

PETITION

OF

CITIZENS OF DAUPHIN COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA,

*For an annual appropriation to remove to Africa all free negroes and manumitted slaves, &c.*

---

FEBRUARY 9, 1836.

Laid on the table, and ordered to be printed.

---

*To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled :*

The subscribers respectfully beg leave to inform your honorable bodies that they were appointed a committee, by a large and respectable meeting of the citizens of Dauphin county, convened in the borough of Harrisburg, on the 28th day of August last, "to prepare a memorial to each House of Congress, praying the appropriation, by the General Government, of a sum sufficient to remove to Africa free negroes willing to remove, and manumitted slaves, equal in amount to the whole annual increase of the colored population of this country, and, also, such additional number as, in the wisdom of Congress, the finances of the nation, and other considerations, may justify; if, in their opinion, the constitution of the United States will justify such appropriations, and, if not, then to adopt measures to effect such an alteration of it as will authorize the measure." In discharging the duty confided to us by our fellow-citizens, we cannot forbear remarking that we are fully aware of the difficult, delicate, and important nature of the subject to which we are commissioned to invite your attention. Considered by minds of cool, discriminating reflection, it presents nothing but a simple question of *expediency*, devoid of all feeling, interest, and passion, but involved, as some may regard it, in its consequences, with other questions of vital concern to a large portion of our brethren of the Union. We are impressed with a lively fear of the possibility that its nature may be mistaken, its tendency misconceived, and the motives which prompted it, misrepresented or calumniated. Anxious to avoid the remotest possibility of a misunderstanding on these points, we will state, explicitly and unreservedly, that it is not the design, nor do we believe it will be the effect, of granting the object sought by this memorial, to touch, directly or indirectly, the vested rights or interests of any man, or community of men, in the United States, except eventually those of the free or manumitted negroes living among us. It would be as impolitic as it would be repugnant to our feelings of respect and justice to our Southern brethren, to solicit the interfer-

ence of Congress in their domestic concerns. However unfortunate we may deem their condition, it is still one which no legislative body has the power of altering or controlling, but their own State Legislatures. They, and they alone, as the representatives of the people, have the right of applying correctives, if evils exist, and they, and they only, are responsible for the consequences of their continuance. The removal of the free negroes in this country from among the white population, is a matter in which the citizens of every State in the Union must feel a deep solicitude, as it is one on which the safety, harmony, and good order of society, materially depend. Occupying a subordinate station, destitute of means, motives, and energy of character, essential to an improvement of their condition, they are now, and must continue to be, with few exceptions, the most worthless and degraded portion of society. The calendars of our gaols and penitentiaries, and the records of our poor-houses, bear ample testimony of this truth.

The relative proportion of negro criminals and paupers in every State of the Union, on a comparison of the number of black and white population, is a melancholy, but instructive commentary on their condition. We need say nothing further, than merely to advert to this fact, for the purpose of showing the extent and magnitude of the evil which we call on you to redress. It affects us in its operation as a nation, and by national intervention only can it be removed. To ensure the aid of the General Government, it appears to us that these three positions are to be established: 1st. Is it expedient to carry into execution the purpose for which we are appointed to address you? Is it feasible to do it with success? And does Congress possess the power necessary for the purpose?

In addition to the foregoing observations, the expediency of the measure may be further proven by other reasons, no less cogent and alarming. There are at present, in the United States about *two millions seven hundred and fifty thousand* free blacks and slaves; which number will augment, at the rate of the last ten years' increase, to the enormous and fearful number of more than ten millions in forty years from the present time! As the whole mass of colored population grows in number, the free and manumitted portion of it will accelerate its increase to an appalling degree of rapidity, operated upon, as it will be, by various causes, and if already this miserable caste crowd our prisons and poor-houses, corrupting, by their vicious and idle example, one part of the community, and depending for subsistence on the depredation or charity of the other part, how much more lamentable and hopeless is the condition to which the free white population of this country is hastening, than that which it has at present reached, but which is confessedly fraught with such difficulties and dangers. These are not the only evils which threaten us. Can human foresight be so short—can human reason be so weak, as not to perceive the portentous change in our condition, when a population of blacks, amounting to more than ten millions, exist among us, with all the means and motives which they will possess to disturb the peace and tranquillity of society, or to take part with our enemies in seasons of war with foreign Powers.

The nation of American blacks will then outnumber the *nation of American freemen*, who challenged and defeated the giant power of England on their own soil, and on the seas—who established a republic unparalleled in the history of the world—who reared innumerable towns and cities, constructed works of internal improvement more useful and stupendous

than any other nations of the same age—who enlarged the empire of the arts and sciences, almost one-half beyond its former boundaries, in less than a single century—and who gloried in teaching the other nations of the world their duties and their rights. Who will be so hardy as to maintain that this vast mass of *ten millions* of human beings, however inferior they may be in natural and acquired intellectual power, will repose quietly in their state of degradation; submit to the servile conditions imposed on their existence; cower humbly under the uplifted hand of the white man, and remain forever ignorant and inert, amidst the universal activity of enterprise and beneath the noontide blaze of science, light, and liberty? Such a population might be harmless under the benighted tyrannies of the old world, but that man must be ignorant of human nature—he must be blind to the irresistible energies which freedom imparts to the humblest human mind—he must forget the history of his country, who does not know that it is far different here. It would be as easy to shut out the rays of the sun from the broad bosom of our free country, as to withhold from the African some share of that knowledge which will whet up the bloody daggers of hate and revenge. Whoever he may be, whether he lives at the North or the South, bond or free, you cannot entirely close up every avenue to his mind: some of the light that beams from our thousand colleges and schools—our constitutions of government—our laws—our papers—and our glorious declaration of independence, must reach him, and all furnish him with claims to equality of rights, or inducements to seek it in the death of us, whom he regards as his oppressors. Evade the subject as we may, this is the deplorable tendency of its continuance in its present state, and no man of reflection can doubt it. Events are daily transpiring around us, which fill the breast of the patriot and philanthropist with the profoundest apprehension. Sympathy, when rightly directed, the most estimable of the virtues, but when misdirected, one of the most dangerous influences which can control the mind of man, is arousing into action the passions and prejudices of a party vigorously acquiring strength and influence, whose action unchecked, will shortly defy stay or control.

You have witnessed its development in all quarters of the land. By its efforts, the North is trembling in agitation, and the South is in a flame of phrensy and desperation. The bloody tragedy of Southampton haunts their midnight slumbers at the South; and contemplated scenes of widespread conflagration and ruin excite a constant alarm. The General Government is invoked to protect the South, through one of its Departments, against endeavors, the consequences of which no one can foretell. It is of no avail, that a majority of the citizens of the Northern States neither advise nor participate in their proceedings. Those who do are shielded by the free principles of our constitution, and act under no other restraint than their own sense of justice furnishes. To allow this discussion and agitation of the subject to take full range, or to remove the cause itself, are the only alternatives left. No remedy can be afforded which will do aught but postpone the fatal crisis a few years; it will come upon us or upon our children, as certain as the present generation neglects to eradicate the cause.

We have forbore to offer a single observation upon the justice of the measure we recommend. We say nothing of the duty we owe to the degraded and friendless free blacks of this country, to return them to the land of their fathers, where they may enjoy, unmolested, that equality of

rights and dignity which they appeal to our declaration of independence as proving to be their natural inheritance. We leave the benefits which the blacks themselves are to receive entirely out of consideration, and present the subject to your view, exclusively in the light of politic expediency for our own adoption. On this basis we rest this part of the argument, and cheerfully leave the expediency, nay necessity of our application, to stand or fall, as it is supported by duty, justice, and truth.

Secondly. The feasibility of removing the free blacks and manumitted slaves, according to the design of the resolutions under which we act, is, we apprehend, very readily demonstrated.

The entire black population of this country, at present, as above stated, is about two and three-quarter millions; the annual increase of which, at the rate of increase during the last ten years, is about 70,000.

These may be removed to Liberia, or to some other part of the coast of Africa, and maintained there for six months, at an average price of about \$30 for each person, or at a gross amount of less than two millions and a half of dollars. Perhaps a portion of the national vessels might be employed in the transportation of them, and thus reduce the sum still lower. No difficulty can arise in procuring a sufficient number of free blacks and manumitted slaves for removal. Thousands are now ready to go, if means were provided, and thousands more would be manumitted by their masters on condition of their immediate transportation from the country. The expense of their maintenance, till they can support themselves in Africa, will be mere nothing. The soil of Liberia is fertile beyond measure; the climate salubrious and genial, the very one which the God of nature designed them to enjoy. A regular Government, based on principles of freedom, fashioned after our own perfect model, is established there, and will stretch forth its hands to receive and welcome the negro back to his father land.

The Treasury of the General Government is full to overflowing. The national debt is extinguished; the resources and enterprise of the American people unparalleled; their means more than equal to the task; their policy and safety demanding its accomplishment: who can doubt their readiness and ability to embark in this undertaking?

At present, the evil is within the reach of remedy, but, before another generation passes away, it will be incurable.

In the third place: Does Congress possess the power necessary for the purpose? This question, like all others arising out of the construction of those powers in the constitution not clearly, unequivocally, and plainly delegated, must be viewed through the medium of prejudices, preconceived opinions, jealousy, and local interest, which embarrass its discussion with never-ending doubts and difficulties. We shall not enter upon an argument to sustain the affirmative of this proposition, further than to remark that, if the objections existing to the power be insuperable, the amendment to the constitution may be speedily effected, should the object to be attained warrant it. We cannot omit suggesting that there is one source from which enough may be drawn to execute this purpose without trespassing on the constitution—we mean the revenue derived from the *public lands*. No objections, we trust, from any quarter, will be started to this measure: for the States to be benefited most, are those whose cession created the fund to be resorted to, and all are to be benefited to the full proportion of their interest in it.

In this opinion we are supported by the concurrence of some of the most distinguished lawyers and statesmen who ever adorned this or any country. The Legislatures of eleven States have, at different times, instructed their Senators, and requested their Representatives in Congress, to promote, in the General Government, measures for removing such free persons of color as are desirous of emigrating to Africa; and the Legislatures of fourteen States have passed resolutions approving of the scheme of colonizing the free colored population of this country, and most of them approving of the objects of the Colonization Society. These considerations, we think, must satisfy your honorable bodies that our application is fully sanctioned by general public sentiment, and that your action on this subject will receive the universal commendation of your fellow-citizens.

In conclusion, we take occasion to assure you, as the result of our impression from past experience, that we consider individual efforts entirely inadequate to the achievement of this great work of patriotism and philanthropy. If ever done at all, it must be by the aid of the governmental arm—let that be extended, and our country will be rescued from the gulf of inextricable confusion, servile war, and blood-shed, into which it is fast plunging. We earnestly appeal to you, as you regard the liberty of your children, as you feel for the degraded condition of the negroes in this country, as you revere the free institutions under which we live, and as you hope for their perpetuation, to adopt some means for the removal of the blacks, either such as we recommend, or such as your own wisdom may suggest, better suited to the purpose; or, if you should consider the possession of the power questionable, we pray you to take the necessary steps for the amendment of the constitution to authorize the action of Congress upon the subject.

And, as in duty bound, we will ever pray, &c.

Ovid F. Johnson,  
 Geo. W. Harris,  
 Calvin Blythe,  
 Charles C. Rawn,  
 A. Mahon,  
 A. M. Piper,  
 Jacob B. Weidman,  
 Jno. M. Forster.

HARRISBURG, *January 16, 1836.*