

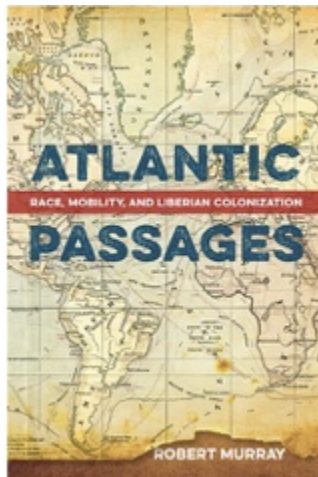
ARDSLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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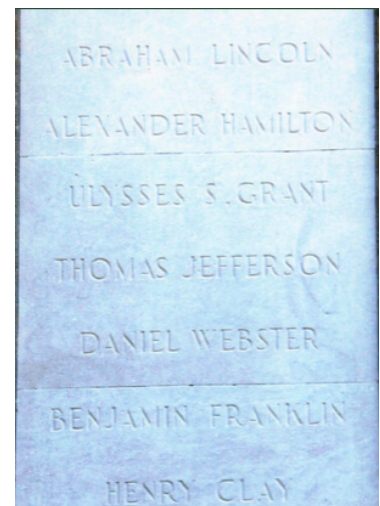
The American Colonization Society - A Challenge to *E Pluribus Unum*

The **Ardsey Historical Society** announces a free Zoom Webinar entitled “The American Colonization Society - A Challenge to *E Pluribus Unum*” in conjunction with Mercy College Professor of History Dr. Robert Murray on **Sunday, May 23, 2021, at 2:00 P.M.**

A controversial chapter of American history will be discussed in connection with Dr. Robert Murray’s recently published book, *ATLANTIC PASSAGES: RACE, MOBILITY, AND LIBERIAN COLONIZATION*



ARDSLEY, NY — April 19, 2021: The Ardsley Historical Society will present a Zoom seminar on the American Colonization Society and its aftermath in Liberia with Dr. Robert Murray, a leading scholar of this little known 19th Century movement. Originally known as the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States, the American Colonization Society (ACS) was founded in 1816 by a group of white elites, including Senators Henry Clay and Daniel Webster (whose names appears on engraved tablets on the exterior of Ardsley's 1912 Ashford Avenue School depicted on the right), Bushrod Washington (George Washington's



nephew and ACS’s first president) and Francis Scott Key (lyricist of *The Star Spangled Banner*). ACS members were an unusual mix of opponents of slavery and enslavers—two groups that typically opposed each other. Abolitionist ACS members believed it was an opportunity for African Americans to escape racism, start their lives anew, and form their own homogenous nation where they could enjoy liberation and citizenship. It also removed the challenges integration would place on white people. Pro-slavery supporters considered it a means to remove those who might threaten slavery. The ACS found support among a wide range of public officials, including Abraham Lincoln (whose name also appears on the Ashford Avenue School's tablets) as well as some in the African American community. While members had many motivations for joining the ACS and different opinions on slavery, the underlying belief that whites and Black people could not peacefully co-exist in society held this unorthodox group together for decades. As the ACS grew, the organization sought to create and settle a colony in West Africa to fulfill its mission. In 1821, ACS purchased land along the West African coast and created the colony of Montserado, later known as Liberia. The colony's capital was later named Monrovia in honor of President James Monroe, an ardent ACS supporter. In theory, colonization appeared to be an ideal solution to complicated and intertwined problems involving slavery, race relations, and the Union's preservation. Many members of the ACS viewed their efforts as benevolent. Still, they gave little

consideration to free African Americans' opinions or how these measures would impact individuals, families, and communities of color. Colonization became a convenient alternative to emancipation, justifying removing a group of people deemed inferior while avoiding a confrontation with the institution of slavery and the large-scale manumission of enslaved people. In *Atlantic Passages*, a beautifully written and well researched book published in 2021 by University Press of Florida, Professor Murray traces the transatlantic crossings of the African American settlers in Liberia between 1820 and 1860. In addition to delving into their experiences on both sides of the ocean, Murray discusses how the African neighbors and inhabitants of Liberia recognized significant cultural differences in the newly arrived African Americans and racially categorized them as "whites." Highlighting examples of how blackness and whiteness have always been contested ideas and how understandings of race can be shaped by geography and cartography, Murray offers many insights into what it meant to be black and white in the space between Africa and America. Please join us in exploring this little known (and frequently sanitized) dark chapter of American history that resonates in our era's current fraught political and cultural discussions about racial identity and the complicated legacies of historical figures appearing on our public monuments.

About the Ardsley Historical Society

Founded in 1982, the mission of the Ardsley Historical Society is to illuminate American history through the prism of the Village of Ardsley, NY, and the boundaries of the larger Ardsley School District through its archives, public programs, The Beacon, its bi-annual journal, and its re-designed website (<https://www.ardsleyhistoricalsociety.org>). The AHS can also be followed on Facebook.

About Robert Murray

Robert Murray obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Kentucky and joined the faculty of Mercy College in 2014, where he chairs the Humanities Department. His research focuses on African American history and the Atlantic World. His article "*Bodies in Motion: Liberian Settlers, Medicine, and Mobility in the Atlantic World*" won the prestigious 2019 Ralph D. Gray Article Prize (Society for Historians of the Early American Republic). Dr. Murray teaches a wide range of American history courses and serves as adviser to Mercy College's chapter of Phi Alpha Theta. He serves on the board of the Westchester County Historical Society. Professor Murray can be reached at rmurray4@mercy.edu

About Mercy College

Mercy College is a private university with its main campus in Dobbs Ferry, New York, and additional Manhattan, the Bronx, and online locations. Mercy College has five schools: Business, Education, Health & Natural Sciences, Liberal Arts, and Social & Behavioral Sciences, and offers more than 100 undergraduate and graduate degree and certificate programs. mercy.edu

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