

REPORT

Of the Committee, to whom was referred the memorial of the President and Board of Managers of the American Society for colonizing the free people of color of the United States.

APRIL 18, 1818.

Read and committed to a committee of the whole House on Monday next.

NOVEMBER 26, 1818.

Printed by order of the House of Representatives.

The committee, to whom was referred the memorial of the "President and board of managers of the American Society for colonizing the free people of color of the United States," have, according to order, had the same under their attentive consideration.

Referring to the memorial itself, and to the report of the committee on the slave trade, to the 14th congress, your committee beg leave to add, that a new interest has been recently imparted to the benevolent enterprise of the memorialists, by the prospect of a speedy termination of that odious traffic, which has been so long the crime of Europe, the scourge of Africa, and the affliction and disgrace of America. Spain and Portugal have at length, concurred in that just and humane policy of the United States, which Great Britain was the first to imitate, and which by her liberal and unremitting zeal, she has successfully extended throughout the civilized world.

So far as the civilization of Africa, the victim of this inhuman traffic, is embraced among the views of the memorialists, the removal of this formidable impediment to their success, is calculated to elevate the hopes of the philanthropist, and to secure to their enterprise a larger share of public confidence.

America cannot but sympathize in the wish to redeem from ignorance, barbarism, and superstition, a continent of vast extent, spread out beneath every climate, embracing every variety of soil, and inhabited by a much injured and degraded portion of the human race.

But your committee have no hesitation in acknowledging that they derive a yet stronger incentive to recommend this enterprise to the countenance and favour of the House, from considerations peculiar to the United States. These were presented to the last Congress by the report to which your committee have referred, and they deem it unnecessary therefore, to press them upon the attention of the House. They cannot, however, forbear to remark, that time is unceasingly aggravating all those domestic evils, for which the memorialists propose the only competent remedy, and that the most auspicious circumstances conspire at present to promote its successful application.

Europe, after passing through a war of unprecedented extent and calamity, enjoys a repose which she has rarely known, and which, for the honor of humanity, it may be hoped she will be disposed to signalize by some act of distinguished generosity. She will not, surely, be content with a mere forbearance of farther injustice; but seek to repair the wrongs which she has inflicted upon an unhappy race of men.

The people of the United States have retired from the same conflict, to enjoy a prosperity which has never been surpassed in the history of the world. Respected abroad, they possess abundance, tranquillity, and happiness at home.

A survey of such blessings, naturally inspires a sentiment, the existence of which is illustrated not only by the formation of the society, from which this memorial proceeds; a society embracing individuals of every religious and political denomination, and inhabitants of every state in this wide spread union, but by the almost unanimous proceedings of the Legislatures of Virginia, Maryland, Tennessee Georgia, either recommending or countenancing the same benevolent object.

It cannot be supposed that the liberal and enlightened policy, which dictated the resolutions and acts of those particular states, is confined to themselves alone. Their neighbors alike circumstanced, actuated by the same interests and feelings, will be conducted to the same conclusions, in relation to questions, not only of vital importance to them, but in their remote bearing, of scarcely less moment to the stability and prosperity of the union.

The auxiliary colonization societies which are daily springing up, in other quarters of the United States, evince, that if the feelings which animate them, were local in their origin, they required only to be manifested, in order to awaken the sympathy and to secure the co-operation of the rest of America, in the attainment of their common object.

Your committee would not thus favorably regard the prayer of the memorialists, if it sought to impair, in the slightest degree, the rights of private property, or the yet more sacred rights of personal liberty, secured to every description of freemen in the United States.

The resolution of the legislature of Virginia, the subsequent acts and declarations, as well as the high character of the memorialists themselves, added to the most obvious interest of the states, who have recently sanctioned the purpose, or recognised the existence of the American Colonization Society, exclude the remotest apprehension of such injustice or inhumanity.

The memorialists propose to attain the noblest end which benevolence can concede, by temperate and practicable means.

As preliminary to their success, and in anticipation of the acts of the government, they have, at considerable expense, sent out agents to explore the coast of Africa, and to select a seat for their contemplated colony. Those agents were instructed first to visit Europe. Their reception in England, and the intelligence which had been received from them down to the period of their late embarkation for Africa, were as favorable, as could have been anticipated, to the success of their mission.

This success, however, cannot be complete, until the object of the memorialists shall have received the sanction, and their efforts the aid of the federal government.

If their memorial does not furnish sufficient ground for the interposition of the national legislature, in their behalf, it appears to your committee, that the resolution of Virginia, which they beg leave to subjoin to this report, subsequently sustained by a similar resolution of Maryland and Tennessee, unquestionably do so.

Whether a treaty for the territory of the proposed colony is to be opened with the native tribes of Africa, or with the European governments which claim certain portions of the shores of that continent, it is by the authority of the United States alone, that such negotiation can be effected.

The several states, having, by their adoption of the federal constitution surrendered the power of negotiation, to the general government, have an undoubted right to claim the exercise of that sovereign authority for their benefit, whenever it can be exerted consistently with the welfare of the United States.

Your committee cannot forbear to add another, to them a very solemn consideration, as an inducement for the exercise of this authority in the manner proposed by the General Assembly of Virginia. The act of congress which interdicts the African slave-trade, and subjects the citizens of the United States who engage in its prosecution, to merited punishment, has left the unfortunate beings, whom the violations of this law are daily casting upon the American shore, to the separate provisions of the respective states within whose jurisdiction they may chance to be found.

To say nothing of the abstract propriety of transferring such an authority over the persons and liberty of these foreigners from the national, to the state legislatures; entertaining no apprehension that Congress will be rendered, thereby, accessory to any act of cruelty or inhumanity; it must be yet apparent, that the individual states have a right to require the aid now sought to be obtained from the general government, in order to enable themselves to discharge the trust reposed in them, without a violation of their local policy, or injustice to those unfortunate Africans, placed at their disposal, by the laws of the United States.

Your committee were instructed by two other resolutions of the House to inquire into the expediency of making more effectual provision by law, for preventing the participation of the citizens of the United States in the African slave trade, and of correcting certain abuses which are practised in the internal commerce of the United States. Both these objects have been accomplished by bills which subsequently originated in the other branch of the national legislature, and which came down to the House of Representatives under circumstances which ensured to them an earlier decision than would have followed a report from your committee. They beg leave, however, to remark, that the beneficial effect to be expected from any improvement of the pre-existing laws, in relation to the former species of traffic, which commences its enterprize against humanity, and foreign, and remote coast, and matures it on that of America, in such a manner as to elude detection by ordinary vigilance, must depend on the efforts of another branch of the government.

It does not become your committee to do more, in relation to this branch of the inquiry charged upon them, than to intimate their opinion that no act of legislation whatever, would be so likely to put down this iniquitous traffic, as the multiplication of the revenue cutters, upon the American shores most frequented by the vessels engaged in it, and the employment of such part of the navy as would be best adapted to such service, in occasional visits to the African coast, at the season when it is frequented by the same description of vessels.

Your committee ask therefore to be discharged from the further consideration of the 2d and 3d resolutions, to which they have referred, and beg leave to recommend to the House, in relation to the first, the adoption of the following resolution:

Resolved, That the President of the United States, be, and he is hereby, requested to take such measures as he may deem proper to ascertain whether a suitable territory can be procured on the coast of Africa, for colonizing such of the free people of color of the United States as may be willing to avail themselves of such an asylum, and to enter into such negotiation with the native tribes of Af-

rica, or with one or more of the governments of Europe as may be necessary to obtain such territory, and to secure to the contemplated colony every advantage which he may deem essential to its future independence and prosperity.

“Whereas the General Assembly of Virginia have repeatedly sought to obtain an asylum, beyond the limits of the United States, for such persons of color, as had been, or might be emancipated under the laws of this commonwealth, but have hitherto found all their efforts frustrated, either by the disturbed state of other nations or domestic causes equally unpropitious to their success:

They now avail themselves of a period when peace has healed the wounds of humanity, and the principal nations of Europe have concurred with the government of the United States, in abolishing the African slave trade (a traffic which this commonwealth, both before and since the revolution, zealously sought to terminate) to renew this effort, and do therefore *Resolve*, That the executive be requested to correspond with the President of the United States, for the purpose of obtaining a territory upon the coast of Africa, or at some other place, not within any of the states or territorial governments of the United States, to serve as an asylum for such persons of color, as are now free, and may desire the same, and for those who may be hereafter emancipated within this commonwealth; and that the Senators and Representatives of this State in the Congress of the United States be requested to exert their best efforts, to aid the President of the United States in the attainment of the above object: *Provided*, That no contract or arrangement respecting such territory shall be obligatory on this commonwealth until ratified by the legislature.”

Passed by the House of Delegates, December 15th—by the Senate with an amendment, December 20th—concurring in by the House of Delegates, December 21st, 1816.