and rights under the law. Though he believed in the potential for both African Americans and whites in a new America, Turner did not absolve whites in America for their oppression of African Americans.

Turner's speech is laced with accusations against whites, revealing that he had not completely conceded to the idea of white and African American harmony in the United States. Giving his opinion of the historical relationship between whites and slaves, he declared, "We gave the white man our labor, yes! Every drop of sweat which oozed from our face he claimed as his own. In return, he should have educated us, taught us to read and write, at least, and to have seen that Africa was well supplied with missionaries." Turner relayed his experience with slavery and with white oppression. He had been forced into apprenticeship as a young adult and was prevented from a formal education due to provisions set up by Southern states. He asserted that the master-slave relationship should have been beneficial to both, but in reality African Americans gained nothing from whites during enslavement. His declaration that slave masters should have taught their slaves to read and write references the historical legacy of slavery and the disenfranchised position of many African Americans because of their lack of access to education. His reference to missionaries in Africa reveals that Turner was already thinking about Africa, though not necessarily in the context of emigration. This passage also emphasizes the complicity of many whites in the institution of slavery when he stated that "the white man" had claimed African American labor "as his own." This implies that whites who benefited from slave labor were instrumental in their acquisition of that labor and were not just passive recipients. Though Turner was not fully convinced of the possibility for his idealized version of America, he was willing to make compromises in order to bring it to fruition.

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Compromise is evident in Turner's speech through his discussion of the potential for America. Turner decided that it was necessary to forgive the past actions of whites, but to also used this forgiveness as a path through which African Americans could shape the ways in which they were perceived. He concluded,

Let us love the whites, and let by-gones be by-gones, neither taunt nor insult them for past grievances; respect them; honor them; work for them; but still let us be men. Let us show them we can be a people, respectable, virtuous, honest and industrious, and soon their prejudice will melt away, and with God for our father, we will all be brothers.12

Turner encouraged African Americans to love those who had oppressed them, to avoid reminding whites of their past actions toward slaves and African Americans. Though he had already described the historical legacy of slavery, Turner was willing to "respect them; honor them; work for them." Turner compromised in order to establish a brotherhood in which "prejudice [would] melt away." He believed it necessary for African Americans to compromise by suppressing their anger toward white actions in order to build relationships with their former oppressors. Turner also believed that African Americans could use this as a way to form their own identity and reshape white public perceptions of African Americans. His call for African Americans to "show them we can be a people, respectable, virtuous, honest and industrious," suggests that Turner harbored a belief that African Americans had to prove their worth to whites in order to gain equal standing. This view, though realistic, reveals that Turner was willing to convince white Americans of the positive qualities of African Americans rather than just allowing white Americans to see for themselves. Turner's compromising attitude did not last long because white Americans refused to "let by-gones be by-gones" and actively attempted to limit opportunities for African Americans.

Though Turner's 1866 emancipation speech is filled with hope toward a future in which African Americans could coexist in a brotherhood with white Americans, the events of the following decades swiftly crushed this idealized vision. The compromise that Turner was willing to make in order to establish relationships with whites was nullified by the refusal of the United States government and the majority of its white citizens to protect and grant African Americans equal citizenship and rights. The end of the Civil War was only a slight respite in oppression of African Americans. The War and its immediate aftermath created a path toward the Jim Crow laws that would soon follow because of the compromises made in order to reunite the nation, causing Turner to reject his conciliatory attitude and take up a much more aggressive approach toward gaining African American rights in the United States.

The End of Reconstruction and Turner's Move Against Compromise

The optimism that overwhelmed the immediate post-War period settled into a dim hope that eventually collapsed under the weight of the compromises made about Reconstruction in the 1880s. During this time, extreme violence toward African Americans became normalized in parts of the country and African Americans lost their rights in exchange for an agreement of peace between the North and the South. It was in this period that Henry McNeal Turner solidified his position as a passionate supporter of African emigrationism. Turner began to remove all traces of appeasement toward white America in his rhetoric. He filled his speeches and editorials with a fierceness that rallied against African American acceptance of their oppression. This became his way to counteract the compromises that had been made at the expense of African Americans taking place in the country around him. Violence and national reunification spurred Turner's intense rhetoric about the need to return to Africa, described by
Turner to be "the fatherland," to create a place where African Americans could be true citizens. Because of these depressing circumstances and a grim-looking future for African Americans in the United States, Turner was able to maintain and disperse widely his message about the need for African American emigration. His position against the injustices toward African Americans made him beloved, especially by southern African Americans who had had direct experiences with slavery and southern oppression. This support allowed him to become even more confident in his rhetoric and his message, resulting in his public defiance, a method of resistance in which many others were unwilling to engage. The period immediately following the Civil War period laid the groundwork for Turner's change in strategy toward gaining African American rights.

The years immediately following the Civil War were ones of hope and ones of shattered dreams. The hope, as espoused in Turner's 1866 speech, was a sentiment widely felt by African Americans. Not only did many African Americans feel themselves to be "fully American," but many also felt as if the equality that resulted from the Union victory in the War would be a color-blind equality. There was a hopefulness that race would no longer be a consideration in public life. However, massive uncertainty and the ambiguity of legal codes left room for manipulation of laws by whites who wanted to maintain restrictions on African Americans. This was evident in Turner's life and the country more generally. While Turner served as a member of the Georgia House of Representatives in 1868, the House voted to expel its African American members. This expulsion was possible due to the formation of a new constitution that had occurred in 1867. It had omitted a provision that stated that African Americans were entitled to hold office, an omission that some Republicans interpreted a way to prohibit African Americans from being

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14 Foner, "Rights and the Constitution," 876.
elected officials. This was similar to how the Thirteenth Amendment was left open to much interpretation, leading to the question of whether emancipation implied additional rights for former slaves beyond freedom as well as how to define freedom. In the case of the Georgia constitution, white supremacists utilized this aspect of the constitution in order to push African Americans out of the political sphere. This led to defiance on the part of African Americans to oppose this motion, resulting in a clash between African Americans and whites over the issue. Though the U.S. Congress ordered the seating of African American representatives in Georgia in 1870, this did not erase the violence that engulfed the state in the intermediate years. The newly founded Ku Klux Klan launched "a reign of terror," and during the time of the Georgia House controversy, thirty African American political leaders were assassinated and two hundred were violently assaulted. It was in this environment of violence, in combination with the decision to end Reconstruction, that Turner turned fully toward emigration. The late 1860s and early 1870s were periods in which African Americans pushed for more federal government intervention in local politics, both to suppress the Ku Klux Klan violence and to pass the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. However, federal protection collapsed in the following decades, leading to massive losses in African American rights.

The 1870s and 1880s brought two major blows in the push for African American equality in the United States: the first being the election of Rutherford B. Hayes to the presidency and the second being the 1883 Supreme Court ruling that established the Civil Rights Act of 1875 as unconstitutional. Both of these events drastically diminished African American gains in civil rights and equality. Regarding the 1876 presidential election, there was a dispute over nineteen

15 Angell, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, 86.
16 Foner, "Rights and the Constitution," 869.
17 Angell, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, 88.
18 Campbell, Middle Passages, 108.
electoral votes between the two candidates, Democrat Samuel Tilden and Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, that would decide the winner. To reach an agreement, an electoral compromise was made in which Hayes would remove federal troops from the South and would place a southern white Democrat in his cabinet for the presidency. Concerning their side of the compromise, white Southerners agreed to respect African American civil and political rights. The removal of federal troops and the weakening of federal power in the South put an end to African American hopes of a federal authority that would defend their interests.\textsuperscript{20} In 1883, a few years after the Hayes-Tilden compromise, the Supreme Court ruled that it was up to state authority to enforce civil rights laws. This meant that "the acts of private persons were beyond the safeguards of the Fourteenth Amendment and federal jurisdiction," overturning the Civil Rights Act of 1875 and leading to the passage of Jim Crow laws in the South in the following years.\textsuperscript{21} Turner's reaction to these two events solidified his support for emigration and prevented any future concessions on his part.

In response to the election of Hayes and the Supreme Court ruling, Turner began reevaluating his public actions. He was outraged by this ruling and attempted to counter the decision by lobbying on behalf of a bill that would reinstate civil rights protections for African Americans, all while urging blacks to pray and hold public meetings in huge numbers.\textsuperscript{22} Though Turner supported African emigration by this point, he understood that there were African Americans who desired to stay in the United States. It was for these African Americans that Turner took a conciliatory attitude toward Southern whites in the mid-1880s.\textsuperscript{23} But even while he took this approach, he continued to speak critically of the Supreme Court decision and the

\textsuperscript{20} Foner, "Rights and the Constitution," 881.
\textsuperscript{21} Blight, \textit{Race and Reunion}, 309.
\textsuperscript{22} Angell, \textit{Bishop Henry McNeal Turner}, 169.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 169.
state of the nation. He demanded a heightened racial pride amongst African Americans and
turned away from political institutions such as the Supreme Court.24 He went as far as to state in
a newspaper interview, "As long as that decision is the law of the land I am a rebel to this
nation."25 To counter the continued degradation of African American rights and criticism by
African Americans who feared he might be compromising his goal of equality, Turner began to
shift his rhetoric even more radically and "speak more broadly and forcefully on behalf of the
civil rights of African Americans."26

By the turn of the century, Turner had decided that there was nothing in America for
which African Americans could aspire because of the racist limitations put upon them. He
responded by removing any trace of trust or hope in American society from his rhetoric, wholly
encouraging African Americans to emigrate to Africa. In 1902, Turner contributed an essay to a
compilation entitled Twentieth Century Negro Literature or A Cyclopedia of Thought: Vital
Topics Relating to the American Negro by One Hundred of America's Greatest Negroes. His
entry, "Will it be Possible for the Negro to Attain, in this Country, Unto the American Type of
Civilization," was more radical than his work in previous decades. He overtly blamed the United
States and its white supremacists for the poor position of African Americans, while also blaming
African Americans who passively watched such grievances occur. The theme of lack of
oversight of and repercussions for intense violence runs through the essay, drawing heavily on
the role of white civilian violence against African Americans at the end of the nineteenth
century. This essay exemplifies Turner's refusal to soften his views to make them less critical
because of his disgust at the widespread injustices African Americans faced. By the time of this

24 Blight, Race and Reunion, 310.
25 Ibid, 310.
26 Angell, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, 170-172.
essay, Turner was so unhappy with the situation in the United States that he saw no opportunity for African Americans aspiration and felt as if America was not the place for African Americans.

For Turner, the violent and racist attitudes of white America brought into question if America was civilized and where the best place for African Americans would be. Turner's answer to the question posed by his essay, whether African Americans could attain the "American Type of Civilization," was a resolute no. He concluded:

But for the Negro as a whole, I see nothing here for him to aspire after. He can return to Africa, especially to Liberia where a Negro government is already in existence, and learn the elements of civilization in fact; ... So my decision is that there is nothing in the United States for the Negro to learn or try to attain to.27

This overt criticism of the United States and its disregard for human life created an overwhelmingly negative portrayal of America and its "civilization." Though there may have been individual cases of African American success in the United States, with Turner's own life being an example of the level of limited success African Americans could reach, "the Negro[s in America] as a whole," had nothing to gain in America. There were no "elements of civilization" to learn because African Americans were denied the possibilities of equal education and civil liberties. "Negro government," had also become an important issue to Turner, no doubt encouraged by the willingness of white politicians in the United States to disenfranchise African Americans for their own political aims. Turner's decision "that there is nothing in the United States for the Negro to learn or try to attain to," sums up Turner's rejection of the racial conditions that African Americans were expected to live under. Rather than living a limited life in America, Turner renounced American society as a space for the cultivation of civilization for African Americans and instead focused his energies on convincing African Americans to

emigrate to Africa. His tone is forceful and uncompromising, revealing Turner's transition to a position of authority within his movement and his dedication to it. His criticism of the aspects of American society that allowed for such inequality and violence, including the legal system, also highlights his view that he was an authority figure on the dynamics of race in America.

Turner's attitude was not only critical of the moral, but also the legal, shortcomings of American society. In a nation founded on liberty and justice, many whites were excused of responsibility for violent crimes because of their skin color. In response to this lack of justice, Turner wrote:

Civilization presumes legal adjudication and the intervention of that judicial authority which civilized legislation produces... no verdict of guilt from a drunken lawless mob should be accepted by a civilized country; and when they do accept it they become a barbarous people. And a barbarous people makes a barbarous nation... 28

Turner was critical of the ambiguous and subjective character of the American legal system in regard to cases against African Americans. He criticized how the United States, though seen by the world and by itself as a civilized nation, did not abide by the legal and justice codes he considered to be integral aspects of what it meant to be a civilized nation. He referenced the common feature of "justice" enacted by "drunken lawless" mobs. This was a common response of Southern whites to African Americans through episodes of lynching and other violence. Turner describes such actions as "barbarous," revealing his anger at these episodes and his association of such actions with lack of civilization. His statement, "A barbarous people makes a barbarous nation," describes this idea of a lack of civilization in regard to America and its citizens. This was a bold claim at the time, especially as it was stated by an African American. Turner's disregard for accepted conventions and censorship is clear, suggesting Turner's confidence in his assertions. Turner's belief that America was not a civilized place, due to the

28 Turner, "Will it be Possible," 45.
actions by its people and the lack of action by its government, represents one of Turner's reasons for trying to push for African American flight from the country. Turner's criticism of the perpetrators did not only extend to white Americans, but also extended to anyone who did not act against such injustices against African Americans.

Turner's criticism of American actions toward African Americans also applied to African Americans he considered to be culpable in this violence and degradation of African Americans, and in turn American civility, because of their passivity. He declared:

I know that thousands... would not plead guilty of having a part in the violent and gory outrages which are often perpetrated in this country upon human beings, chiefly because they are of African descent... As long as they keep silent and fail to lift up their voices in protestation and declaim against it, their very silence is a world-wide acquiescence. It is practically saying, well done.29

Turner's unyielding attitude extended even to African Americans, leaving no one free from his judgment. His attitude had changed dramatically from his early years as a public figure, evidenced by how he was not willing to compromise even with other African Americans. His dedication to full African American rights and humane treatment extended beyond racial distinction. This excerpt reveals how Turner hoped the movement for civil rights to be a movement of full participation, just as he hoped emigration movement would be a massive exodus to Africa. His "with us or against us" mentality in this passage reveals Turner's boldness and his belief that his followers would not turn against him even with this highly charged, controversial rhetoric. His confidence in the truthfulness of his message is evident through his willingness to make such a bold and critical statement toward many people he was expected to support unconditionally. Turner's focus was no longer on simply unifying African Americans. It was creating a mindset in which all people were treated equally both socially and under the law. This was not a new goal by African American leaders. Much of Turner's rhetoric and the

29 Turner, "Will it be Possible,"46.
foundation of his ideas can be traced to earlier emigration movements, revealing a continuity in the struggle for African American rights throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

The Influence of Turner's Historical Predecessors and Turner's Defense of Emigration

Henry McNeal Turner founded his emigration movement on longstanding concerns about the treatment of African Americans in the United States. African American emigrationism had been a contested issue for over a century. Turner drew upon ideas that had come before him and applied them to his own historical circumstances, eventually becoming one of the most celebrated African American orators and one of the most prolific supporters of African American emigration in American history. Turner's movement was not the first of its kind, but rather it was a reaction and a continuation of previous attempts to relocate African Americans to Africa through emigration or colonization. This influence is important in understanding Turner's choice of rhetoric, rhetoric that would make his plan effective and convincing. These historical arguments also provided Turner with a way to discuss the prolonged suffering of African Americans in the United States.

The 1820s were the first time that African Americans emigrated in large numbers to Africa, settling in Liberia under the direction of the American Colonization Society. During this decade, there were both supporters and critics of American colonization. The debate raged about the moral, economic and political implications of establishing a colony in Africa and by 1820 the American Colonization Society set up a colony on the western coast of Africa. Missionary activity around the world had become common by this time, with Europeans and Americans attempting to Christianize Africa. Some Americans, white and black, suggested Africa as a homeland for African Americans. As historian Floyd Miller explains, "There were those who
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decided that... planting an Afro-American colony in West Africa would free blacks from the
degradation they experienced in the United States and present them with new social and
economic opportunities."\(^{30}\) Emigration and Africa would be alternatives to the suffering African
Americans experienced as a result of American oppression. This sympathy for African
Americans was not always the guiding factor, and many pro-colonists supported emigration to
create a solution for the issue of what to do with an increasing population of free African
Americans.\(^{31}\) Many critics of colonization targeted this racist motivation as the crux of their
arguments against emigration.

Critics of the movement were extremely vocal about their disapproval of emigration
generally and the American Colonization Society (ACS) more specifically. The ACS had a
legacy of racism and according to Miller, "most Afro-Americans viewed the organization as a
deportation society whose members believed both in black inferiority and in the necessity of
ridding the country of its free black population in order to preserve the institution of slavery."\(^{32}\)
This distrust of the ACS's objectives was widespread throughout the country. Many anti-
colonialists argued that there was no evidence to support the idea that emigration would help end
slavery. Miller also notes, anti-colonists "maintained both that there was no evidence that
emigration would help liberate the slaves and that blacks should seek their fortunes in the United
States, where opportunities were expanding and conditions improving."\(^{33}\) This questioning of
the ACS's motivations led to longstanding suspicion of the organization, particularly from
abolitionists. Decades later, Henry McNeal Turner involvement in the ACS was heavily

\(^{30}\) Floyd J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863*, (Urbana,
\(^{32}\) Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality*, 54.
\(^{33}\) Ibid, 82.
criticized. His support for emigrationism and the ACS was founded on many of the arguments, both for and against colonization, that had come before him.

These early ideas about back-to-Africa movements had a significant impact on Henry McNeal Turner's rhetoric and his advocacy for emigration to Africa. By the 1880s and 1890s, Turner's ideas were not always well received. Some prominent African Americans, including a few of his fellow leaders in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, disagreed with Turner's move toward emigration.34 Frederick Douglass, renowned abolitionist and orator, believed America to be the native land of African Americans, not Africa. Douglass' solution to the suppression of African American opportunities and rights was that "the white people of the North and South [had to] conquer their prejudices."35 To Douglass and many other anti-emigrationists, hope had not died in the country: African Americans would eventually achieve equality through white compromise. Douglass quoted Senator John James Ingall in saying, "Let the nation try justice and the problem will be solved."36 Like Turner in his earlier life, Douglass believed in the power of the nation to rectify the injustices enacted against African Americans. For Douglass and many others, it would take a concerted effort on the part of all Americans to equalize society, an attempt that they, unlike Turner, still believed to be possible. Douglass allegedly accused Turner of "clandestinely aiding the colonization society," to which Turner responded indignantly that Douglass was wrong about the deceitful intentions of the ACS and that the ACS was "doing good, and [would] ultimately be adored by unborn millions."37 Turner's support for emigration outweighed his support for Douglass and other people working for equality within America, illustrating his turn away from America. His defense of emigration

34 Angell, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, 121.
36 Ibid, 381.
37 Angell, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, 121.
revealed his loyalty not to America, but to Africa. In 1883, Bishop Benjamin Tanner, one of Turner's colleagues in the A.M.E. Church, rejected Turner's goal of emigration. Turner responded in an editorial where he defined his "African position." In the editorial, Turner drew upon many similar themes argued by both the supporters and the critics of emigration in order to firmly state his belief. 38

Particularly salient in Turner's editorial was his position about the lack of opportunities for African Americans within the United States. In opposition to the anti-colonialists who had pushed for African Americans to seize opportunities within the United States, Turner argued that such opportunities were not available to African Americans. He declared, "Stop talking about the negro doing anything by his own strength, brain and merits."39 Turner recognized that though these were values judged highly by American society, the oppressive condition in the United States toward African Americans prevented them from being able to use these qualities to find work. Limitations American society put upon them prevented African Americans from using their strength, brains and merit. Racialized laws and practices made it such that African Americans had no control over whether or not they could gain and seize upon opportunities. The color of their skin that determined their success. Turner also recognized the national affiliation that African Americans had to the United States, but he believed that this characteristic was hollow because of the lack of progress toward equality the United States had made since the emancipation of slaves during the Civil War.

In response to this idea of nationality, Turner declared, "I know we are Americans to all intents and purposes. We were born here, raised here, fought, bled and died here, and have a thousand times more right here than hundreds of thousands of those who help to snub, proscribe

38 Turner, "Back to Africa."
39 Turner, "Back to Africa."
and persecute us..."40 By clarifying the nationality of African Americans with the phrase "to all intents and purposes," Turner implied that there were ways in which African Americans were not considered Americans. In the United States, the racialized laws around the country clearly supported this idea that some Americans, mainly white Americans, were more "American" than other people. Turner also referenced how persecuted African Americans were born in the United States, gesturing to the Fourteenth Amendment and the right of all people born in the United States to American citizenship. Even though they legally were citizens, the way African Americans were treated transformed this recognition of citizenship into an empty promise. Even though slavery was now abolished, African Americans were still treated as sub-citizens. Turner argued that African Americans were still persecuted after emancipation, nullifying previous arguments that colonization would not end slavery. Even though slavery was over, many of the same societal dynamics remained. Rather than being a catalyst for freedom for slavery, Africa would be a place of freedom from oppression. Turner asserted the right of African Americans to be in the United States and exist within its borders, but realized that those who had control and had full citizenship were the people who snubbed, proscribed and persecuted African Americans.

Turner believed that such people had less of a right to be considered Americans because of their behavior and treatment of other people. Turner observed that in America, skin color was given precedence over moral behavior. He declared,

[I] have seen colored men die by the thousands on the field of battle in defense of the country... I have also seen [them] ignored on account of their color to such an extent that they could not procure a dinner on the public highway without going into some dirty old kitchen and sitting among the pots, while the riff-raff from the ends of the earth were treated as princes.41

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40 Turner, "Back to Africa."
41 Turner, "Back to Africa."
Turner brought in his own experiences to this image, revealing his emotional connection to the topic. This example contains images of African American soldiers who died to defend the United States, implying their brave and honorable actions alongside the image of others who were "riff-raff from the ends of the earth," common people who did not deserve the preferential treatment they enjoyed due to the color of their skin. Turner contrasted the two, having the riff-raff degrading the honorable, in order to exemplify how African Americans were denied opportunities and status by whites in the United States even when they were deserving of such rights. These statements reveal Turner's belief that the United States was a place where some people were more respected and held in higher esteem than others based on dubious qualifications. This attitude severely limited opportunities for African Americans, making Turner's African emigration proposition a solution to the injustice aimed at and lack of opportunities for African Americans. This can be seen as a response to earlier critics of emigration and colonialism who believed that by this point African Americans would have had more rights and more opportunity. Turner founded his criticism in the actual state of America, bringing a sense of realistic necessity and urgency to the movement.

Turner stated, "Yes, I would make Africa the place of refuge because I see no other shelter from the stormy blast, from the red tide of persecution, from the horrors of American prejudice." The supporters of colonialism and emigration in the 1820s believed that Africa or countries in the Caribbean could be places for African Americans to escape the oppression that they experienced in America. In this quote, Turner's description of Africa as a "refuge" implies that the African Americans who would emigrate would be refugees, escaping from an extremely negative environment, of rampant violence and the degradation of African American civil rights during and after Reconstruction. Turner wrote this editorial at a moment in his life when he was 42 Turner, "Back to Africa."
shifting away from his conciliatory, at times compromising, attitude toward white southerners and white supremacists who had succeeded in diminishing the rights of African Americans that had been gained in the 1860s. The fierceness in his tone, the positivity of his claims, and his lack of concession to either the North or the South reveal that Turner had grown more confident about his message and his status as an authority figure with regard to African American rights and emigration. His use of historical arguments to justify his position was emulated by later leaders. Much like how Turner continued the movements of the 1820s during his time, Turner's movement was taken up by future African American leaders in response to the oppression of African Americans.

Turner's forceful rhetoric, such as his Back-to-Africa speech and his questioning of American civilization, is one of the qualities for which Turner is most remembered. His contribution toward the acquisition of African American civil rights is immense, in large part due to his uncompromising attitude and public defiance of the disenfranchisement of African American after the Civil War. As America compromised at the expense of African American rights, Turner became uncompromising at the expense of the expectations of society. He advocated for the disintegration of the current American society through the emigration of the African American population, responding to unification based on exclusion in the country. His emigration movement was not successful in terms of how many African Americans actually emigrated, for there were few for whom this was feasible. However, it was successful in the sense that it unified many African Americans in a movement concentrated on their positive qualities and their entitlement to justice and equal treatment. Because many African Americans did not leave, they continued to be oppressed by white American society, especially through such legal means as Jim Crow laws in the South. By the 1920s, historian Edwin S. Redkey described
African Americans who had moved to the North to find better opportunities as, "Uprooted from familiar surroundings... shunned by whites and restricted to the lowest levels of society," an environment very similar to Turner's followers in the late 1800s. This led some to "began to recall Bishop Turner's African dream of a free and powerful Black nation outside the United States." Turner's movement did not die when he did. Rather, others utilized his movement and his ideas about African nationalism to better the conditions of African Americans and other people of African descent around the world. One person who did this was Marcus Garvey, who was, as Redkey describes, "the man who was to mobilize [these new Northerners] in the second mass flowering of Black Nationalism." The two men shared a "vision of African power" that came to be one of the defining ideas of Pan-Africanism in the twentieth century. Henry McNeal Turner's ascent to leadership of the African American emigration movement in the late nineteenth century helped lay a foundation for Black Nationalism movements in the twentieth century, movements which utilized ideas of African American power and returning to Africa.

44 Ibid, 393.
46 Ibid, 398.
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