

THE GILDER LEHRMAN INSTITUTE *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

Inside the Vault: Highlights from the Gilder Lehrman Collection

June 17, 2021

The session will start shortly. Please note:

- Your video and audio will automatically turn off.
- You can participate through the Q&A function.
- If you have technical difficulties, please email collectionprograms@gilderlehrman.org so we can assist you.

Our Team

Panelists

- Sandy Trenholm - Collection Director
- Mandel Holland - History Teacher at Woodlands Middle High School in Hartsdale, New York
- Elijah Malcomb - John Laurens/Philip Hamilton in *Hamilton*
- Meagan Jenkins - Curatorial Intern
- Allison Kraft - Assistant Curator

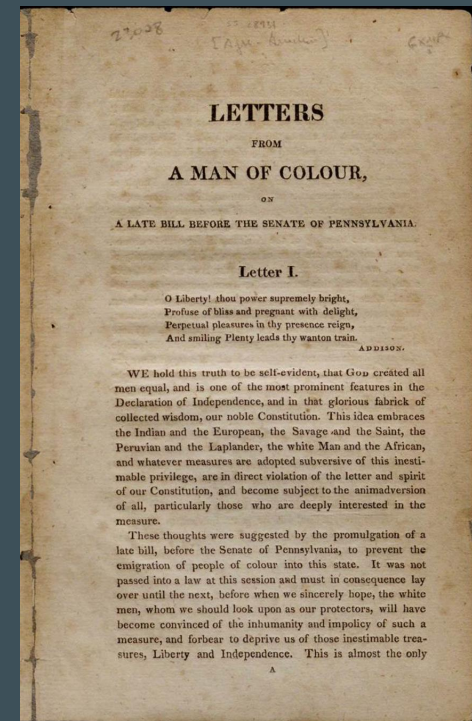
During the Session



- If you would like to ask a question, you can **use the Q&A feature.**
- We will be asking audience questions throughout the session.

For Security and Privacy

- Your microphone is automatically muted.
- Your camera is automatically turned off.



- Prince Hall, “Petition to the General Court of Massachusetts”
- James Forten, *Letters from a Man of Colour on a Late Bill before the Senate of Pennsylvania*

Prince Hall, 1735-1807

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- Born in 1735
 - Enslaved by William Hall of Boston
- Freed in 1770 - a month after Boston Massacre
- Owned a leather workshop
- Founder of African Lodge of the Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons of Boston no. 459
- Advocated free education for children of Black taxpayers in Boston
- Started a school for free Black children in his home
- Wrote a petition protesting the kidnapping of Black sailors



Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon

Prince Hall Petition

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N E W - Y O R K, April 8.

The following is a copy of a petition presented to the General Court of Massachusetts, by a free negro in the town of Boston.

To the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Bay, in General Court assembled, on the 27th February, 1788.

The Petition of a great number of *Blacks*, Freemen of this Commonwealth,

Humbly Sheweth,

THAT your petitioners are justly alarmed at the inhuman and cruel treatment that three of our brethren, free citizens of the town of Boston, lately received. The captain under pretence that his vessel was in distress on an island below in this harbour, having got them on board, put them in irons, and carried them off from their wives and children, to be sold for slaves; this being the state of these poor men, what can your petitioners expect but to be treated in the same manner by the same sort of men?—What then are our lives and liberties worth, if they may be taken away in such a cruel and unjust manner as this? May it please your honours, we are not insensible, that the good laws of this state forbid all such bad actions; notwithstanding, we can assure your honors, that many of our free blacks, that have entered on board of vessels, as seamen, have been sold for slaves; and some of them we have heard from, but know not who carried them away. Hence it is, that many of us, who are good seamen, are obliged to stay at home through fear, and the one half of our time loiter about the streets, for want of employ, whereas if they were protected in that calling, they might get a handsome livelihood for themselves and theirs, which, in the situation they are now in, they cannot. One thing more we would beg leave to hint, that is, that your petitioners have, for some time past, beheld with grief, ships cleared out from this harbour for Africa, and there they either steal, or cause others to steal, our brothers and sisters, and fill their ships holds full of unhappy men and women, crowded together, then set out to find the best market, to sell them there like sheep for the slaughter, and then return here like honest men after having sported with the lives and liberty of their fellow men, and at the same time call themselves Christians. Blush, O Heavens! at this, these our weighty grievances! We cheerfully submit to your honors, without dictating in the least, knowing by experience that your honors have, and we trust ever will in your wisdom do us that justice that our present condition requires, as God and the good laws of this commonwealth shall dictate you.

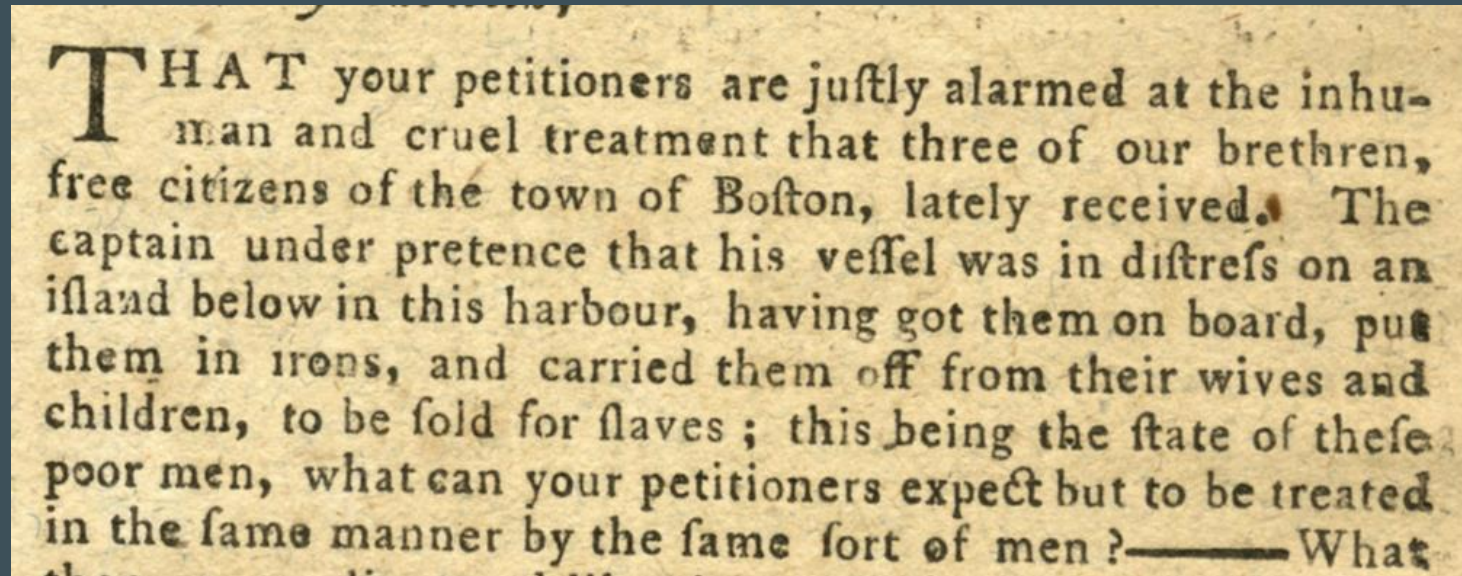
And as in duty bound, your petitioners shall ever pray.

P R I N C E H A L L.

- Petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts Bay (state legislature) on February 27th, 1788
 - Protested the kidnapping of Black men by slave traders
 - Protested the docking of slave trade ships Boston
- One of 3 petitions to be sent to the General Court regarding the abolition of the slave trade

The Kidnapping of Free Men

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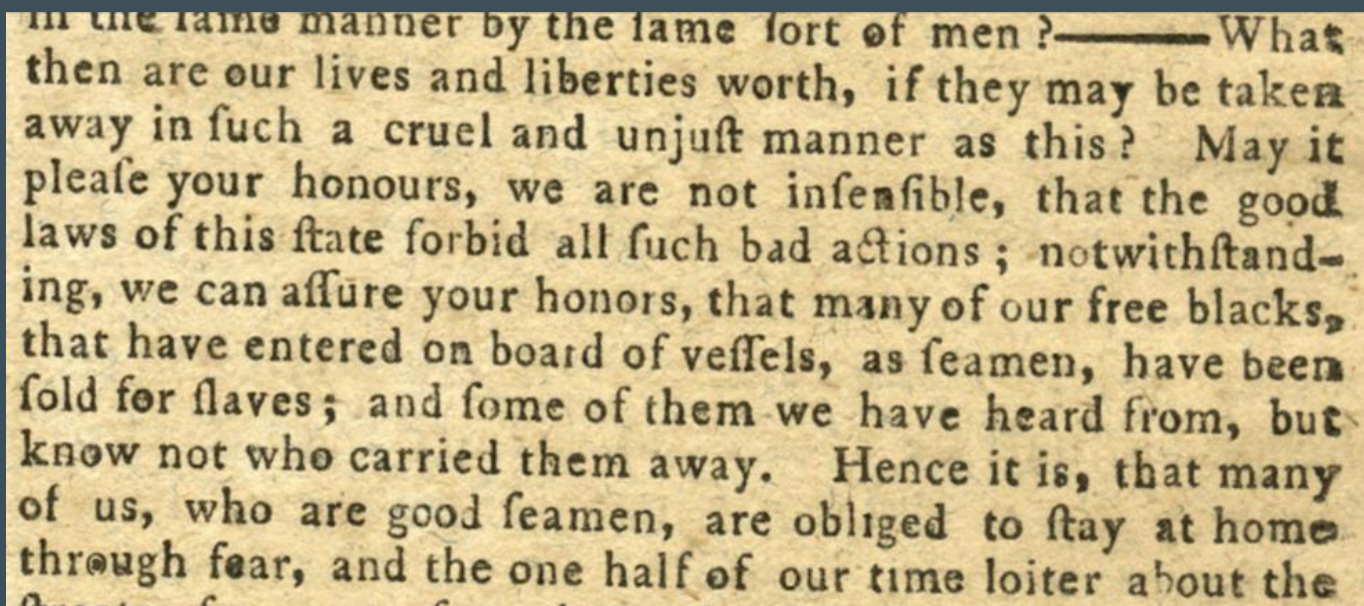


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“What Then Are Our Lives and Liberties Worth”

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Preventing Slave Trade Vessels from Stopping in Boston

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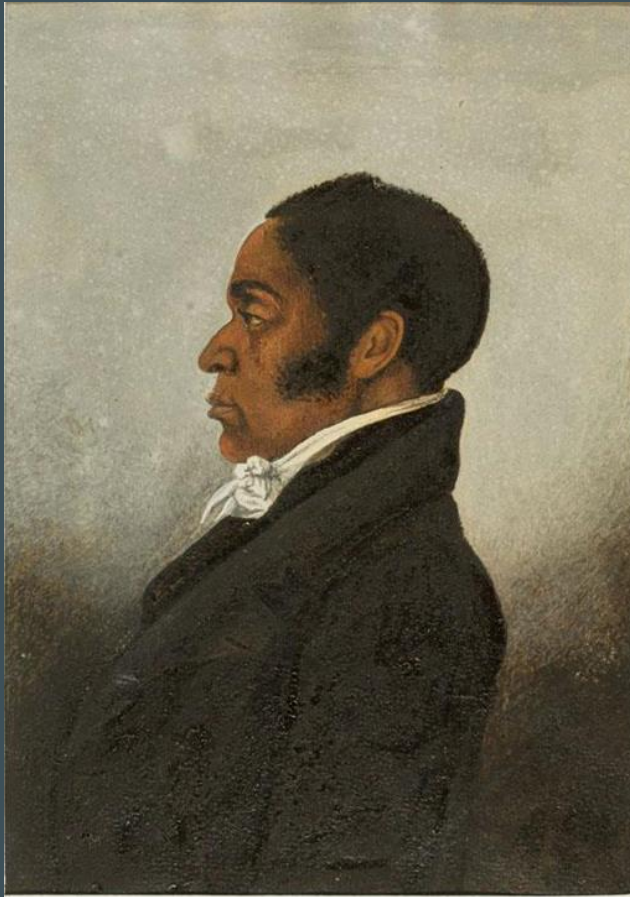
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What Happened Next

- Two men—one named “Avery”—kidnapped the men and proceeded to sail to the West Indies.
- The petitions sent by Hall and two others gained the attention of Governor John Hancock and a Frenchman by the name of “Monsieur L’Etombe.”
- Both men wrote letters to the West Indian governors requesting the kidnapped men be sent back.
- Once the three Black men were located and spoke before the West Indian governors, they were sent back to Boston, arriving in July of 1788.
- On March 26, an act was passed that prevented the slave trade in Massachusetts and grant relief to the families of those who were kidnapped.

James Forten, 1766-1842

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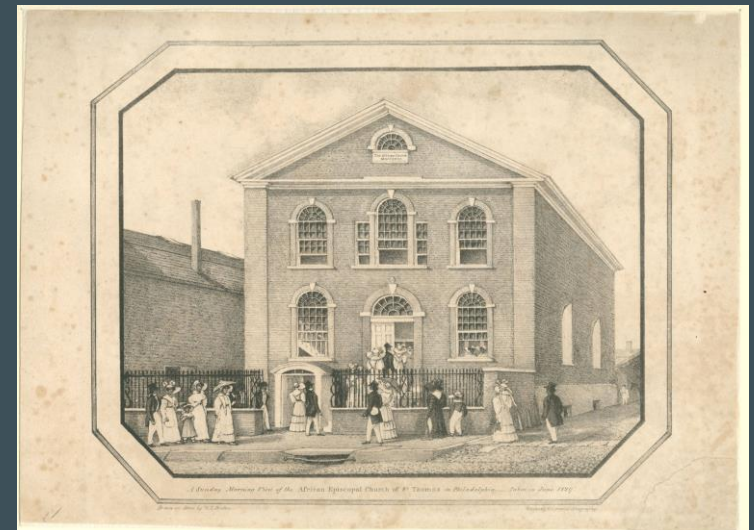
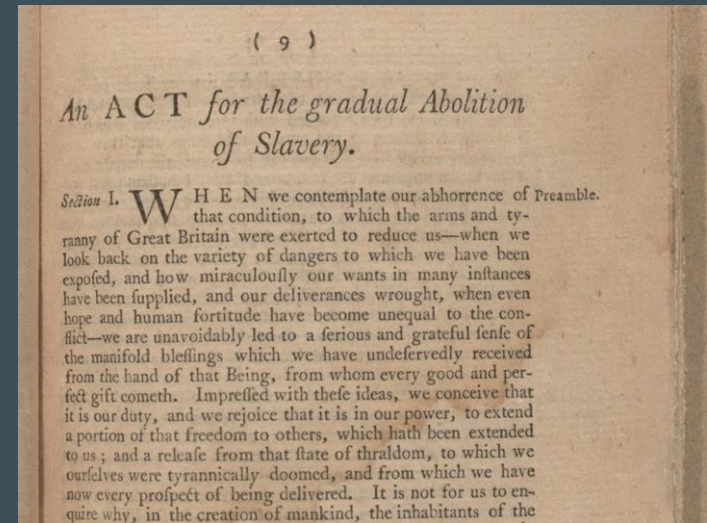


The Historical Society of Pennsylvania

- Born September 1766 to Thomas and Margaret Forten in Philadelphia
- Enlisted in the Continental Navy at 14 on a privateer
- Taken as a prisoner of war and confined on the HMS *Jersey*
- Apprenticed as a sailmaker in Philadelphia
- Purchased that business and became one of the wealthiest men in Philadelphia
- Published in the same newspaper under the pseudonym "A Colored Man of Philadelphia"
- Fought against the colonization movement, claiming that most Black people in America were born here so they deserved equal rights, not to be sent to Africa
- Financially supported abolitionist efforts, such as the newspaper *The Liberator*
- Wrote a pamphlet entitled *Letters From a Man of Colour*

Philadelphia for Black Residents

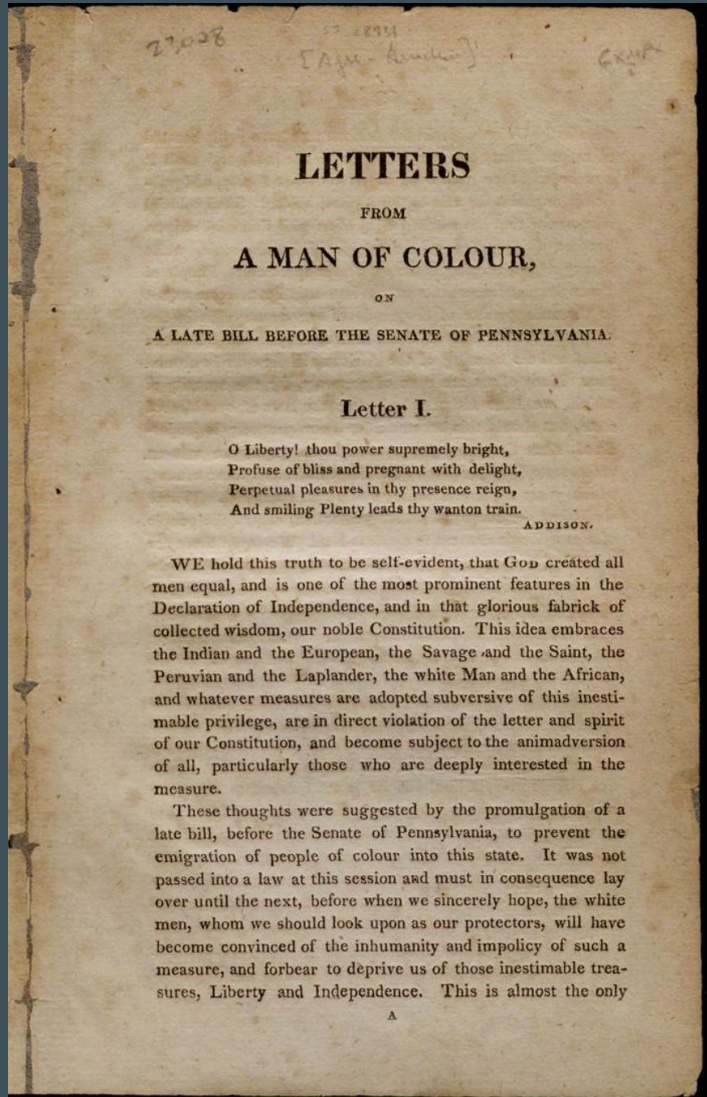
- In 1780, Pennsylvania enacted the Gradual Abolition Act, which guaranteed children born after March 1780 would be free by 28 years old.
- Pennsylvania became a refuge for people who escaped enslavement and freeborn Black people.
- Prominent churches and Black societies, such as the Free African Society, promoted leadership and and unity within the Black community.



Top: The Gilder Lehrman Collection
Bottom: Library Company of Philadelphia

Pennsylvania Bill, 1813

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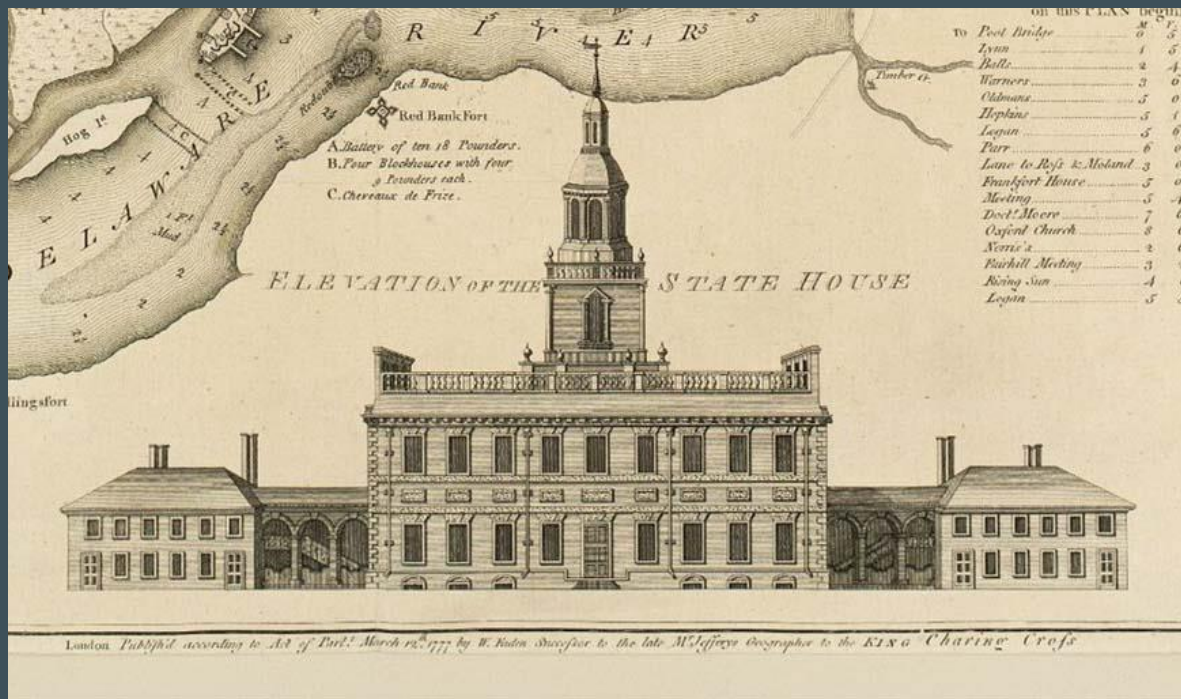
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- White residents of Philadelphia feared the growing free Black population would compete with them for jobs or turn to crime.
- Pennsylvania lawmakers drafted a bill that would
 - Close state borders to free Black citizens and escaped enslaved people
 - Allow any Black “lawbreakers” to be enslaved
 - Require registration of all Black people in Pennsylvania, whether they were residents or not
- James Forten published a pamphlet with series of five letters protesting the law.

Created Equal

why are we not to be considered as men. Has the God who made the white man and the black, left any record declaring us a different species. Are we not sustained by the same power, supported by the same food, hurt by the same wounds, wounded by the same wrongs, pleased with the same delights, and propagated by the same means. And should we not then enjoy the same liberty, and be protected by the same laws.—

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Intent of Pennsylvania's Founders

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“It cannot be that the authors of our [Pennsylvania] Constitution intended to exclude us from its benefits, for just emerging from unjust and cruel emancipation, their souls were too much affected with their own deprivations to commence the reign of terrour over others. They know we were deeper skinned than they were, but they acknowledged us as men, and found that many an honest heart beat beneath a dusky bosom. They felt that they had no more authority to enslave us, than England had to tyrannize over them. They were convinced that if amenable to the same laws in our actions, we should be protected by the same laws in our rights and privileges. Actuated by these sentiments they adopted the glorious fabric of our liberties, and declaring ‘all men’ free, they did not particularize white and black, because they never supposed it would be made a question whether we were men or not.”

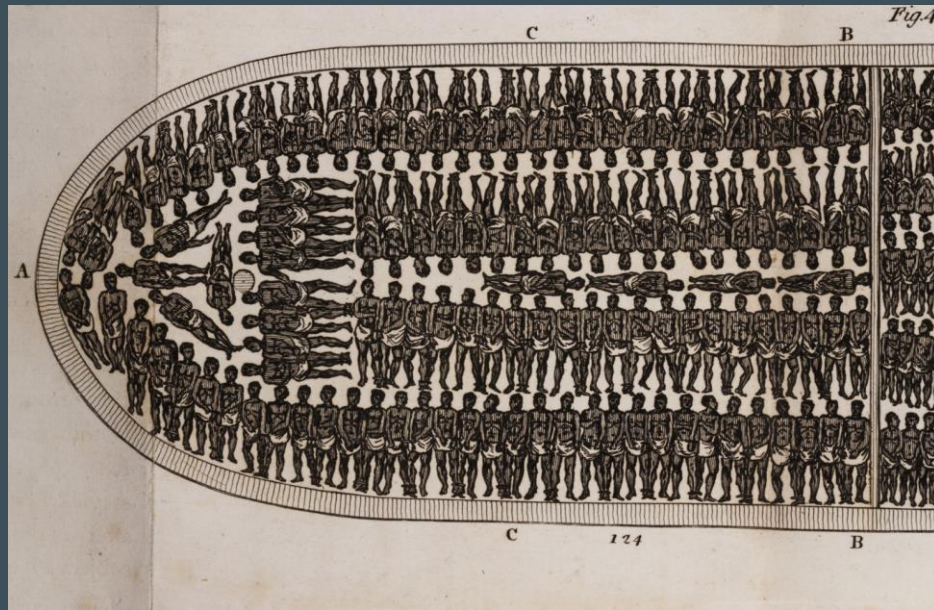
Dangers of Requiring Registration

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“The man of colour receiving as a visiter any other person of colour, is bound to turn informer, and rudely report to the Register, that a friend and a brother has come to visit him for a few days, whose name he must take within twenty four hours, or forfeit a sum which the iron hand of the law is authorized to rend from him, partly for the benefit of the Register. Who is this Register? A man, and exercising an office, where ten dollars is the fee for each delinquent, will probably be a cruel man and find delinquents where they really do not exist. The poor black is left to the merciless gripe of an avaricious Register, without an appeal, in the even, from his tyranny or oppression!”



Selling “Criminals” into Slavery

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“By the third section of this bill, which is its peculiar hardship, the police officers are authorized to apprehend any black, whether a vagrant or a man of reputable character, who cannot produce a Certificate that he has been registered. He is to be arrayed before a justice, who thereupon is to commit him to prison! The jailor is to advertise a Freeman, and at expiration of six months, if no owner appears for this degraded black, he is to be exposed to sale, and if not sold to be confined at hard labour for seven years! —Man of feeling, read this! ... How can an owner appear for a man who is free and belongs to no one!—If no owner appears, he is exposed for sale”



- Registration now open!
- Classes for students grades K-12
 - Hamilton Cast Read Along (elementary-age students and families)
 - History Camp: Life in Colonial Times (3rd-5th grade)
 - Immigration and the American Story (6th-12th grade)
 - History in the Making (6th-12th grade)
 - The Global Cold War (6th-12th grade)
 - APUSH: The Remix (9th-12th grade)
 - AP US Government and Politics: Foundational Documents (9th-12th grade)

Upcoming Programs

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- *Inside the Vault*, Thursday, July 1 at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT)
 - We will be discussing the Declaration of Independence.
- *Book Breaks*, June 20 at 2 p.m. ET (11 a.m. PT)
 - Matthew R. Costello discusses his book *The Property of the Nation: George Washington's Tomb, Mount Vernon, and the Memory of the First President*.