

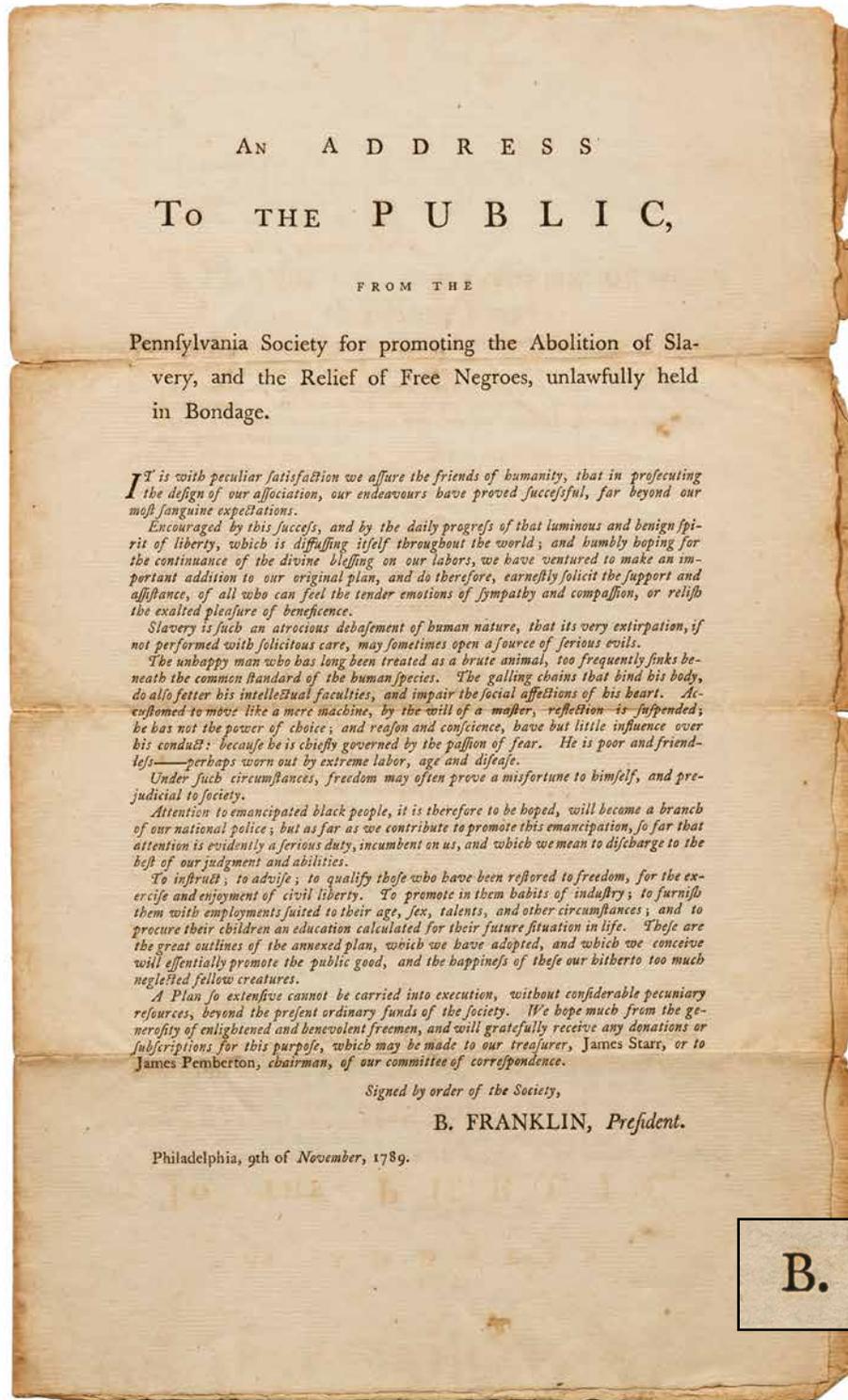
## *The world's first antislavery society*

[Benjamin Franklin].

### **The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery** *An Address to the Public, from the Pennsylvania Society for promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, unlawfully held in Bondage*

Philadelphia: Printed by Francis Bailey (1789)

\$35,000



AN ADDRESS

TO THE PUBLIC,

FROM THE

Pennsylvania Society for promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, unlawfully held in Bondage.

*I*t is with peculiar satisfaction we assure the friends of humanity, that in prosecuting the design of our association, our endeavours have proved successful, far beyond our most sanguine expectations.

Encouraged by this success, and by the daily progress of that luminous and benign spirit of liberty, which is diffusing itself throughout the world; and humbly hoping for the continuance of the divine blessing on our labors, we have ventured to make an important addition to our original plan, and do therefore, earnestly solicit the support and assistance, of all who can feel the tender emotions of sympathy and compassion, or relish the exalted pleasure of beneficence.

Slavery is such an atrocious debasement of human nature, that its very extirpation, if not performed with sollicitous care, may sometimes open a source of serious evils.

The unhappy man who has long been treated as a brute animal, too frequently sinks beneath the common standard of the human species. The galling chains that bind his body, do also fetter his intellectual faculties, and impair the social affections of his heart. Accustomed to move like a mere machine, by the will of a master, reflection is suspended; he has not the power of choice; and reason and conscience, have but little influence over his conduct: because he is chiefly governed by the passion of fear. He is poor and friendless—perhaps worn out by extreme labor, age and disease.

Under such circumstances, freedom may often prove a misfortune to himself, and prejudicial to society.

Attention to emancipated black people, it is therefore to be hoped, will become a branch of our national policy; but as far as we contribute to promote this emancipation, so far that attention is evidently a serious duty, incumbent on us, and which we mean to discharge to the best of our judgment and abilities.

To instruct; to advise; to qualify those who have been restored to freedom, for the exercise and enjoyment of civil liberty. To promote in them habits of industry; to furnish them with employments suited to their age, sex, talents, and other circumstances; and to procure their children an education calculated for their future situation in life. These are the great outlines of the annexed plan, which we have adopted, and which we conceive will essentially promote the public good, and the happiness of these our hitherto too much neglected fellow creatures.

A Plan so extensive cannot be carried into execution, without considerable pecuniary resources, beyond the present ordinary funds of the society. We hope much from the generosity of enlightened and benevolent freemen, and will gratefully receive any donations or subscriptions for this purpose, which may be made to our treasurer, James Starr, or to James Pemberton, chairman, of our committee of correspondence.

Signed by order of the Society,

B. FRANKLIN, *President.*

Philadelphia, 9th of November, 1789.

Very scarce pair of broadsides printed in 1789 by the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, the world's first antislavery society, signed in letterpress by Benjamin Franklin, the Society's President.

Folio. A pair of broadsides printed in folio on the first and third pages of a single untrimmed bifolium sheet. Measures 16.5" x 13.5" unfolded; 8" x 13.5" folded. With a docket title written in manuscript by a contemporary hand on the fourth blank page: "Address for the Abolition of Slavery; also a plan for improving free Negroes". The sheet is partially split along the vertical spine fold (with about two inches conjugate at the top), three light horizontal folds, a few small tears to the left and right margins, very good.

B. FRANKLIN, *President.*

As indicated by the manuscript docket title, the first broadside prints: “An Address to the Public” soliciting contributions to fund a plan for educating and employing “emancipated black people”. It is Signed in letterpress “by order of the Society, B. Franklin, President. Philadelphia, 9th of November, 1789.” The second broadside prints the plan. It is dated in letterpress at the head of the sheet: “Philadelphia, 26 October, 1789. At a meeting of the Pennsylvania Society for promoting the Abolition of Slavery &c. An essay of a Plan for improving the condition of Free Negroes ... was adopted as follows, / A Plan for improving the condition of the Free Blacks.”

In the Address, Benjamin Franklin and the Society publically state their opposition to the institution of Slavery. It reads, in part: “Slavery is such an atrocious debasement of human nature, that its very extirpation, if not performed with solicitous care, may sometimes open a source of serious evils. / The unhappy man who has long been treated as a brute animal, too frequently sinks beneath the common standard of the human species. The galling chains that bind his body, do also fetter his intellectual faculties, and impair the social affections of this heart ... Under such circumstances, freedom may often prove a misfortune to himself, and prejudicial to society. / Attention to emancipated black people, it is therefore hoped, will become a branch of our national police; but as far as we contribute to promote this emancipation ... [it is] incumbent on us ... To instruct; to advise; to qualify those who have been restored to freedom, for the exercise and enjoyment of civil liberty ... These are the great outlines of the annexed plan, which we have adopted ...”

The second broadside prints the “annexed plan” which outlines the duties of four committees: “I. A committee of Inspection, who shall superintend the morals, general conduct, and ordinary situation of the Free Negroes ...”; “II. A committee of Guardians, who shall place out children and young people with suitable persons ...”; “III. A committee of Education, who shall superintend the school-instruction of the children, and youth of the Free Blacks ...”; “IV. A committee of Employ, who shall endeavour to procure constant employment for those Free Negroes ...”

A well-preserved, untrimmed copy. *Shipton & Mooney* 45559; *ESTC* W4578. [BTC#423208]

Philadelphia, 26 October, 1789.

*At a meeting of the Pennsylvania Society for promoting the Abolition of Slavery, &c. An essay of a Plan for improving the condition of Free Negroes, was presented by the committee appointed to prepare it, which after deliberate consideration was adopted as follows,*

## A Plan for improving the condition of the Free Blacks.

THE business relative to Free Blacks, shall be transacted by a committee of twenty-four persons, annually elected by ballot, at the meeting of this society in the month called April; and in order to perform the different services, with expedition, regularity and energy; this committee shall resolve itself into the following sub-committees, *viz.*

### I.

*A committee of Inspection*, who shall superintend the morals, general conduct, and ordinary situation of the Free Negroes, and afford them advice and instruction; protection from wrongs; and other friendly offices.

### II.

*A committee of Guardians*, who shall place out children and young people with suitable persons, that they may (during a moderate time of apprenticeship, or servitude) learn some trade or other business of subsistence. The committee may effect this partly by a persuasive influence on parents, and the persons concerned; and partly by co-operating with the laws which are, or may be enacted for this, and similar purposes; in forming contracts on these occasions, the committee shall secure to the society, as far as may be practicable, the right of guardianship, over the persons so bound.

### III.

*A committee of Education*, who shall superintend the school-instruction of the children, and youth of the Free Blacks; they may either influence them to attend regularly the schools already established in this city, or form others with this view; they shall in either case provide that, the pupils may receive such learning, as is necessary for their future situation in life; and especially a deep impression of the most important, and generally acknowledged moral and religious principles. They shall also procure, and preserve a regular record of the marriages, births and manumissions of all Free Blacks.

### IV.

*A committee of Employ*, who shall endeavour to procure constant employment for those Free Negroes, who are able to work: as the want of this would occasion poverty, idleness, and many vicious habits. This committee will, by sedulous enquiry, be enabled to find common labour for a great number; they will also provide, that such as indicate proper talents, may learn various trades, which may be done by prevailing upon them to bind themselves for such a term of years, as shall compensate their masters for the expense and trouble of instruction, and maintenance. The committee may attempt the institution of some useful, and simple manufactures, which require but little skill, and also may assist in commencing business, such as appear to be qualified for it.

Whenever the committee of inspection, shall find persons of any particular description, requiring attention, they shall immediately direct them to that committee, of whose care they are the proper objects.

In matters of a mixed nature the committees shall confer, and if necessary act in concert. Affairs of great importance, shall be referred to the whole committee.

The expense incurred by the prosecution of this plan, shall be defrayed by a fund to be formed by donations, or subscriptions for these particular purposes, and to be kept separate from the other funds of this society.

The committee shall make a report of their proceedings, and of the state of their stock to the society at their quarterly meetings, in the months called April and October.