

The Lincoln Administration's Negotiations to Colonize African Americans in Dutch Suriname

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When historians in the twentieth century reviewed Civil War colonization, they arrived at a general consensus most clearly enunciated in the words of James McPherson: "As a practical solution of the Negro question, colonization was a failure from the beginning."¹ Indeed, if winners write history, or if historians concerned themselves only with victorious ideologies, then colonization should not take much of a place in the history of the war. But if historians desire a more complete understanding of the complexities of Civil War race relations and diplomacy, the topic of colonization is long overdue.

Historians have long known that in the summer of 1862 the Lincoln administration announced its intention to negotiate with foreign powers concerning the colonization of African Americans abroad. Over the next two years, federally funded initiatives to settle African Americans in Chiriqui, Panama, and Île-à-Vache, Haiti, both failed. However, only recently have scholars seriously analyzed the extent of official colonization diplomacy during the war. Most notably, Phillip Magness and Sebastian Page have argued that Abraham Lincoln kept colonization proposals alive well after

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1. James M. McPherson, "Abolitionist and Negro Opposition to Colonization during the Civil War," *Phylon* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1965): 399.

the Emancipation Proclamation. From their analysis, it is now clear that American negotiations with officials representing Panama, Haiti, British Honduras, British Guiana, and Dutch Suriname continued well after 1863 and indeed throughout the course of the war.² As the understanding of this topic progresses, foreign archival materials will present a new avenue for historical research. After all, colonization during the Civil War concerned international agreements and had international significance. A new reading of primary sources concerning Civil War colonization must therefore respond to the call of Thomas Bender, who urges American historians to “integrate the stories of American history with other, larger stories from which, with a kind of continental self-sufficiency, the United States has isolated itself.”³

In the collection of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Netherlands’s National Archive in The Hague, a cache of letters is filed under the inauspicious subheading “American Legation.” Elsewhere in the collection, a set of related papers is labeled “pieces relating to the emigration of workers to Suriname, 1858–1870.”⁴ These documents, more than eighty in total between the two folders, cover the full extent of Dutch-American negotiations on African American colonization in Suriname from 1862 to 1866. I have provided translations for the Dutch and French documents and have transcribed them along with English originals for a forthcoming primary source publication.⁵ These recently discovered foreign sources should significantly contribute to our understanding of Civil War colonization and point the way for future international research.

Of all the Civil War colonization schemes with known diplomatic discussions, Dutch Suriname drew the lowest number of mentions in the American press and remains today probably the least known. Suriname’s neglect in Civil War colonization literature is unfortunate, because the Dutch plan

2. Phillip W. Magness and Sebastian N. Page, *Colonization after Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2011).

3. Thomas Bender, *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002), 5–6.

4. The relevant folders of the two following collections are both labeled “Stukken betreffende de emigratie van werkvolk naar Suriname, 1858–1870” (Pieces relating to the emigration of laborers to Suriname, 1858–1870). These appear in folder 142 of the papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13 and in folders 3230–31 of papers of the Netherlands Department of Foreign Affairs, Collection 2.05.01, both in the Netherlands National Archives, The Hague.

5. Michael J. Douma and Anders Bo Rasmussen, eds., *Colonization, Emigration, Emancipation and the American Civil War*, vol. 3, *Dutch Suriname* (London: Pickering & Chatto, forthcoming).

provides an additional and alternative case demonstrating the seriousness and depth of the Lincoln administration's interest in colonization. The extant historiography on this subject suffers, moreover, because of a consistent reliance on a limited number of exclusively domestic and official diplomatic records. Articles on Civil War colonization written in the first half of the twentieth century completely failed to recognize the relevance of colonization in Dutch Suriname. Charles Wesley, writing in 1919, stated flatly and without citation that Secretary of State William Seward had rejected the 1862 Dutch colonization proposal. Strangely, Wesley misspells "Suriname" as "Swinam," an error that could be forgiven as a typographical mistake if it were not repeated in the article as the patently absurd "Netherland Colony of St. Swinam."⁶ An article from 1947 noted the Suriname plan among other wartime colonization proposals but presented no analysis, just a statement of the plan's existence, based on a reading of a single government report from 1862.⁷ Later articles hardly did more. In 1952, in an article on colonization in Chiriqui, Panama, Paul J. Scheips listed the competing European colonization proposals that came to Lincoln's desk. Without citing a primary source, he dismissed Seward's interaction with the Europeans on colonization: "Nothing very important resulted from this effort."⁸ The litany of errors continued in 1969, when Robert L. Gold concluded that all the European powers had declined Seward's "offer of Negro American immigrants."⁹ Other, more recent histories of Civil War colonization and related topics ignore the Dutch, Danish, and other Caribbean colonization projects entirely.¹⁰ Historians should recognize, of course, that the absence of available primary sources does not lead logically to the conclusion that nothing happened.

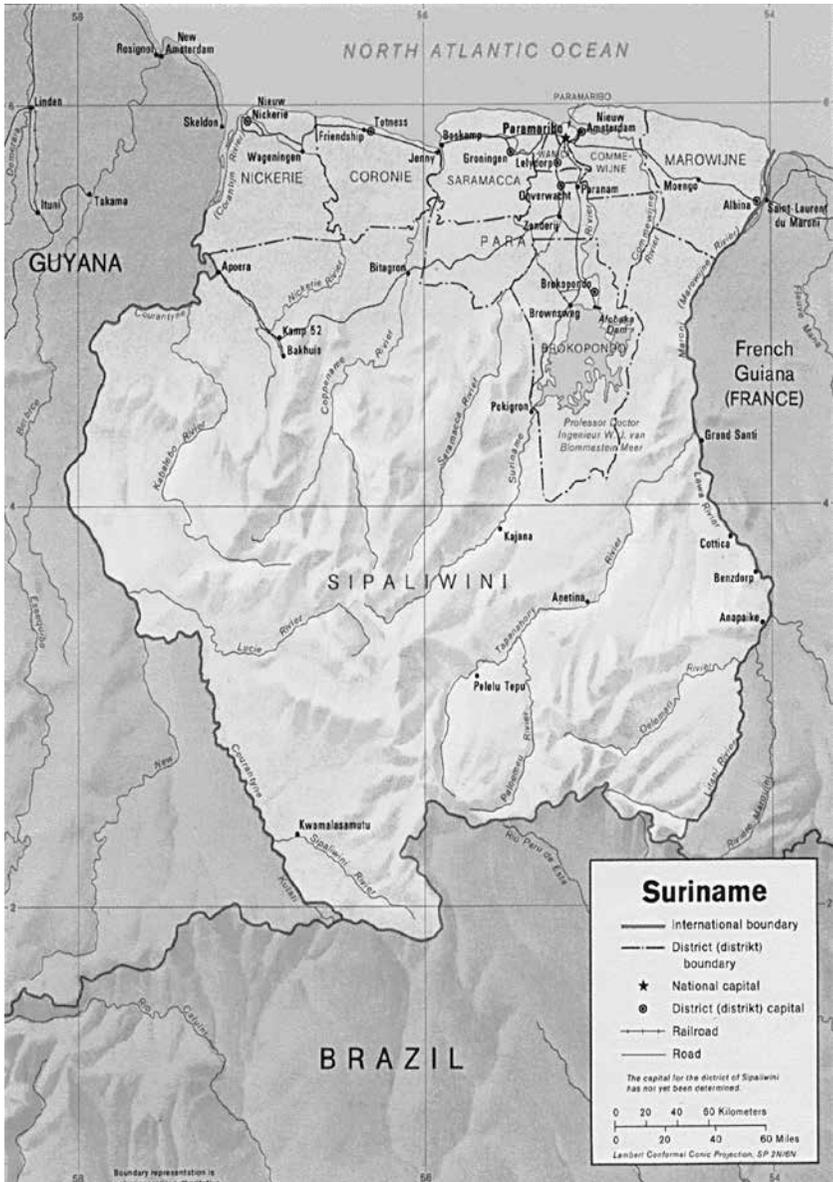
6. Charles H. Wesley, "Lincoln's Plan for Colonizing the Emancipated Negroes," *Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 1 (Jan. 1919): 15.

7. Luveta W. Gresham, "Colonization Proposals for Free Negroes and Contrabands during the Civil War," *Journal of Negro Education* 16, no. 1 (1947): 28–33.

8. Paul J. Scheips, "Lincoln and the Chiriqui Colonization Project," *Journal of Negro History* 37, no. 4 (Oct. 1952): 444–45.

9. Robert L. Gold, "Colonization Schemes in Ecuador, 1861–1864," *Phylon* 30, no. 3 (Fall 1969): 308.

10. See, for example, P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816–1865* (New York: Octagon, 1980), 246; Paul D. Escott, *What Shall We Do with the Negro?: Lincoln, White Racism, and Civil War America* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2009); Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 2005); Allan Yarema, *The American Colonization Society: An Avenue to Freedom?* (Lanham, Md.: Univ. Press of America, 2006).



In the 1860s, Dutch Suriname had only about thirty-five thousand inhabitants, concentrated in plantations and cities along the colony's coastline. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, 1991.

Robert F. Durden's 1957 biography of American ambassador to the Netherlands James Shepherd Pike deserves significant credit for its reexamination of the Suriname colonization proposals. Durden covered the Suriname scheme in eight pages, with citations to correspondence between Seward and Pike and between Seward and Theodorus Maurinus Roest van Limburg, the Dutch minister resident of the Netherlands in Washington.¹¹ But Durden and, more recently, Phillip Magness and Sebastian Page, who also investigated the topic, could not read Dutch and thus neglected insightful Dutch-language papers. These historians focused on the English-language correspondence between Seward and the American ambassador to the Netherlands, James Pike, when the more enlightening material was to be found in the correspondence of Roest van Limburg. Scholars from the Netherlands interested in the history of Suriname also directed their attention elsewhere, on the topic of marronage, for example, or postcolonial Surinamese migration.¹² Apparently, only one Dutch historian has ever even cited the relevant Suriname colonization papers mentioned above, and he did little to demonstrate their significance.¹³

Given the renewed interest in the history of American colonization since the end of the twentieth century, it is time for a study of the Dutch Suriname colonization plan, with attention to Dutch language sources. In particular, recent scholarship has been interested in colonization for what it can tell us about the character and political motives of Abraham Lincoln.¹⁴ The dominant view of Lincoln on colonization is expressed by Eric Foner, who believes the president's thoughts on African Americans evolved during the Civil War, as did his relationship with the colonization movement. Foner argues that

11. Robert F. Durden, *James Shepherd Pike: Republicanism and the American Negro, 1850–1882* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1957).

12. Duco Hellema, *Neutraliteit & Vrijhandel: De Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Buitenlandse Betrekkingen* (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 2001); Gert Oostindie, *Postkoloniaal Nederland: Vijfenzestig jaar vergeten, herdenken, verdringen* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2009); Gert Oostindie and Inge Klinkers, *Knellende Koninkrijksbanden. Het Nederlandse dekolonisatiebeleid in de Caraïben, 1940–2000*. 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2001). Anthropological views on Suriname include the award-winning work of Richard Price, including *Alabi's World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1990).

13. J. P. Siwipersad, *De Nederlandse Regering en de Afschaffing van de Surinaamse Slavernij (1833–1863)* (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1979).

14. Phillip Shaw Paludan, "Lincoln and Colonization: Policy or Propaganda?" *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 23–37. Popular recent revivals of this topic include Richard J. Blackett, "Lincoln and Colonization," *OAH Magazine of History* 21, no. 4 (Oct. 2007): 19–22; Nicholas Guyatt, "A Topic Best Avoided," *London Review of Books*, Dec. 1, 2011, 27–31.

Lincoln and the Republicans changed their views on colonization because of the expected demand for labor in the postwar South. African Americans needed to work in cotton fields, since cotton was the country's main export that primed the economy. Foner recognizes, however, that Lincoln scholars have downplayed Lincoln's colonization ideas.¹⁵

While this study does not directly engage in a discussion about Lincoln's views on colonization, it does indicate that Lincoln was aware of the Dutch Suriname plan as it continued to be discussed in 1863 and 1864. In fact, most of the diplomatic correspondence on colonization in Suriname occurred *after* the Emancipation Proclamation took effect. A Dutch–American agreement on colonization was signed in December 1863, a full year after Lincoln's famous act, but the agreement languished in Congress, awaiting a ratification vote. In February 1864, Seward wrote separate letters to Pike and van Limburg, stating that he did not expect the U.S. Senate to ratify the proposal. Van Limburg was told that the likelihood of the approval of the treaty was “doubtful” because of the “altered condition of affairs relating to the treaty since the negotiations commenced.” Similarly, Seward informed Pike that that the treaty was “not now expected” to be ratified, since “the American people have advanced to a new position in regard to slavery and the African class since the President in obedience to their prevailing wishes accepted the policy of colonization.”¹⁶ Seward's statement on Lincoln was vague and ambiguous. Did he mean to say that Lincoln had previously accepted colonization only because of the wishes of the people? This, of course, could not have been the case, since no one seriously doubts that before 1863 Lincoln supported colonization. Nor does Seward make clear any change of mind in Lincoln himself. According to Seward, the failure of the ratification of the Dutch proposal had more to do with a change in American society than a change with the president. “Now not only their free labor, but their military service is also appreciated and accepted,” Seward concluded in his February 1864 letter to Pike. Seward's use of the passive verb leaves some ambiguity: who exactly appreciated and accepted African Americans for their free labor and military service?

15. Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: Norton, 2010).

16. Seward to van Limburg, Feb. 12, 1864, folder 142, NA 2.05.13, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives; Seward to Pike, Feb. 15, 1864, Diplomatic Instructions from the Department of State, 1801–1906 (vol. 14, Jan. 29, 1833–Sept. 12, 1864), General Records of the Department of State, RG 56, U.S. National Archives.

A thorough reading of the papers of the Netherlands' Department of Foreign Affairs demonstrates that the Dutch continued to hold out for a potential ratification of the Suriname colonization treaty through to the end of the war. Indeed, the war's end sparked another round of Dutch inter-department memoranda on colonization. These sources demonstrate, furthermore, that neither Seward's words to van Limburg nor van Limburg's growing pessimism about the plan convinced the Dutch government that the plan had been defeated. In fact, the Dutch had reason to hold out hope. Although no further official American correspondence on colonization in Suriname appeared after February 1864, the lead Dutch diplomat in the United States, Roest van Limburg, continued to field relevant information on the matter until spring 1866. Van Limburg's personal correspondents at this time included former Secretary of State Lewis Cass, the Danish chargé d'affaires in Washington, Waldemaar Raaslöff, the commissioner of emigration and Freedman's Bureau general Oliver O. Howard, and the interim secretary of state William Hunter. Van Limburg grew increasingly convinced that the plan was impractical or even infeasible but not that it was impossible or diplomatically defeated. Indeed, van Limburg's persistence in following orders from the Dutch minister of foreign affairs (the Dutch equivalent of the secretary of state) and the Dutch colonial minister yielded some actual progress toward Surinamese colonization, since in 1865 the U.S. government allowed Dutch agents on American soil to recruit African American volunteers for labor on Surinamese plantations. It is unclear whether any African Americans left for Suriname in this period. In the end, it was not the Lincoln administration that killed the Dutch Suriname colonization plan; instead, diplomatic inefficiencies delayed progress and preparation for the scheme, and African Americans demonstrated a consistent reluctance to migrate to foreign lands. Hence, the Dutch-American colonization proposal died a slow death.

This study of the negotiations to colonize African Americans in Dutch Suriname intends to contribute to an ongoing discourse about the relationship between the colonization movement and nineteenth-century racial ideas. Any study of colonization is fraught with challenges, since historians must be careful not to appear to support what many see today as a morally indefensible, defunct ideology. According to David Brion Davis, historians have neglected to study the colonization movement precisely for this reason. Importantly, Davis reminds us that colonizationists were not motivated solely

by racism. Instead, many thought slavery was a corruption that needed to be excised from a moral republican system.¹⁷ As Beverly Tomek points out, the American colonization movement rested within the antislavery network, and was hardly a wild, independent movement of racist idealists. Although colonizationists argued fiercely with immediatist and gradualist abolitionists, members could and did move fluidly between these groups. Colonization may be, as the humanitarian Matthew Carey put it, “one of the wildest projects ever patronized by a body of enlightened men,” but it was only one of many early-nineteenth-century antislavery ideas that may seem abhorrent today.¹⁸

Colonization is also not only an American story but rather one that must be seen within an international context. In Suriname, colonization was the latest Dutch proposal concerning the importation and control of labor in their South American colony. First established by the English, conquered by the Dutch in 1667, reconquered by England in 1672–74, and then returned to the Netherlands in 1674, Suriname was essentially a sugar colony that also produced significant exports of cacao, coffee, and cotton. The Dutch government placed Suriname in control of the Charter Society of Suriname, which, consisting of three equal partners—the West Indian Company, the City of Amsterdam, and Cornelius van Aerssen van Sommelsdijk (and later, his descendants)—ruled the territory until 1795. Under the Dutch, slave imports were almost always needed to maintain stable populations and to promote economic growth. When France took control of the Netherlands in 1795 and threatened to occupy its colonies, the English provided protection for Suriname and became its ostensible sovereign. Now free of French rule, the Dutch regained control of Suriname in 1816. Although Surinamese trade picked up in the wake of Napoleon’s defeat, the colony faced financial difficulties throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, despite subsidies from the Netherlands. Once a crown colony, in 1848 Suriname became the responsibility of the Dutch Parliament and its advisor, the minister of colonies. The plantation system that brought the colony prosperity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries faltered in the nineteenth century because with the death of the slave trade planters lost their source of replenishing labor. After slaves were emancipated in 1863, the Surinamese planter class grew

17. David Brion Davis, “Reconsidering the Colonization Movement; Leonard Bacon and the Problem of Evil,” *Intellectual History Newsletter* 14 (1992): 3–16.

18. Beverly C. Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery Pennsylvania* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2011), 65.

desperate for new sources of labor. At first, it found a few willing Chinese immigrants and some laborers from elsewhere in the Caribbean. But a larger number of British Indian “coolies” arrived after 1873. By 1916, despite some reservations about conditions in Suriname, more than thirty-four thousand British Indians had entered this Dutch colony. Immigrants from Java, then part of the Dutch East Indies, provided another source of labor for Suriname. Some thirty-three thousand Javanese came to Suriname before the Second World War, and although significant numbers returned to Asia, the Indian and Javanese populations on Suriname grew steadily.¹⁹

In promoting a plan to settle African Americans in Suriname, the Dutch eagerly participated in a post-emancipation Atlantic World order that maintained some control of African Americans as a source of labor. That is, governments designed to use their power and influence to direct the flow of labor and to establish wage and migration laws to protect vested interests. Financial gain prompted Dutch colonization policy, but the Dutch also saw colonization as a humanitarian cause. The Dutch government agreed to end slavery in its colonial possessions in the summer of 1863, just a half year after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation took effect. Fearing the consequences of the loss of labor in Suriname, the Dutch quickly responded to the potential of free laborers from the United States.

The Dutch-American correspondence on colonization began in the summer of 1862, as the American Civil War swung into full gear. For the most part, colonization was an objective and duty of the U.S. Department of Interior; in the Dutch case, however, the U.S. secretary of state, William Henry Seward, inexplicably took control. The attempt to recruit American blacks for Suriname was also part of a wider Dutch concern, an international system of state-sponsored and regulated migration that distributed wage laborers around the world. The history of slavery in Dutch Suriname or the Dutch Atlantic World and the history of slavery in the United States therefore converged at this date. In the end, the Dutch American colonization treaty never came before the U.S. Senate, and its provisions were forgotten. Nevertheless, extensive negotiations between the two nations on the topic of resettling blacks in Suriname continued as late as 1866. The related correspondence regarding

19. Cornelis Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in Surinam 1791/5–1942* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990); Rosemijn Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery: A Social History of British Indian and Javanese Laborers in Suriname* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1998).

colonization demonstrates the depth and significance of Dutch and American colonial sympathies.

The Dutch responded positively to Lincoln's colonization message of the summer of 1862; they saw colonization as a desired component of colonial emancipation plans. A key figure in the Dutch discourse was Adriaan David Van der Gon Netscher (1811–1897), a former Dutch sea captain, who had also been an attorney, a painter, and part proprietor of a coffee and plantain estate in Demerara, British Guiana. According to his own account, he served as magistrate and member of the Court of Policy in British Guiana from 1841 to 1857 before returning to life in the Netherlands where he served on a government committee to recommend emancipation policy for Suriname.²⁰ Van der Gon Netscher, like most other Dutchmen, believed emancipation in the Dutch West Indies was inevitable and desirable but that the main concern would be finding the proper procedure to enact such reforms.²¹ In a series of lengthy pamphlets, two from 1858 and one from 1859, he outlined a plan consisting of three main parts: compensation for slave owners, state supervision of freed slaves for ten to twelve years of contract labor, and state-subsidized immigrant recruitment to prevent a decline in production on the Surinamese plantations.

Immigration was the key plank in van der Gon Netscher's platform, since he believed that only immigrant labor could compensate for the loss of slave labor. For this reason he supported the immigration of thirty-six thousand laborers over the twelve years immediately following emancipation. He asked for government premiums to be paid to immigration recruiting agents to encourage the flow of people: Africans (at a cost to the government of 60 guilders each), Chinese (at 200 guilders each), Portuguese (including people from Madeira, Azores, and Cape Verdeans, Canary Islands at 75 guilders each), while inducements for Dutch, Germans, and other northern Europeans to journey to Suriname would be paid for by a tax on Surinamese planters.²²

20. P. C. Molhuysen and P. J. Blok, eds., *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, pt. 3 of 10 (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1914), 910.

21. J. M. van Winter, "De openbare mening in Nederland over de afschaffing der slavernij," *De West-Indische Gids* 34, no. 3 (1953): 61–90; Pieter C. Emmer, "The Ideology of Free Labor and Dutch Colonial Policy, 1830–1870," in *Fifty Years Later: Antislavery, Capitalism, and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit*, ed. Gert Oostindie (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 207–22. Emmer also notes that Dutch labor policies in the colonies were based on cost-effectiveness, not ideology.

22. Adriaan David van der Gon Netscher, *Bijdrage Ter Aanwijzing van de Grondslagen, Waarop De Afschaffing der Slavernij in Suriname dient gevestigd te worden* ('s-Gravenhage: A.

In van der Gon Netscher's eyes, the chance to receive free laborers, or even to earn a premium per laborer through receiving African Americans, relieved the Dutch government of a minimum of 60 guilders per person.

A key theme in van der Gon Netscher's message to the Dutch government was the necessity of supporting Suriname in its transition to free labor. British Guiana and the British and French West Indian colonies, he demonstrated with meticulous statistical evidence, had suffered a universal decline in production in the sudden transition from full slavery to full freedom. This occurred, he argued, because Africans were not interested in civilization, and if not forced to labor, they would work as little as needed. The transition to freedom needed to be gradual, well-planned, and organized, he declared. This would continue the pattern of the preceding decade, in which slaves in Suriname were granted some rights for proper food and provision as well as shorter working hours. The transition from slavery to freedom in Suriname was long and slow, but by 1863, it bridged less of a gap than in other Caribbean colonies.²³

Any understanding of colonization must proceed from the premise that both the countries offering colonists, as well as the countries receiving them, hoped to gain something for themselves in the process. The correspondence between Dutch and American diplomats beginning in 1862 began, however, from different premises about the objective of African American colonization. Both governments sought economic gain (the American idea was to relieve the nation of unwanted laborers, and the Dutch to satisfy extra labor demand) while diplomats bilaterally demonstrated humanitarian concerns. The American contingent was, at least on paper, more concerned with the welfare of colonists and felt a moral duty to allow them to prosper in an environment they assumed was more suitable for the African race.

The earliest available correspondence on the subject is the missive of June 25, 1862, from the Dutch colonial minister in The Hague, Gerhard Henrick

Belinfante, 1858); Adriaan David Van der Gon Netscher, *Beschouwing van Het op 25 October 1858 Voorgesteld Ontwerp van Wet Ter Afschaffing der Slavernij in Suriname voornamelijk ter aanwijzing van de noodzakelijkheid eener gelijktijdige en voldoende immigratie* ('s-Gravenhage: A. Belinfante, 1858); Adriaan David Van der Gon Netscher, *De Quaestie van Vrijen Arbeid en Immigratie in de West-Indie, toegelicht door A. D. van der Gon Netscher* ('s-Gravenhage: A. Belinfante: 1859).

23. Pieter Emmer, "Between Slavery and Freedom: The Period of Apprenticeship in Suriname (Dutch Guiana), 1863–1873," *Slavery & Abolition* 14, no. 1 (1993): 87–113.

Uhlenbeck, sent to the Dutch Department of Foreign Affairs, in whose archival collection a copy of the letter now resides. Uhlenbeck stated that Roest van Limburg, the Netherlands minister resident in the United States, had informed him about the possibility of acquiring African American laborers. Factoring in a two-week transatlantic mail delay, this indicates that van Limburg knew something about the Lincoln administration's colonization plans some two months *before* Lincoln provided a \$600,000 appropriation to establish an Emigration Office in the Department of the Interior, in mid-July. Uhlenbeck responded positively to the idea of colonization, and he did not question the feasibility of the project. Indeed, he thought their circumstances would motivate American blacks to migrate. He suggested establishing five-year labor contracts to recruit African American emigrants to Suriname.²⁴ The Dutch minister of foreign affairs, P. van der Maesen de Sombreff, indicated a subsequent proposal sent via van Limburg to Seward, originated in the Tweede Kamer (Dutch House of Representatives).²⁵

A biographer describes van Limburg as a complainer who never felt at home in the United States, despite marrying an American. At five feet, seven inches, with a thick brown beard, he was not an imposing man, but he was respected in Washington's diplomatic circles after his arrival there in 1856. During his tenure, he felt underpaid and underappreciated, and he constantly hoped for a new post. When dining with Lincoln in 1861, he found the new president ignorant about the Dutch. Indeed he consistently saw weakness and folly in Lincoln and his administration. He had little positive to say about a "government of the people" run by a rough midwesterner.²⁶

Despite his views of the Lincoln administration, however, van Limburg felt duty bound to serve the interests of the nation he represented. For this reason, he responded with energy to Dutch inquiries about colonization. Van Limburg sought guidance on the subject first from the Danish chargé d'affaires, Waldemar Raaslöff, who had been busy negotiating his own nation's plan for

24. G. H. Uhlenbeck to P. Th. Van der Maesen de Sombreff, June 25, 1862, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.015.13, Netherlands National Archives.

25. P. Th. van der Maesen de Sombreff (The Hague) to Roest van Limburg (Washington, D.C.), July 1, 1862, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

26. J. W. Schulte Nordholt, "The Civil War Letters of the Dutch Ambassador," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 54, no. 4 (1961): 341–73, originally appeared as "De brieven van de Nederlandse gezant in de Verenigde State tijdens de Burgeroorlog," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 72 (1959): 206–25.

receiving African American laborers, and also from former U.S. secretary of state Lewis Cass. Van Limburg respected Cass above all others and closely heeded his words. Not only did van Limburg know Cass from four years shared working in the Capitol, but Cass was also van Limburg's father-in-law (van Limburg married Cass's daughter Isabella in 1858). Cass spoke ill of colonization plans in general and suggested three points for van Limburg to consider: first, there would be few, if any, blacks from the southern states willing to emigrate; second, the American government would prefer to make contracts with the Dutch government, rather than with individual planters; and finally, many of the northern blacks were already in useful service in the Union's war effort.²⁷ Seward doubted there would be any emigration, because the Union forces needed the services of African Americans, but he suggested that van Limburg apply to the secretary of interior, Caleb Smith, for more information.²⁸ In dispatches of July 21, 28, and 29 and August 11, van Limburg relayed this information and more to the minister of foreign affairs in The Hague. He also provided a newspaper clipping on the successful Danish negotiations with the United States, which had resulted in an agreement to send to St. Croix all slaves taken in the illegal slave trade on the Atlantic Ocean. Although Cass's words sat strongly in his mind, van Limburg continued to heed the advice of his government and seek further information. Correspondence from 1862 demonstrates his desire to work hard on the issue.²⁹

Van Limburg followed Seward's advice and wrote to Caleb Smith in September. Smith replied promptly with a line that would echo through the correspondent chain and into chambers across the Atlantic: the U.S. government was "not prepared at this moment to enter into arrangements."³⁰ Before this message reached the Netherlands, however, the Dutch government issued another salvo of efforts to encourage a colonization agreement. Colonial Minister

27. Roest van Limburg (Detroit) to Department of Foreign Affairs (The Hague), July 21, 1862, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

28. W. H. Seward (Washington, D.C.) to Roest van Limburg (Detroit), July 22, 1862, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

29. Roest van Limburg (Detroit) to Department of Foreign Affairs, July 28, 29, 1862, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives; Roest van Limburg (Sharon Springs) to Foreign Affairs, Aug. 11, 1862, folders 3230–31, Papers of the Netherlands Department of Foreign Affairs, Collection 2.05.01, Netherlands National Archives.

30. Roest van Limburg (New York) to Caleb Smith, Sept. 19, 1862, and Caleb Smith, Department of the Interior (D.C.) to Roest van Limburg (New York) Sept. 22, 1862, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

Uhlenbeck, for example, learned from the Dutch newspapers of the attempt by British Guiana officials to attract American blacks, and he wondered if the governor of Suriname should go to Washington to encourage action.³¹ The minister of foreign affairs, de Sombreff, forwarded Uhlenbeck's message to van Limburg and encouraged all possible speed on the project. Van Limburg must have been frustrated with the delay in transatlantic communication, since he received orders from the Netherlands encouraging him to recruit the Governor of Suriname a few days *after* he had sent to the Netherlands with word of Smith's remarks. In Paramaribo, Suriname, meanwhile, the American consular agent, Henry Sawyer, reported to Seward that colonial planters were agitating for black laborers. The Surinamese governor and authorities were much in favor of the scheme, Sawyer added, and the planters proposed to send an agent to the U.S. to ascertain the fitness of the potential immigrants.³²

By mid-October, van Limburg and de Sombreff were up to date with the general position of the American government. Van Limburg then tried to judge the merits of colonization from the precedents of Danish and English negotiations with the United States. From his friend the Dane Waldemar Raaslöff, he learned that English-American negotiations had stalled, and the Americans viewed the British proposal as unreachable, due primarily to the perceived difficulty in protecting the emigrating blacks. For the first time, van Limburg now expressed his conviction that the Suriname colonization proposal was not *uitvoerbaar* (feasible/practicable).³³

On October 31, 1862, a new line of correspondence opened when American ambassador James Pike wrote to the Dutch Department of Foreign Affairs.³⁴ Pike's letter appeared to be exactly what the Dutch were waiting for, since it clearly stated that Pike would authorize an agreement between the United States and the Netherlands to settle African Americans in Suriname. Pike explained that many freed blacks were interested in emigrating, the number was

31. G. H. Uhlenbeck (The Hague) to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (The Hague), Sept. 27, 1862, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

32. Henry Sawyer, consul to William H. Seward, Sept. 30, 1862, Dispatches from United States Consuls in Paramaribo, 1799–1997, roll 4, vol. 4: Jan. 9, 1858–Dec. 31, 1862, U.S. National Archives.

33. Roest van Limburg (New York) to de Sombreff, Netherlands' Department of Foreign Affairs, Oct. 27, 1862, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

34. James Pike, United States Legation, The Hague to the Netherlands Minister of Foreign Affairs, Oct. 31, 1862, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.



U.S. secretary of state William Seward directed the American ambassador in the Netherlands to negotiate a treaty for African colonization in Dutch Suriname. Image from *The Works of William H. Seward*, vol. 5 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1884), title page.

expected to increase, and other countries in the Caribbean had also engaged the United States in colonization agreements. In letter of October 8, 1862, Seward authorized Pike to continue with an agreement.³⁵ What prompted Seward to make this authorization at this time is unclear, but similar moves by the Lincoln administration indicate an executive influence. Once authorized by Seward, Pike established a few grounding principles for a possible future treaty. For example, all colonists were to remain free, migration was to be voluntary, and emigrants were to be properly looked after during transportation. The Dutch Department of Foreign Affairs passed the welcome news on to the Department of Colonies.

By late October 1862, only Seward and Pike (and presumably Lincoln) knew the true direction of the American efforts. Van Limburg, however, remained in the dark. On November 3, he received a letter from a E. Boram Graves of New York City, who forwarded a call from a man in Amsterdam for laborers in Suriname. Van Limburg responded with the words of Caleb Smith: the U.S. was not prepared.³⁶ Even James Mitchell, Lincoln's colonization officer,

35. William H. Seward to James Pike, Oct. 8, 1862, Diplomatic Instructions from the Department of State, 1801–1906 (vol. 14, Jan. 29, 1833–Sept. 12, 1864) General Records of the Department of State, RG 56, U.S. National Archives.

36. Roest van Limburg, New York to Foreign Affairs, Nov. 5, 1862, and E. Boram Graves (New York) to Roest van Limburg, Nov. 3, 1862, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

knew little about the Suriname case. In his 1862 “Report on Colonization and Emigration,” Mitchell summarized a note from van Limburg stating the interest of the Dutch government in acquiring laborers. But he gave much more space to the Danish offer to settle African Americans on St. Croix and even to the potential colonization of Ecuador, in addition to the better known British Guiana, Liberia, British Honduras, Haiti, and Chirqui (Panama) plans.³⁷ The correspondence of 1862 presents as many questions as it provides answers. Why was Pike granted permission to engage in a treaty just weeks after Caleb Smith had turned down any inquiry from van Limburg requesting the same? What had changed? Did the Lincoln administration want to make sure it operated on its own initiative and for some reason not work with van Limburg?

All the while, the Dutch government was busy hammering out a plan for emancipation in Suriname and the proper regulations to provide for post-emancipation immigration. African American colonization in Suriname was a late-arriving line in a longer Dutch discourse about providing Suriname with laborers. Van der Gon Netscher provided a commentary on the events in an October 1862 tract in which he explained that the United States recently made it known that it wanted to release its “black and colored” population and that many in the planter class in Suriname were encouraged by the possibility of receiving the same.³⁸ Furthermore, he expressed hope that freed African Americans would chose to immigrate to Suriname and sign work contracts.

Van der Gon Netscher was upset, and rightly so, that the Dutch government was not pursuing Suriname immigration. After all, in March of the previous year (1861), van der Gon Netscher had been selected to serve as one of three members (along with former Surinamese governor C. P. Schimpf and former Curacao governor I. J. Rammelman Elsevier Jr.) on a special commission on emancipation, reporting to new colonial minister, James Loudon.³⁹ Loudon agreed with the members of the commission that the Dutch government should heavily support migration to Suriname after emancipation. The Tweede Kamer sharply amended Loudon’s proposal. Loudon and van der

37. James Mitchell, *Report on Colonization and Emigration made to the Secretary of the Interior by the Agent of Emigration* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1862).

38. Adriaan David van der Gon Netscher, *Opheffing van de Slavernij en De Toekomst van Nederlandsch West-Indie* (’s-Gravenhage: Broeders Belifante, 1862), 16.

39. C. A. van Sypesteyn, *Afschaffing der Slavernij in de Nederlandsche West-Indische Kolonien, Uit officiale bronnen zamengesteld* (’s-Gravenhage: n.p., 1866), 8.

Gon Netscher, among others, believed that changes in the final legislation would be devastating for Suriname. Some of the basic provisions of the law remained the same: slave owners were to be compensated 300 guilders per slave, regardless of gender or condition, and a ten-year period of state-supervised labor contracts was to be established. But van der Gon Netscher complained that only 1 million guilders, instead of the commission's proposed 3 million, were to be set aside as a subsidy to encourage migration to Suriname. The new Dutch law subsidizing Surinamese immigration included a premium for African Americans, but only for a maximum of five years after emancipation, instead of a previously proposed twenty. Another amendment to the commission's proposal was that state supervision of wage labor contracts would last for a maximum of ten years but could end sooner and the governor of Suriname could end supervision for those freed slaves who demonstrated good behavior and industriousness.⁴⁰

In a January 10, 1863, editorial in the *Nieuwe Amsterdamsche Courant: Algemeen Handelsblad*, van der Gon Netscher again stated his case. He explained that the Dutch in Suriname had expressed significant interest in acquiring freed African Americans to work on their plantations and that Suriname's governing administration looked into acquiring freed African Americans. The international context continued to play a role in Dutch plans. Van der Gon Netscher provided a translation of the November 5, 1862, issue of a British Guiana newspaper, the *Colonist*, which demonstrated, to his eyes, the necessity of government involvement in the project. However, when van der Gon Netscher penned another article in May 1863, he had given up hope of American cooperation.⁴¹

Since premiums were established for the importation of laborers in Suriname, and a treaty proposal with the United States was in the works, Dutch foreign affairs minister de Sombreff encouraged van Limburg to work with all possible speed to prepare Dutch consular agents in American ports.⁴² These agents would be responsible for recruiting African American emigrants and

40. van der Gon Netscher, *Opheffing van de Slavernij en De Toekomst van Nederlandsch West-Indie*. He also argued that Suriname needed basic services set up to organize a police force, jails, a gun-boat, jurisdictions of legal administration, schools, hospitals, labor rules and rights, and new taxes.

41. Adriaan David van der Gon Netscher, "De Immigratie van arbeiders uit China in Suriname," *Koloniale Jaarboeken* 3 (1863): 346–69.

42. P. Th. van der Maesen de Sombreff (The Hague) to Roest van Limburg, Apr. 27, 1863, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

for inspecting the ships on which they were to be transported to Suriname. Van Limburg was willing to follow through, seeking confirmation from established consuls in New Orleans, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston, but he openly expressed his pessimism about the potential success of the endeavor. African Americans, he repeated, were not likely to want to emigrate.⁴³ The four consular agents expressed mixed feelings about the proposal as well. The consul in Philadelphia, George K. Zeigler, declared that American blacks were fit for labor in Suriname and that he would aid the emigration in any way. General Consul Rud C. Burlage in New York disagreed; not only were African Americans unfit for labor in Suriname, he wrote, but they avoided heavy labor in general. He made himself clear: there was nothing a Dutch consular agent could do to recruit African Americans for emigration that had not already been tried with meager results by the American Colonization society over the past thirty years. The Dutch consul in Boston declared himself unable to comment on the issue, since there were too few African Americans in his city for him to have much acquaintance with them.⁴⁴ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the New Orleans consul, Amadee Couturie, had grave reservations and once even threatened to resign his post if required to aid the emigration project. He wrote, "*Le nègre du Sud, surtout le nègre de champ, est indolent de la nature, et très inconstant dans ses habitudes.*" (The blacks in the South, especially the blacks in the fields, are indolent by nature and very inconsistent in their ways of doing things.)⁴⁵ Couturie suggested that, considering the nature of the subjects, if the object of emigration were to be pursued, perhaps a clause should be included to provide for the return migration of those who proved to be unfit for labor in Suriname.

For much of 1863, the Dutch and Americans waited to hear of further developments in the progress of a treaty. In June, van Limburg again spoke with Cass, who declared the colonization movement as a weapon of the "abolitionist party." It appears, however, that Cass resigned himself to the inevitability of colonization when van Limburg presented him with his archive of cor-

43. Roest van Limburg (New York) to Minister of Foreign Affairs, May 19, 1863, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives

44. George K. Zeigler to Roest van Limburg, May 29, 1863, Rud C. Burlage (New York) to Roest van Limburg, 3 June, 1863, and Henry A. Raden (Boston Consul) to Rud C. Burlage, June 5, 1863, folders 3230–31, Papers of the Netherlands Department of Foreign Affairs, Collection 2.05.01, Netherlands National Archives.

45. Amadee Couturie (New Orleans Consul) to Roest van Limburg, June 5, 1863, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

response on the subject.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the new Dutch colonial minister, Isaac Dignus Fransen van de Putte, kept up the pressure to see the treaty through. He wondered why van Limburg was unsuccessful in finding willing black emigrants when, according to the governor of Suriname, a Mr. Desse of New York had already recruited three or four hundred.⁴⁷ On December 15, 1863, after correspondence had been still for months, Pike and Minister de Sombreff finished the treaty proposal and set their signatures to it. Van Limburg would not hear official news of the event for more than a month. In the ebb and flow of hopes and despair for the treaty's passing, early 1863 had been a low point and much of the year passed with little progress. The sudden announcement of a signed proposal revived hopes for a large-scale, government-sponsored emigration.

One wonders if the delay in the treaty proposal was ultimately responsible for its failing to come before the U.S. Senate, which may have been more supportive of the measure earlier in the war. An important reason for the treaty's failure must also be seen in the delay, inefficiency, and opposition within diplomatic channels. The Dutch government, including the king, the Department of Foreign Affairs, and above all, the Department of Colonies, supported the efforts to colonize African Americans in Suriname. Furthermore, Dutch and American consuls in Suriname expressed willingness to aid the project. But van Limburg, the leading Dutch diplomat in the United States, expressed increasing reservations about the efforts, while the Dutch consuls in American port cities were reluctant to participate. Pike and Seward, acquainted through long careers in New England politics, were no help to the proposal, and Pike, at least, secretly hoped for its failure. In 1861, he wrote to Seward, "We have got to destroy the race of slaveholders in order to prevent permanent dismemberment."⁴⁸ To the Maine senator James Pitt Fessenden, Pike wrote something similar: "Our shortest way out is to overthrow slavery + then the Union will reconstruct itself."⁴⁹ Pike had long held the idea that

46. Roest van Limburg (Detroit) to Netherlands Department of Foreign Affairs, June 22, 1863, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

47. Fransen van de Putte (Minister of Colonies) to Minister of Foreign Affairs, July 18, 1863, folders 3230–31, Papers of the Netherlands Department of Foreign Affairs, Collection 2.05.01, Netherlands National Archives.

48. Pike to Seward, July 7, 1861, reel 64, Seward Papers, Library of Congress.

49. Pike to Fessenden, June 7, 1861, Pike Papers, Library of Congress.

a portion of the United States should be set aside for blacks because, he argued, the races could not generally live together. In 1863, he said as much to Fessenden; the Border States and the western states already won should be joined to the Union, while the rest of the South could be turned into a “negro pen.”⁵⁰ With other wartime issues to consider, Pike had little interest in the Suriname affair. He added a few lines on it to the end of a letter to Fessenden: “By the way, speaking of treaties, I made one here a while ago on Negro emancipation to Surinam which I hope you will ratify, should it come before you. Not that I believe it would do any harm in its operation, but because I think the principle on which it is based a vicious one.”⁵¹ Pike believed there was little work to do in the Netherlands. He even thought that Dutch diplomatic affairs could easily be handled from Brussels, where he had originally requested to be posted, in 1861.⁵²

A relatively high rate of turnover in key ministry positions contributed to the diplomatic struggles on the Dutch side. From the late spring of 1862 through early 1866, Roest van Limburg answered to three different foreign affairs ministers (P. T. van der Maesen de Sombreff, W. J. C. van Kattendijke, and E. J. Cremers) and three colonial ministers (Gerhard Hendrik Uhlenbeck, Gerardus Henri Betz, and I. D. Fransen van de Putte).⁵³ All of these government officials were members of what was known as the “second Thorbecke cabinet” of 1862–66. In provincial origin and religion, this was a mixed lot, but they were all members of the Liberal Party, students and followers of Rudolph Thorbecke, the foremost Dutch statesman of the nineteenth century. Yet, they did not all see eye to eye. In his memoirs, Foreign Affairs Minister James Loudon called his successor Uhlenbeck “unusually timid not at all well spoken, with few thoughts fit to put on paper.” Loudon blamed

50. Pike to Fessenden, Jan. 13, 1863, Pike Papers, Library of Congress.

51. Pike to Fessenden, Apr. 6, 1864, Pike Papers, Library of Congress.

52. Pike to Seward, Mar. 10, 1861, reel 62, Seward Papers, Library of Congress.

53. James Loudon was foreign affairs minister from March 12, 1861, to January 31, 1862; Paul Therese van der Maesen de Sombreff, from van Limburg, a Roman Catholic, was minister of foreign affairs from March 12, 1862, to January 2, 1864, and a liberal of the second Thorbecke cabinet. From Groningen, E. J. B. “Eppo” Cremers, at thirty-one years of age became minister of foreign Affairs, from March 15, 1864, to June 1, 1866. Cremers was a Liberal, with ties to Fransen van de Putten. Colonial ministers included Gerhardt Hendrik Uhlenbeck, born in Ceylon, a Liberal officer in the military in the Dutch East Indies, who served as minister from February 1, 1862, to January 3, 1863. Isaac Dignus Fransen van de Putte, a Liberal from Zeeland was minister of colonies from February 2, 1863, to May 30, 1866. Willem Huyssen van Kattendijke, who was also maritime of foreign affairs from January 2, 1864, to March 15, 1864.

Uhlenbeck for letting the Dutch politician Pieter Philip van Bosse spoil the emancipation law.⁵⁴ Van Bosse out-debated Uhlenbeck in the Dutch House of Representatives and convinced its members to support an amended bill with a weaker provision for government-sponsored migration to Suriname, a relief for those concerned with saving the government's treasury. Cornets de Groot, a Liberal, gave the July 9, 1862, proposal. He named the committee of Schmipf, van der Gon Netscher, and Elsevier. Loudon, his successor, continued this committee. The state supervision clause was a compromise on economic grounds, a more moral question debated between members who wanted to see immediate and complete freedom and those who held on to the conservative and profitable past. Van Bosse, among others, had written off Suriname as an agricultural colony. Because it was a slave colony, it was entirely dependent on that system and not quick to seek change.⁵⁵

In December 1862, the Dutch Senate (Eerste Kamer) refused a bill to enlarge the colonial domains and Uhlenbeck resigned. De Sombreff did the same the following year when the Senate rejected the enlargement of the Foreign Affairs Department.⁵⁶ Van Limburg must have felt like he was talking to a revolving door. Each new colonial minister also demanded action, and van Limburg explained why he could do very little to speed things up. Colonial ministers took every event in the development of the war in the United States as a sign in their favor. And yet, van Limburg, on the ground, could only report with an increasingly pessimistic tone.

Van Limburg's late receipt of the news of the signing of the convention added to his frustrations, not about the progress of the plan, but of his role in it. Indeed, he felt slighted to have first learned about the signing through a clipping from the December 19, 1863, *Nederlandsche Staats Courant*, handed to him by a German. His first official notice of the event, a letter from the minister of foreign affairs dated January 18, 1864, would not have arrived at his station until early February. Van Limburg was not sure if such a convention was legitimate; discussion with Cass led him to believe that the United

54. Gedenkschrift van Zijn Excellentie jhr. Mr. James Loudon over de periode 1831–1877 (Memoirs of his Excellency Mr. James Loudon concerning the period 1831–1877), page 205, Papers of James Loudon, Collection 2.21.183.50, Netherlands National Archives.

55. J. P. Siwipersad, *De Nederlandse Regering en de Afschaffing van de Surinaamse Slavernij (1833–1863)* (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1979).

56. "Jhr. Mr. P.Th. van der Maesen de Sombreff," *Parlement Y Politiek*, accessed July 12, 2012, http://www.parlement.com/id/vgo9ll34k2y1/p_th_van_der_maesen_de_sombreff.

States would not allow any foreign government to make such an agreement.⁵⁷ Seward had just informed him that the Senate had not seen the text of the convention, probably would not see it and would not pass it as law if they did see it. Yet, the Dutch government thought ratification was imminent. Van Limburg found it necessary to write at length to bring the new minister, Kattendijke, up to speed on what had transpired over the past two years and to express his frustrations. Van Limburg's letters to the minister of foreign affairs from 1864 are lengthy, passionate expressions of frustration, tempered only by the requirement to remain civil and formal in diplomatic writing.

The proposed colonization treaty failed not only because the U.S. government turned against the project but also because colonization in general was rejected by African Americans. American blacks' perceived proclivity to stay where they were—to enjoy their newfound freedom on known soil—convinced American and Dutch observers that diplomatic efforts to encourage migration constituted much work for little gain. Diplomats observed the behavior of freedmen as a sign of natural temperament relating to their race. The Dutch general consul in New York City, Rudolph C. Burlage, for one, exemplified this stereotype when he wrote, “Blacks are by nature lazy and sluggish.”⁵⁸

Once the Union army began recruiting black soldiers, there was no chance of getting strong, young African men, van Limburg wrote. Emigration agents, he continued, might be able to find willing emigrants in Washington, D.C., or Norfolk, but what kind of people would they be? Mostly the weak, sick, and demoralized, he figured. Other potential emigrants would likely fear that five-year contracts were a new form of involuntary servitude. Van Limburg could find no kind words for Pike, that “fiery abolitionist.”⁵⁹

The end of the war encouraged the Dutch to again inquire into the possible ratification of the Pike-Sombreff emigration proposal. Foreign Affairs Minister E. Cremers wrote to van Limburg in January 1865, to encourage action.

57. Roest van Limburg (New York) to Netherlands Department of Foreign Affairs, Jan. 30, 1864, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

58. Rud C. Burlage (New York) to Roest van Limburg, 3 June 1863, folders. 3230–31, Papers of the Netherlands Department of Foreign Affairs, Collection 2.05.01, Netherlands National Archives.

59. Roest van Limburg (New York) to Kattendyke, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Feb. 16, 1864, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, folder 142, Netherlands National Archives. William H. Seward, U.S. Department of State (D.C.) to Roest van Limburg, Feb. 12, 1864, folders 3230–31, Papers of the Netherlands Department of Foreign Affairs, Collection 2.05.01, Netherlands National Archives.

Cremers had learned of the possible arming of slaves in the South and of their flight to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's camp. These African Americans, Cremers thought, would be cheaper to bring to Suriname than Chinese emigrants. If the treaty proposal were now to be brought before the U.S. Congress, Cremers reasoned, it may stand a better chance.⁶⁰ Van Limburg's continued opposition to the proposal fell on deaf ears in the Netherlands. In October 1865, Colonial Minister Fransen van de Putte still saw hope for the treaty's ratification. He imagined that of the more than 4 million freed slaves, certainly some must be willing to migrate.⁶¹

The Dutch vice consul in Washington, D.C., Alfred Schuiking, seconded van Limburg's pessimism and repeated his racism. For Schuiking, the history of colonization movement demonstrated its infeasibility. Blacks were not a migrating people, he wrote, they would not seek remote advantages. Whites, meanwhile, were not fit for the tropical climate. The vice consul thought blacks were "valuable only when subject to that strict control which their liberation has taken from them." High wages and shortage of good labor contributed further to the "Negro's inhabitativeness." And the contrabands, he continued, were "notoriously worthless."⁶²

Although the Dutch never got their hoped-for emigration treaty, they still managed to open up the possibility of migrants leaving the United States for Suriname. Ostensibly, Dutch law allowed for whites or blacks, or people of any nationality, to immigrate to Suriname as long as a Dutch consul was present at the port of emigration to ensure proper procedure. A January 1865 royal decree also slackened the requirements for immigration, allowing anyone to recruit immigrants, so long as a Dutch consul supervised them. Gender restrictions were also relaxed from the initial requirement of an equal proportion of men and women to just one woman for two men, except in the case of emigrants from Madeira, Cape Verde, the Canaries, the Azores, and the West Indies. Among Chinese emigrants, only one female in four was required.⁶³

60. E. Cremers, The Hague to Roest van Limburg, Jan. 12, 1865, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

61. Minister of Colonies, Fransen van de Putten, The Hague to Department of Foreign Affairs, Oct. 9, 1865, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

62. A. Schuiking, Vice Consul (Washington, D.C.) to Roest van Limburg, Nov. 9, 1865, folders 3230-31, Papers of the Netherlands Department of Foreign Affairs, Collection 2.05.01, Netherlands National Archives.

63. Royal decree dated Jan. 26, 1865, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

But in the minds of the Netherlands' Department of Foreign Affairs, the real idea was to get African American laborers. This much is clear from van Limburg's letter of April 21, 1866, in which the author mentions specifically the intention to ship blacks, and not whites, from Boston to Suriname. Yet, without the U.S. government supporting a colonization effort, emigration plans fell flat. African Americans were allowed to leave the United States voluntarily, but by 1866 there was no government effort to aid them, or to recruit them for such a move.

Despite his thoughts that the Surinamese program was unfeasible, van Limburg continued in 1865 and 1866 to seek information to further the cause. He spoke with a General John Wolcott Phelps, who had been an officer during the war, who said African Americans would not go to Suriname for less than a dollar a day in wages, that they were attached to their soil and to their newly found freedom. Phelps echoed Schuiking: blacks hoped for schools and churches and would not want to migrate to a new climate, with a foreign language. Van Limburg told Gen. Oliver Howard, the commissioner of emigration and the Freedman's Bureau, about the Dutch king's desires. Howard explained that there was no shortage of work in the South, but rather a shortage of good, willing workers. He did not expect any volunteers for emigration. Van Limburg was left with the impression that the only available African Americans were "vagabonds and beggars." "The Netherlands," he wrote, "doesn't want a beggar's colony." In a November 13, 1865, letter, van Limburg referenced a discussion with interim secretary of state William Hunter, who "let it slip that nothing hinders the intended colonization." The U.S. Constitution, Hunter reasoned, guaranteed freedom and could not forbid emigration. Van Limburg also learned that the American Colonization Society only wanted to send blacks to Liberia, as a civilizing force, and that its members would therefore not be of any help with the Dutch efforts in Suriname. In a telling remark in November 1865, van Limburg summarized the diplomatic failure of the whole confusing scheme. "Just as I am certain of the opposition [*wederwerking*, literally: working against] of the government, so am I convinced of the same of our consuls. I suspect many would rather quit their positions than take up the efforts. It would be better to appoint special agents, and pay them for this duty."⁶⁴

64. Roest van Limburg (Washington, D.C.) to E. Cremers, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nov. 13, 1865, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13 Netherlands National Archives.

In 1866, van der Gon Netscher published a tract to summarize the situation in Suriname during the first three years after emancipation, in which he concluded: "Negros from the United States hardly came at all," a line which leaves open the possibility that some did in fact come to Suriname.⁶⁵ While this may be the case, it seems more likely that van der Gon Netscher was unaware whether any came or not and that he simply avoided saying that none had arrived, for lack of evidence.⁶⁶ What is remarkable, however, is both van der Gon Netscher's change in attitude regarding the desirability of acquiring freed blacks from the United States and that the discussion about this possibility remained open as late as 1866. An official in the Dutch Colonial Ministry, Cornelis Ascanius van Sypesteyn, demonstrated the same open-ended hope. In a footnote in his 1866 work on emancipation in Suriname, he wrote, "One still always hopes to get freed Negros from the United States as colonists. The Government is still prepared for that."⁶⁷ Van Limburg's meetings with Howard, also demonstrated that while colonization had grown unfavorable, it was not entirely outside of either the purview of the U.S. government or the realm of possibility.

In 1867, Claude August Crommelin, a young son of an Amsterdam merchant, paid van Limburg a visit during his yearlong tour of America. Crommelin recorded in his diary that van Limburg had continued to receive inquiries from Suriname, even as late as the previous year when an agent from Suriname had visited Washington for this purpose. Although van Limburg and Howard had supported the agent in his attempts to recruit black laborers, not a single laborer ultimately moved.⁶⁸

Perhaps this unnamed agent was a member of the van Praag family, the topic of a final round of diplomatic correspondence about the Dutch attempt to recruit African Americans for Suriname. The van Praags traded between

65. Roest van Limburg (Washington, D.C.) to E. Cremers, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nov. 13, 1865, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

66. Adrian David Van der Gon Netscher, *Over den Nood van Suriname: Een woord aan Nederland en Nederlandsch West-Indie* ('s-Gravenhage: J. A. de la Vieter, 1868).

67. C. A. van Sypesteyn, *Afschaffing der Slavernij in de Nederlandsche West-Indische Kolonien, Uit officiële bronnen zamengesteld* ('s-Gravenhage: n.p., 1866), 25. This is my translation of "Men hoopt nog altijd als kolonisten te bekomen vrijgemaakte negers, afkomstig uit de Vereenigde Staten van Noord-Amerika. De Regering blijft daar steeds op bedacht,

68. Augustus J. Veenendaal and H. Roger Grants, eds., *A Young Dutchman Views Post-Civil War America: Diary of Claude August Crommelin* (Indianapolis: Univ. of Indiana Press, 2011).

Boston, Paramaribo, and Amsterdam. Their involvement in colonization began in 1865, when A. van Praag of Amsterdam asked permission from the Dutch government for his brother, D. J. van Praag of Boston, to ship African Americans to Suriname. After the Dutch consul in Boston confirmed van Praag's good reputation, he was granted the rights to transport emigrants. In his final correspondence on the subject, a letter from April 21, 1866, van Limburg noted that van Praag had as yet shipped no colonists.⁶⁹

Historians all too often present a thesis that a subject is complex, that no single factor or factors can alone explain historical cause and effect. It is another thing, however, to write that the complexity of the events, of motivating and organizing a large-scale colonization, as well as the diplomacy required to see it through, was a major reason for the ultimate failure of the cause. In a way, there were too many officials involved in the diplomacy, and the representatives (Pike and van Limburg in particular) did not share the vision of their respective governments. Negotiations were subject to delay, miscommunication, and misunderstanding. The failure of American-Dutch colonization demonstrates the overall complexity of nineteenth-century colonization policy and the difficulties Lincoln faced in organizing such plans. Colonization was never a default setting: immigration to foreign lands would not occur without government urging and support.

Sebastian Page has argued that the significance of Lincoln's colonization project in Panama was a shift in the administration's reliance on private contractors to more secure dealings with foreign governments.⁷⁰ The Dutch Suriname case shows that after the failure of Chiriqui, the Lincoln administration was much more careful not to rush into action, but, as far as the Dutch knew, it had not abandoned its colonization plans entirely.

It is also fitting that, with slavery's end, African Americans refused to participate in labor migration. The ultimate failure of the Dutch Suriname plan, however, should not take away from the very real and serious possibility of its success. Many other migration streams in history have been less likely. Who would have imagined, for example, that British Indians immigrants

69. Roest van Limburg (Washington, D.C.) to Department of Foreign Affairs (The Hague), Apr. 21, 1866, folder 142, Papers of the American Legation, Collection 2.05.13, Netherlands National Archives.

70. Sebastian N. Page, "Lincoln and Chiriqui Colonization Revisited," *American Nineteenth Century History* 12, no. 2 (2011): 289–325.

to Suriname would eventually form that country's majority ethnic group? What might have happened had the Americans chosen to send colonists to Suriname or St. Croix in 1862 or 1863 rather than to the ultimately failed experimental colonies in Haiti and Panama?

Lincoln, of course, was not privy to the internal correspondence of the Dutch government. Because there is nothing written by Lincoln on Suriname, we cannot know exactly what his plans were for this South American Dutch colony, or if, indeed, he even had a strong idea about the role Suriname would play in a potential, larger colonization plan. Instead of relying on domestic sources, the best path to understand this topic is to look to foreign archives. In the Dutch-language papers of the Netherlands' Department of Foreign Affairs, we see a completely new perspective on colonization. These sources indicate that colonization was still a topic of conversation among foreign diplomats in Washington, D.C., in 1864 and 1865. The Dutch minister resident, Roest van Limburg, continued throughout the war to seek information on colonization. Van Limburg's writings demonstrate that information about colonization flowed readily in the *corps diplomatique* in Washington. These foreign sources also reinforce that the idea the Civil War may have been a domestic struggle but it had international implications, particularly in the realm of diplomacy. It appears that we have only scratched the surface of the significance of foreign sources for Civil War research.