

Colored Conventions Project Teaching Guide for College/AP
EXHIBIT:
To Stay or To Go?: The 1854 National Emigration Convention

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

Reviewed by Janel Moore Almond

This teaching guide can be taught in conjunction with Benjamin Fagan’s article “The Organ of the Whole: Colored Conventions, the Black Press, and the Question of National Authority,” 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](#).

“To Stay or To Go?: The 1854 National Emigration Convention,” curated by Ashley Durrance, Hannah Harkins, Nicholas Palombo, Leslie Rewis, Melanie Berry, Christy Hutcheson, Eli Jones, and Morgan Shaffer. Taught by Benjamin Fagan, Auburn University, Fall 2016. ([link](#))

Questions:

1. Like many Colored Conventions, Black women partook in the conversations and debates *When we juxtapose women’s published appeals and their demands in newspapers with the resolutions they pushed forth in the 1854 Emigration Convention, what do we learn?*
2. *How do digital and interactive timelines such as this [Timeline of Related Events and Periodicals](#) situate events such as this 1854 convention about leaving the United State in search of full civil rights and integration? How are any such timelines useful? How might they be limiting? What other questions do they invite?*
3. While this exhibit explicitly makes an argument about Black women’s active roles in Black nineteenth-century conventions, *what other claims about gender do you think this exhibit puts forth? What clues do any of the national convention minutes and proceedings provide about the roles played by Black women? If the minutes only provide the most fleeting mentions, how do we begin to recognize the fuller impact and importance of Black women’s convention activism?*
4. Benjamin Fagan explores how the Colored Conventions and the Black press were deeply entangled with one another. The Colored Conventions movement “helped make the Black press.”¹ In both institutions, delegates and writers debated what made each one institution “national.” *How do we see the concept*

¹ Benjamin Fagan, “The Organ of the Whole: Colored Conventions, the Black Press, and the Question of National Authority,” *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century*, eds P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Paterson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 207.

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of “nation” and notions of a Black national community permeate the Convention movement? How do the figures in this exhibit define the idea of “nation?” Why does “nation” appear in quotes? Who offers these competing definitions, and on what grounds/in what settings and mediums do they make their claims?

5. When we look at the Black conventions and early Black press, we see some of the 19th century’s most dynamic speakers, organizers, and newspaper editors, such as Frederick Douglass, Charles Bennett Ray, and James McCune Smith. *If we follow their words, speeches, and collective organizing efforts across both arenas, what can we learn about how they made their claims to speak on behalf of larger Black communities/collectives?*
6. 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:
 - a. How would your convention be organized?
 - b. 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.
 - c. What objectives do you think most attendees would agree on?
 - d. What major differences in approaches do you think delegates might have?
 - e. How do you think it would be covered by the press?

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Suggested Readings:

- Ernest, John. *A Nation within a Nation: Organizing African-American Communities before the Civil War*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011.
- Fagan, Benjamin. *The Black Newspaper and the Chosen Nation*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016.
- Glaude Jr., Eddie S., *Exodus! Religions, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Hahn, Steven. *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Peterson, Carla L. *Doers of the Word: African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

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