

Colored Conventions Project Teaching Guide for College/AP

EXHIBIT:

Before Garvey! Henry McNeal Turner and the Fight for Reparations, Emigration and Black Rights

Prepared by Samantha de Vera in collaboration with P. Gabrielle Foreman

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This teaching guide can be taught in conjunction with Andre E. Johnson’s article “Further Silence upon Our Part Would be an Outrage: Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and the Colored Conventions Movement,” which appears in the volume *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century* (2021), edited by P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Paterson, published by the University of North Carolina Press. For more information on the contents of the volume and where to find it, [click here](#).

“Before Garvey!: Henry McNeal Turner and the Fight for Reparations, Emigration, and Black Rights” curated by Denise Burgher, PhD Candidate, University of Delaware and Dr. Andre E. Johnson, University of Memphis ([link](#))

Questions:

1. This exhibit offers a view of some of the many facets of Turner’s life—his role as a Black chaplain during the Civil War and as a Republican party organizer, a postmaster, and an AME bishop. *How does the span of Turner’s life and activism complicate terms we commonly attach to Black leaders, such as “abolitionist,” “antebellum,” “postbellum,” and “religious activist”?* Consider this [timeline](#) of the events in Turner’s life.
2. As the exhibit page [“Black Women Preachers”](#) shows, Black women preachers such as Amanda Berry Smith, Juliann Jane Tillman, Mary Harden, and Sarah Ann Copeland Hughes challenged the religious establishments to which they belonged and fought to be ordained. Explain the significance of acknowledging Black women preachers’ work. *Where and how do they fit in within the long trajectory of Black feminist thought? How do you think they influenced Turner?*
3. This exhibit offers a map tracking Turner’s travels from the 1860s to the 1890s. *How does this [visual representation](#) of Turner’s travels help us understand the breadth of his influence and work? How can we further improve this map?*

4. Andre E. Johnson and the exhibit curator Denise Burgher show that Turner was an ardent proponent of the Colored Conventions movement and urged that conventions be continued even when other Black leaders no longer felt they were needed; As Johnson points out, in an 1883 newspaper article, Turner argued that “it was a great mistake to abolish colored conventions, if it was done at the bidding of Mr. (Frederick) Douglas, that prince of Negroes. A national colored convention has been greatly needed for the last several years. If the Northern Negro is satisfied with matters and things, we of the South are far from being. Indeed I have been thinking of calling one for the last twelve months; not political but a civil and moral convention.”¹ Note that throughout most of his life (see the [timeline of events in his life](#)), Turner lived in the American South while Douglass in the North. *What do you make of the regional differences that divided Black leaders? How does Turner frame this difference and seek to represent the needs and wants of African Americans in the South?*

5. Having witnessed the gains of Reconstruction and Republicans’ subsequent abandonment of equal rights and protections for African Americans in the South, Turner decried and condemned lynchings, seeing how the government turned a blind eye toward—and even complicit in—white terrorism. His “solutions” emerged before Ida B. Wells’s anti-lynching campaign, begun in 1892, had exposed that interracial rape was a mythology created to foment anti-Black extra-judicial killings. *How does Turner’s support for emigration and reparations fit within his larger critique of the nation? Start by considering this [timeline on debates about emigration](#) as you craft an answer.*

6. The [map of newspaper coverage of the 1893 national convention](#) shows that no less than 60 newspapers from every region of the U.S. published an article about Turner’s convention. *What are the major themes that different newspapers emphasize? What do you think accounts for such wide coverage from so many papers across regions? Why do you think there was so much newspaper coverage of this issue as we see in the data visualization that Samantha de Vera created? What insights can we glean from this map, considering that African Americans formed reading communities and groups as portrayed in the image below?*

¹ Johnson, 306.



The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library.
"Soldier Examining Newspaper By Torchlight As Others Watch, Civil War Era." [New York Public Library Digital Collections](#).

7. CLASS ACTIVITY: If your class were to create/hold a convention today, what issues would be its focus? Write a convention call that outlines the convention's objectives, urgent issues at hand, and the active measures delegates and attendees would need to consider, discuss, and plan. Write a comprehensive call and brief version of it (see examples [here](#) and [here](#)). Prepare to address the following questions:
- How would your convention be organized?
 - What organizations and which leaders would be invited? Who are the non-famous people who would need to be there and from what communities/entities would they draw? Consider how an [unprecedented number of Black women participated in the 1854 Emigration Convention](#) and how their presence informed the issues that were discussed and the resolutions that were passed.
 - What objectives do you think most attendees would agree on?
 - What major differences in approaches do you think delegates might have?
 - How do you think it would be covered by the press?

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Suggested Readings:

Cuffee, Sallie M. "[Reconstructing Subversive Moral Discourses in the Spiritual Autobiographies of Nineteenth-Century African American Preaching Women.](#)" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 32, no. 2 (2016): 45-62.

Johnson, Andre E. *No Future in This Country: The Prophetic Pessimism of Bishop Henry McNeal Turner*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020.

Peterson, Carla L. *Doers of the Word: African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Sanderfer, Selena. "[Tennessee's Black Postwar Emigration Movements, 1866—1880.](#)" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2014): 254-79.