

REVIEW

***All Men Free and Brethren. Essays on the History of African American Freemasonry.* Edited by Peter P. Hinks and Stephen Kantrowitz. Foreword by Leslie A. Lewis. Ithaca, US and London: Cornell University Press, 2013. 262 pages. ISBN-10: 0-8014-5030-6; ISBN-13: 978-0-8014-5030-3.**

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Compared to the number of scientific studies devoted to white American freemasonry, the historiography of black freemasonry (named after Prince Hall, its founder in Boston in 1784), is relatively recent, making this collection of essays particularly precious to all those who have an interest in black culture, all the more so as it is edited by two well-known specialists of African American history, Peter P. Hinks, a public historian, editor and teacher, and Stephen Kantrowitz, Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, whose main works include *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (Hinks, 1997) and *More Than Freedom: Fighting for Black Citizenship in a White Republic, 1829-1889* (Kantrowitz, 2012). In his foreword, Leslie A. Lewis, Grand Master of the Prince Hall Masons in Massachusetts, acknowledges the outstanding quality of the essays. The authors, who have all kept their liberty of judgment, explore primary sources, both Masonic and non Masonic, available in specialized libraries such as the Lexington Van Gorden-Williams Library (which holds the minutes of the first two African Lodges, in Boston and Philadelphia), the Livingston Masonic Library in New York, the Iowa Masonic Library, the New York Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (hosting the Harry Williamson Fund) or municipal and church archives. Detailed endnotes for each chapter provide the biographical data. A chronology of major events, a glossary of basic Masonic terminology, a list of the major repositories of Prince Hall Masonic History will be useful to specialists who want to follow this track of research as well as to the general public.

The eight authors study Prince Hall freemasonry in the general context of abolition and emancipation, from American independence to the Civil war, the reconstruction period and the first half of the twentieth century. To quote Hinks and Kantrowitz, “Black

freemasonry remained a school of leadership and a vehicle for collective expression outside the channels of formal politics” (Introduction, p.17). Each chapter highlights instances of the interaction between fraternalism and black emancipation in the United States thus showing that Prince Hall masonry was instrumental in forming an elite eager to promote the rights of the black community.

Chernoy M. Sesay cross-examines the Boston Taking Books, i.e. the complete tax list, the church records and newspaper accounts between 1775 and 1800 and the first list of members of the African lodge to provide a prosopography of black Masonry in Boston, pointing out that some members were servants, sextons or cooks (Prince Hall worked as a cook at some point), some holding a small estate while others were quite destitute.

Peter P. Hinks focuses on black freemasonry among the abolitionists of the antebellum era and more particularly on the central role of John T. Hilton (1784-1860), the Master of the African Lodge and future Grand Master of the African Grand Lodge N°459. While gratefully acknowledging the original filiation to the Grand Lodge of England, in the absence of returns from the 1813 United Grand Lodge of England, Hilton published a Declaration of Independence in the Boston press (Boston, June 26, 1827, fully reproduced in Appendix A) establishing the full sovereignty of the African Lodge, thus asserting once and for all the full regularity of all the Prince Hall lodges. Incidentally, as Hinks explains, the declaration came out four years after the Grand Lodge of Haiti declared its independence vis à vis all foreign Grand Lodges and barely one month before slavery was officially abolished in the state of New York. Hilton who actively supported Haiti, both politically and from a Masonic point of view, advocated the abolition of slavery throughout America, a turning point he envisioned as “a new era in the moral World” (p.57). In 1847 he became the first Grand Master of the controversial National Grand Lodge or Compact Grand Lodge, meant to federate all the Prince Hall Grand Lodges and to provide black masons with a powerful organization to promote black emancipation in the broader American context.

Julie Winch endeavours to put faces to the names of the members of the Philadelphia African Lodge, through studying press reports of the marches of the lodge throughout the city, the contents of the libraries owned by individual masons as well as the lodge minutes. She identifies sailors, craftsmen, nailmakers but also preachers (Richard Allen Absalom Jones) as well as representatives of the burgeoning African American middle class.

Corey D.B. Walker studies the rhetoric of Prince Hall’s addresses to his lodge to prove that the language used “advanced a broader concept of the nation and citizenship in American democracy” (p.85).

Stephen Kantrowitz explores the internal struggles within the National Grand Lodge while the black Masons had to face the racism of the white Grand Lodges. Although St

Andrew's lodge, the historical lodge in revolutionary Boston, initiated a black man in 1867, the following year the white Grand Lodge of Massachusetts rejected the petition sent by Lewis Hayden in the name of 250 Prince Hall Masons asking for the recognition of their Grand Lodge.

Brittney C. Cooper focuses on the order of the Eastern Star and the battle for women's leadership among the black brethren, paying special attention to the character of Grand Matron Joe Brown, who associated her fight for women's agency in Masonry to the civil rights movement as she was heavily involved in the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). Brown contends that studying women's involvement in fraternal organizations helps assess the importance of race and gender in the early twentieth century.

David Hackett, by exploring the personality and achievement of James Walker Hood (1831-1918), a Grand Master of the North Carolina Grand Lodge and a bishop within the AMEZ (African Methodist Episcopal Zion) Church highlights the close relationship between of African American lodges and churches at the turn of the twentieth century.

Martin Summers examines the different responses brought by black Freemasons to white exclusion from the 1860s to the 1940s, i.e. the consolidation of separate Masonic institutions but also communication through the press. Thus in 1904, the Colored American Magazine started a column entitled "Masonic department", entirely devoted to Prince Hall events.

Hinks and Kantrowitz achieve no small feat in bringing together eight self-contained pieces into a convincing and harmonious whole, a multi-authored book with a common purpose, proving the major role played by black Freemasons in providing the African American community with an elite, sometimes with leaders, and building the American nation at large.