
Letter from Quaker Elisha Tyson to Rep. McKim regarding the kidnapping of free people of color

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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 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

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.

In addition to the foregoing, a great multitude of other instances might be produced in proof of the existence of an illicit and unjustifiable traffic in People of Color from the middle to the southern states, and not a doubt exists, but hundreds have been taken off, who from the clandestine manner in which the trade is carried on, never come to the knowledge of the public or under the cognizance of the laws.

This trade is conducted by a chain of individuals of the most unprincipled and profligate characters, whose connection extends from Orleans to New York, and from the manner of their conducting the business, it is scarcely possible to bring any individual of them to punishment. Thus, for instance, the one who actually steals or decoys a Negro from New York, immediately hands him over to one of the association* in Delaware or Maryland and should the latter by any accident be detected with the Negro in his possession, he pleads that he bought him and even shows a bill of sale!

Amongst the People of Color thus carried off, it is believed there are many slaves who having absconded from Virginia and elsewhere and come to this and other places have fallen in to the fangs of these people, and from the facility for transporting them. They are sent to Orleans and the Mississippi territory and their real owners never hear from them.

Should it be thy opinion that any further personal attention will be necessary on our part, thou will please to inform us and we will return to Washington.

*Note it will be recollected that evidence of a Person of Color is not admitted in proof against white people.

Alexander McKim, esq.