

Congress and Human Trafficking in 1812

Document 3. Excerpts from a letter from Elisha Tyson to Rep. Alexander McKim (MD) regarding the kidnapping and transportation of free people of color that was received by Congress on December 5, 1811; Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, National Archives.

Baltimore 12 Nov., 1811

Respected friend,

Agreeable to the arrangement made between us when I was at Washington, I now enclose this, some proofs of the existence of an unlawful trade in People of Color. These with the glaring evidence lately exhibited in the detection of a set of kidnappers at Petersburg in Virginia with a family of black people, forcibly taken from the state of Delaware, will, I hope, be deemed conclusive evidence on the subject.

I am respectfully on behalf of the Committee,*

Thy Friend
Elisha Tyson

Remarks

Case 1st Abraham Long

This boy was born free on the Eastern Shore [MD] and was bound out by his mother. He was kidnapped and taken off to New Orleans, where he was sold to Doctor Blackburn, who some time afterwards came on a visit to Baltimore, attended by this boy as waiting man; the boy on getting here made his case known and a petition being filed for his freedom, these facts were proved and he discharged.

Case 2 Negro Phebe

This woman lived on Staten Island in the state of New York, and was manumitted to be free at the expiration of a term of years which had nearly expired. She was privately sold and clandestinely brought out of that state by night, and actually shipped on board a vessel lying in the harbor of Baltimore for the purpose of being transported to New Orleans. Her situation by accident became known to a person in the city who by Habeas Corpus caused her to be brought before Chief Justice Scott whereupon a petition was filed for her freedom and she discharged.

Case 3 Antionette and her male child

This woman was free and lived in the city of New York. She was decoyed off from there and sold to some traders who brought her to Baltimore, where she was discovered in a depot with a number of other People of Color who were collected for transportation. Her case being represented to the court, she was under a petition discharged.

Case 4 Negro Bill

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This boy was born free in the city of New York. He was decoyed off from there and sold to a trader in this city, whilst they were in the act of shipping him, he made his escape and disclosed his situation to a person who directed a petition to be filed for his freedom, and he was thereupon discharged. . . .

*Note: Tyson is writing on behalf of a committee of the Maryland Society of Friends.