

APPENDIX B

BIAS STANLEY AND WILLIAM LANSON:
PETITION AGAINST A LEGISLATIVE ACT,
OCTOBER 1815¹

To the Honourable General Assembly now sitting at New Haven The Petition of Bias Stanley & William Lanson, both of New Haven & men of colour humbly sheweth

That your Petitioners although of African descent are both free & native of the State of Connecticut; that they sustain a fair character for sobriety & integrity and are "persons of a quiet & peaceable behaviour & civil conversation;" that by their industry & frugality they have been enabled to amass a small portion of property sufficient to purchase for each of them a comfortable home, & to qualify them for freemen; that while acquiring their property they were assured by a public act of this State passed as early as 1639 that all such inhabitants of this State without exception as are twenty one years of age, have the requisite property, & are persons of a quiet & peaceable behaviour may be admitted & made free of this State;² that by the second section of the act in addition to the Act regulating elections passed May Session 1814 it is enacted that no person shall be admitted a freeman of this State unless in addition to the qualifications already required by law he be a free white male person; that by this act, they & the other black men of this State, are singled out from the other citizens & deprived of a privilege which probably every member of this Honourable Assembly considers one of the highest privileges of a free citizen; ~~that in the year 1775 that no compensation has~~ privileges or immunities of any kind, have hitherto been ~~made~~ granted them as a compensation for this disfranchisement; that in the year 1775 when the rights of white men were in jeopardy from the encroachments of the Parliament of England this Honourable Legislature declared publicly & solemnly before God & Man that the right of

1. This petition, from two free African Americans in New Haven, protested an act passed at the May 1814 legislative session and printed above, pp. 49, 49n. The document can be found in Rejected Bills, Box 2, 1815, folder 19, doc. 45; it is the first of a number of similar petitions submitted to the Assembly between 1814 and 1864: Bruce P. Stark, *Finding Aid to the Rejected Bills, 1808-1870...* (Hartford, 1999), p. 5.

2. For the basic law on qualifications for freemen, dating from the early years of the colony, see *Stat. Conn., 1808*, pp. 356-57n, 357.

representation was inseparable from the liability to taxation & to prove the sincerity & importance of the declaration sealed it with blood;³ that some years since the legislature of Massachusetts disfranchised all the [illegible] people of colour in that state as they are now disfranchised in Connecticut; that Capt. Paul Cuffee [illegible] who ~~though a black man~~ is well known by reputation to this Honourable Assembly & who your Petitioners are proud to say is a black man petitioned that Honourable Legislature & ~~obtained from~~ procured for all people of colour in that State an entire exemption from taxes;⁴ that in several of the Southern States if not in all particularly in the State of South Carolina ~~free~~[?] black men are exempted by law from taxes on the express ground that they are not admitted to the privileges of citizens;⁵ that your Petitioners are not prepared to believe that ~~the~~ Legislatures of South Carolina & Massachusetts or the Legislature of Connecticut in 1775 were more ready to perform a plain act of justice than this Honourable Assembly; that, while they remember that God hath made of one blood all the nations of men, they are well aware that the feelings and prejudices of this community are ~~such~~ so strong respecting the descendents of Africans that ~~they~~ your Petitioners will not complain of their disfranchisement nor ask this Honourable Body to repeal the Law in question; that they feel authorized, however, (while they submit thus to be disfranchised without any fault on their part, & while they can have no representative here to plead their cause,) to come before this Honourable Legislature & ask what they believe to be a plain act of justice, an act which the Legislature of Connecticut & the Legislatures of all the old Thirteen States repeatedly & solemnly

3. During the early years of the Revolution the Assembly had several times committed itself to the creed of "no taxation without representation." *C.R.*, XIV, 347–48, XV, 18–21.

4. The proposed but rejected Massachusetts constitution of 1778 would have disfranchised negroes, mulattos, and Indians. In 1780 Paul Cuffe (1759–1817) and other free blacks had petitioned the Massachusetts General Assembly for relief, making the argument of no taxation without representation. The new state constitution of 1780 dropped the racially exclusionary language about the franchise, and African Americans were able to exercise the vote in some places in the state during subsequent years, despite continuing prejudice and hostility. Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago and London, 1961), pp. 16, 91–92; Lamont D. Thomas, *Rise to be a People: A Biography of Paul Cuffe* (Urbana and Chicago, 1986), pp. 8–12; James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700–1860* (New York and Oxford, 1997), pp. 70, 167–70.

5. The exclusion of free blacks from the vote in the Southern states is discussed in Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage: From Property to Democracy, 1760–1860* (Princeton, 1960), pp. 15, 115, and Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1974), pp. 8, 90–91, 190–91. The most recent iteration of South Carolina's constitutional restriction of the vote to free white males can be found in the state's 1790 constitution, Art. I, Sec 4.

declared to be in such a sense an act of justice that they would not relinquish it but with life.

Wherefore they pray this Honourable Assembly in behalf of themselves & the rest of the men of colour in the State of Connecticut to take their case into consideration, & on finding the representation herein made to be true to enact that the people of colour throughout this State shall be exempted from taxes; not merely from taxes on their polls, but likewise from all taxes whatsoever on their property & [illegible] occupations; & ~~they beg leave to~~ believing & respectfully ~~to~~ suggesting that there is no class of men in this community who if such an ~~compensation~~ exemption were offered them as compensation for disfranchisement would consent to be disfranchised; or if this may not be done ~~they~~ your Petitioners pray this honourable assembly in some other way to grant them relief & they as in duty bound will ever pray &c.

BIENS [*sic*] STANLEY

WILLIAM LANSON

By Dwight Attorney

General Assembly Octo. Session

In the House of Reps. The further consideration of this petition is referred to the General Assembly to be holden in Hartford in May next.

Attest S.P. STAPLES Clk.

Concurred in the Upper House.

Attest THOMAS DAY Secy.

~~Petition of~~ Bias Stanley & Wm. Lanson's Memorial [illegible] No. 26 October 1815. H.R. Cd. U.H.C.

Bias Stanley &c. memorial