

Petition by the African Lodge to the General Court of Massachusetts, January 4, 1787

[Excerpt]

. . . we, or our ancestors have been taken from all our dear connections, and brought from Africa and put into a state of slavery in this country; from which unhappy situation we have been lately in some measure delivered by the new constitution which has been adopted by this State, or by a free act of our former masters. But we yet find ourselves, in many respects, in very disagreeable and disadvantageous circumstances; most of which must attend us, so long as we and our children live in America.

This, and other considerations, which we need not here particularly mention, induce us earnestly to desire to return to Africa, our native country, which warm climate is much more natural and agre[e]able to us; and, for which the God of nature has formed us; and, where we shall live among our equals, and be more comfortable and happy, than we can be in our present situation; and, at the same time, may have a prospect of usefulness to our brethren there.

This leads us humbly to propose the following plan to the consideration of this honourable Court. The soil of our native country is good, and produces the necessities of life in great abundance. There are large tracts of uncultivated lands, which, if proper application were made for them, it is presumed, might be obtained, and would be freely given for those to settle upon, who shall be disposed to return to them. When this shall be effected by a number of Blacks, sent there for this purpose, who shall be thought most capable of making such an application, and transacting this business; then they who are disposed to go and settle there shall form themselves into a civil society, united by a political constitution, in which they shall agree. And those who are disposed, and shall be thought qualified, shall unite, and be formed into a religious society, or christian church; and have one or more blacks ordained as their pastors or Bishops: And being thus formed, shall remove to Africa, and settle on said lands.

These must be furnished with necessary provisions for the voyage; and with farming utensils necessary to cultivate the land; and with the materials which cannot at present be obtained there, and which will be needed to build houses and mills.

The execution of this plan will, we hope, be the means of enlightening and civilizing those nations, who are now sunk in ignorance and barbarity; and may give opportunity to those who shall be disposed, and engaged to promote the salvation of their heathen brethren, to spread the knowledge of Christianity among them, and persuade them to embrace it. And schools may be formed to instruct their youth and children, and christian knowledge be spread through many nations who now are in gross darkness; and christian churches be formed, and the only true God and Saviour be worshiped and honoured through that vast extent of country, where are now the habitations of cruelty under the reign of the prince of darkness.

This may also lay a happy foundation for a friendly and lasting connection between that country and the united States of America, by a mutual intercourse and profitable commerce, which may much more than overbalance all the expence which is now necessary in order to carry this plan into effect.

This leads us to observe, that we are poor and utterly unable to prosecute this scheme or to return to Africa, without assistance. Money is wanted to enable those who shall be appointed, to go to Africa, and procure lands to settle upon; and to obtain a passage for us and our families; and to furnish us with necessary provisions, and the utensils and articles that have been mentioned.

We therefore humbly and earnestly apply to this honourable Court, hoping and praying that in your wisdom and goodness, you concert and prosecute the best method to relieve and assist us either by granting a brief for a collection in all the congregations in this State, or in any other way, which shall to your wisdom appear most expedient.

Transcript Source: Prince Hall, Petition by the African Lodge to the General Court of Massachusetts, January 4, 1787, Massachusetts Archives, Unenacted Legislation, House Document #2358, printed in *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution*, ed. Sidney Kaplan and Emma Nogrody Kaplan (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), pp. 207-209.