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# Forgotten Books

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*John J. Bush*

SENATE.....

.....No. 35.

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## REPORT AND RESOLVES

ON THE SUBJECT OF THE

FOREIGN SLAVE TRADE.

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## Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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Reported by a Special Joint Committee consisting of  
Messrs. BLAKE and WHITMARSH, of the Senate : and  
Messrs. EVELETH, of *Boston*,  
CHOATE, of *Essex*, and  
SOUTHGATE, of *Leicester*,  
of the House.

## Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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FEBRUARY 7, 1839.

The Joint Special Committee to whom were referred the memorial of Henry Edwards and many others, citizens of Boston, and also the memorial of Mark Newman, and a large number of other persons, inhabitants of the town of Andover, praying this Legislature to request of Congress the adoption of measures for the more effectual suppression of the foreign slave trade ; and also for the protection of the growing commercial intercourse between the United States and the western coast of Africa, have duly attended to the subject submitted to them, and respectfully submit the following

### R E P O R T :

Whatever may be the differences of opinion among the great body of the high-minded and intelligent people of this Union, upon the subject of domestic slavery, and the degree of countenance and protection which should be given to it, under the existing Constitution of the United States, it is presumed there never has been, nor can be, but one feeling and one sentiment, as to the atrocious character of the foreign traffic in slaves, or as to its being the duty of our national government, so far at least as its

own citizens are concerned, to exercise all constitutional means for its immediate and effectual suppression. It is a circumstance well calculated to inspire the mind of every American citizen with a feeling of pride for the honor and glory of his country, that this solemn duty on the part of our National Legislature, has never, since its first organization, been, for a single moment, intentionally disregarded; but, on the contrary, has always been a leading and prominent subject of consideration in the councils of the nation. A recurrence to that series of severe congressional enactments upon this subject, which commenced with the act of 1794, a very few years only, after the organization of the federal government, and which was followed up by no less than six other enactments, increasing always in the severity of their penalties, through a succession of years, down to the year 1820, when, by a solemn act of Congress, the foreign traffic in slaves was denounced as an act of piracy, will serve to demonstrate, in a forcible manner, the utter abhorrence with which this nefarious business has been uniformly regarded by the legislators of the nation. And it is a gratifying reflection, that, notwithstanding the extreme bitterness of party contention, which has at times pervaded the country, and not unfrequently had a sinister influence upon its legislation, in regard to various other subjects and objects, it seems not to have disturbed, in any degree, the original views and policy of the nation, with regard to the African slave trade. The several acts of Congress, which have been adverted to, not excepting the last, in 1820, denouncing this traffic as piracy, one of the highest offences in a moral, as well as political point of view, in the whole catalogue of human transgressions, which, it is understood, passed by both branches of the Legislature, without se-



rious opposition from any quarter. The Committee, therefore, entertain the impression that, if, in the course of the investigation that has been instituted upon the present memorials, there have been elicited any facts or circumstances tending to show the inadequacy of the means hitherto, and now employed by the federal government, for the effectual suppression of this abominable traffic, it is their duty, as good citizens, to make a public statement of such facts and circumstances; and, at the same time to recommend to the Legislature of Massachusetts the exercise of its influence with the councils of the nation, to the end that further and more efficient remedies and checks may be provided against the great evil in question.

It is a melancholy consideration that the cupidity and cunning of unprincipled men, of men destitute of all moral feeling, in cases where their own private interest is concerned, are not unfrequently found to be quite an overmatch for the wisest and the sternest legislation. Such, it appears, has been, in a most especial manner, the case, with regard to that series of enactments which have been alluded to, for the prohibition and punishment of the foreign slave trade. From a variety of well authenticated statements and documents that were laid before the Committee, in the course of their investigation, it was made sufficiently apparent, that, although, by the combined efforts that were made, a few years ago, by the United States and Great Britain, when a competent number of armed vessels, of either nation, were employed to visit occasionally, the western coast of Africa, for the purpose of breaking up the operations of the slavers, a temporary check was given to that horrible traffic, yet, that it has, more lately, been renewed, and is, in fact

now, carried on, alas, too, by American citizens in disguise, to, even, a greater extent than formerly ; and under circumstances of aggravated cruelty and barbarity. From these statements and documents, the Committee have reason to believe, that, for several years past, the average number of slaves from the coast of Africa which have been transported and landed in Brazil, has not been less than about 8000 per month ; and in fact, that in the course of eighteen months, only a few years ago, the enormous multitude of 114,000 were known to have been landed in that country. It appears, also, that not less than about 54,000 slaves from the coast of Africa, are regularly sent, annually, to Rio de Janeiro, and at least, 40,000 per annum, to the island of Cuba, besides, not a few, to the boasted Republic of Texas. Many other branches of this traffic might be specified, but it is not necessary they should be, for the purposes of the present report. It seems that this extensive and horrible traffic in human flesh, particularly, since it has been declared by the American and British nations, as amounting to piracy, has been, in a great measure, carried on, by means of sharp, clipper-built vessels of small tonnage, which, it is believed, are for the most part, of American construction, and are, in very many instances, employed on account of American citizens. These vessels, it appears, are constructed with a view principally, to their rapidity of sailing, whereby to escape the pursuit of cruisers, and without the least regard to the health, comfort or even lives, of the throng of wretched beings who are destined to embark in them. In illustration of this latter circumstance, several well authenticated cases were stated before the Committee, in which it appeared, that multitudes of these poor creatures had been stowed away, like mere



senseless merchandise, between the decks, commonly about three feet, only, in height, of these miserable little vessels, and there confined, to groan and swelter during a long voyage, or perchance, to be thrown overboard, in case of a pursuit, or of any other emergency which might seem to render such a disposition of them advisable for the safety of the guilty agents in the concern—many other details with regard to the manner in which this accursed traffic has been pursued, and that too, by American citizens, within the last few years, were stated to the Committee, but they were all of a character so revolting, disgusting, that it is not deemed proper to pollute the pages of this report by their recapitulation.

From this brief presentment of facts and circumstances, it is manifest, that the several acts of Congress that are herein before alluded to, for the prohibition of the foreign slave trade, have become, of late years, if not, actually, a mere dead letter, at any rate, almost entirely ineffectual for accomplishing the great national purposes for which they were intended. That such is found to be the present state of the case, is not at all surprising, when it be considered how little has been done or attempted on the part of the general government, for the purpose of carrying this series of laws into effectual execution. It, surely, cannot be pretended, that there are any considerable omissions or defects in the provisions of these enactments; they are full, explicit, and the great severity of their penalties, is sufficiently indicative of the abhorrence with which, from the beginning, our legislators have been accustomed to regard this traffic, and of their earnest desire to arrest its progress. But what are mere acts of legislation without the application of competent and proper means for their enforcement? In relation, espe-



cially, to such pursuits as the slave trade, which, in their nature, are calculated to tempt the avarice, and to engage the worst passions and appetites of base and sordid minds, it is obvious that, although our national legislators should continue as they have done, to pile line upon line and precept upon precept, in the way of pains and penalties, it would all signify nothing.

The vile trade would still go on ; the laws would, by means of cunning and stratagem, be evaded ; and for the reasons that were before adverted to, the horrors of this traffic would, probably, be aggravated rather than diminished, by the additional, mere statutory restraints that were imposed upon it. The Committee are, therefore, unanimously of the opinion, that nothing but the exercise of great vigilance, and the employment of a competent physical force, by the National Government, for the purpose of prevention, can ever be effectual for the correction of the great and crying sin of the African Slave Trade. It has already been stated, that for several years past, but little if any thing, in this way, has been done or attempted by our government. It is believed that several years have elapsed since a single armed ship of the United States, with instructions to cruise for and capture such vessels as are subject to seizure by the existing laws, has ever been known to have made even a transient visit to the western coast of Africa, where, it is understood, that this trade, on American account, is largely carried on. This, surely, is not as it should be. Is it not due to the cause of humanity, to the honor and fame of this great republic, and to the majesty of its laws, that it should not suffer its benevolent intentions, so frequently expressed by those laws, with regard to this interesting subject, to be frustrated, put to nought, when the means of their consummation

are ample, and might be so easily and promptly applied? From a series of facts that were developed in the course of the present investigation, and the opinions that were adduced, of several respectable, intelligent individuals, who had often visited the western coast of Africa, and were well acquainted with the whole course of the vile operations of the slavers in that region, the Committee were induced to believe, that the judicious employment by the United States, of comparatively even a small naval force, for the purpose, would be sufficient to arrest its progress, in a great degree, if not, wholly to annihilate this commerce.

It is believed, that a single sloop of war and an armed schooner, regularly stationed, during the more salubrious season of each successive year, at some selected points, upon this coast; and especially, if these should be accompanied by a few lighter craft, and a steamer or two, destined to cruise occasionally along the coast, between cape Messurado and cape Mount. The presence of even such a force would so disturb the intercourse between the slave dealers and the natives, as to bring about eventually and perhaps speedily, too, an entire abandonment of the trade, as being too difficult and hazardous to be pursued. If such be the case, which, the Committee have reason to believe, it really is, it would seem to be impossible, that the National Government, consistently with its original and constantly avowed policy regarding the foreign slave trade, consistently with its own dignity, and a just concern for the maintenance of a long series of laws of its own enactment, can now hesitate, as to the expediency of appropriating such slight means as have been adverted to, for the accomplishment of so great and glorious an object.

But there are other circumstances intimately connected



with this subject, which, in the view of the Committee, are also worthy of special consideration. The prayer of the memorialists is not confined, exclusively, to the matter of the foreign slave trade. They ask, also, that the potent arm of the General Government may be extended towards Africa, for the protection and encouragement of a legitimate and valuable commerce, already subsisting in a degree, and which might be carried on to an almost indefinite extent, between the western ports on that continent, and those of the United States. In reference to this object, a variety of well-vouched statistical papers were produced before the Committee, which served to show satisfactorily, that the commerce alluded to, even now, whilst but in its infancy had, become a matter well deserving the serious attention of the General Government, and that, by the application of proper means of protection and encouragement it might be carried, in future, to an almost unlimited extent. It appears that, by means of the untiring zeal and efforts of the American Colonization Society, and its kindred auxiliary associations in several of the states, a considerable number of settlements or colonies have, within a few years past, been established upon the western coast of Africa, some of which have already become the theatre of extensive business operations, and all of them being now in a high degree thriving and prosperous.

These settlements lie between the two capes before mentioned, (distant from each other about 280 miles,) and contain, at this time, a free, civilized, population of about 5000 souls, consisting principally of emigrant colored people from the United States, and their children, most of whom, it is said, have obtained their freedom through the influence of the societies before mentioned.



It was stated, apparently upon competent authority, that all along upon this line of coast, are to be seen a succession of little flourishing villages, and that the principal one, Monrovia, which is called their capital, or seat of government, actually contains, at this time, not less than five hundred comfortable dwelling-houses ; that, within the compass of these settlements, there are, at this time, established, eighteen Christian churches, about forty ministers of the gospel, eight hundred professors of religion ; and that the institution of schools for the instruction of children and the improvement of adults, has always been with this people, an object of peculiar concern and attention.

It being, however, understood by the Committee, that the character of the different American Colonization Societies, their merits or demerits, the utility or inutility of their operations, upon the coast of Africa, constitute in fact, no part of the specific subjects submitted to them, according to the tenor of the memorials, they conceive it would be improper to pursue the inquiry any further, in detail, as to the purposes intended, or those that have been accomplished by means of those societies. By the terms of these memorials, it would seem to be their only object to stimulate the General Government to an exertion of its powers, for the more effectual suppression of the foreign slave trade ; and for the protection of American commerce upon the western coast of Africa ; and it is in reference, merely, to this latter branch of the subject, that the Committee now deem it essential to speak at all with regard to the present state of the settlements and improvements upon that coast. In this view, however, of the case submitted, it may be proper to add that, according to the representations made to the Committee, appa-

rently upon good authority, it appears, that the black population which has been alluded to, are, in a high degree, moral, temperate, industrious, and for the most part, actively engaged in various agricultural pursuits, which, by reason of the extraordinary fertility of the soil, are greatly productive and prosperous. It was shown, also, that the internal commerce between different points upon that coast, was by no means inconsiderable, and that, by the application of suitable means of protection, might be greatly facilitated and extended. As an example in illustration of the nature of this trade, it was stated, that a considerable number of merchant vessels of various sizes, built at the port of Monrovia, and placed under the charge and command of black agents and navigators, were constantly employed in traversing the coast, for the purpose of conveying from one port to another, various commodities of American and European production, in exchange for the gold dust, ivory, gums, drugs, palm-oil, spices, and a great variety of other valuable productions brought from the interior of that fertile region. As to the nature and extent of the trade with that coast by vessels of the United States, of Great Britain, and other foreign powers, a series of statistical estimates, were also laid before the Committee, which, it would require too much time and space here to particularize. The Committee will, however, refer to one fact among others, as having a direct bearing upon the precise matter submitted to them, and tending to show the extent of the American commerce with the Western coast of Africa, namely, that in the year 1831, eleven sail of vessels were despatched from the single port of Philadelphia, to Liberia, and that the export of African productions, such as have been alluded to, from the single port of Monrovia, during that year, was about \$200,000.



It was stated, however, that subsequently, this trade had, in a considerable degree declined; that the appalling event, which, about this time, ensued, of the capture and destruction of the colonial schooner, *Mesurado*, and the murder of her crew, by slavers on the coast, and the circumstance moreover, that no sufficient effort was made, from any quarter, to bring these marauders, assassins, to punishment, had, very naturally, given an alarm, as well to our own merchants, as to the colonists, theretofore engaged in a legitimate trade on the coast, and been the means of discouraging them from the prosecution of their usual course of commerce.

It is believed, that the occasional employment, by the United States, of a small naval force, upon this coast, for the protection of this commerce, would have the effect to revive and extend it, so that it would speedily become a source of immense profit, and advantage, in many other respects, to the nation.

In fine, upon a careful consideration of the case submitted, and of all the facts and circumstances disclosed at the hearing, the Committee are of opinion that the subject is highly deserving the serious and immediate attention of the national government. They have therefore, agreed to recommend for adoption, the following Resolves.

All which is respectfully submitted,

Per order of the Committee,

GEO. BLAKE, *Chairman.*





## Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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In the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty-Nine.

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### R E S O L V E S

#### Concerning the Foreign Slave Trade.

1. *Resolved*, That the continued pursuit of the foreign Slave Trade, by citizens of the United States, is a reproach to themselves and to their country; and that all practicable means ought immediately to be adopted by the general government, for putting an end to this foul and disgraceful traffic.

2. *Resolved*, That although the existing laws of the United States, upon this subject, are, in themselves, so far as mere legislation can go, abundantly sufficient, yet, that, for several years past, they have been, and are, now almost entirely inoperative, and void, by reason of there not having been exercised a competent physical power for their enforcement.

3. *Resolved*, That the cause of humanity, the honor of the nation, and a due regard for the majesty of laws of its own enactment, imperiously demand the immediate employment of a competent naval force, as the only means of giving to them their proper power and effect.

4. *Resolved*, That the commerce now subsisting between the ports of the United States, and the western coast of Africa, especially as this commerce might by the exercise of proper means, be extended and improved, is an object well deserving the attention and protection of the general government: and that the same force which may be employed for the more effectual suppression of the slave trade, would, at the same time, with but little additional expense, be the means of affording such protection.

5. *Resolved*, That His Excellency the Governor be requested to transmit a copy of these Resolves to each of our Senators and Representatives in Congress.