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During the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln's administration engaged in protracted negotiations with representatives of the Netherlands to aid in the voluntarily colonization of free African Americans to Suriname. Scores of diplomatic letters in Dutch, English, and French, dating to the period 1862 to 1866 attest to the very real possibility that such a migration stream could have become a reality. They also indicate reasons why this scheme failed: it was bogged down by differences of opinion, mail delays, and ultimately the reluctance of African Americans to migrate.

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Michael J. Douma is an assistant research professor at the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University, where he is also adjunct faculty in the history department. He has published widely on the history of the Dutch in the United States, and is working on a history of Dutch-speaking slavery in New York and New Jersey.

This collection of sources gives insight into how entrepreneurs and state officials engaged in international relations to solve the challenges of their time. The collection is also a reminder that avenues not taken – the migration of free Afro-Americans to Suriname – are crucial to understanding the history of this period. – Karwan Fatah-Black, university lecturer at the Institute for History, Leiden University.

This collection of sources is a very welcome addition to Surinamese and Caribbean historiography. The negotiations between the Netherlands and the United States shed light on an understudied topic; it is surprising how little we know about these crucial years of abolition beyond the actual abolition of slavery and the remuneration of the owners. The topic plus the translations into English make this publication a valuable contribution to pan-Caribbean history as it will help students and scholars to look beyond the borders of empire and will invite connecting perspectives on colonization plans for and by formerly enslaved African Americans. – Professor Rosemarijn Hoeffte, professor in the history of Suriname after 1873 in comparative perspective at the University of Amsterdam and President of the Association of Caribbean Historians.

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