

Statement of C. Fred Kleinknecht
Former Sovereign Grand Commander
Scottish Rite Masons, Southern Jurisdiction
Before the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission
On S. 2495, the National Liberty Memorial Act
June 27, 2006

Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission, over a year ago when my son Scott told me about Maurice Barboza's efforts to preserve land on the Mall for a memorial to African Americans of the Revolutionary war era, I saw this as an opportunity to renew my personal efforts at unity within the Masonic family. I was honored to join the Board of Directors and chair its Finance Committee. Scott and my daughter-in-law Ellen run a business in Laurel, Maryland with over 400 employees. The majority of those employees, including executives and managers, are African Americans. In much the same way they impress the importance of unity on the company's employees, I tried to instill unity between black and white Masonic Orders.

The Prince Hall Masons represent thousands of African American Masons and was founded by Prince Hall, a soldier in the Revolutionary war. He was one of several African Americans already serving in the Army who protested the initial directives to exclude them from service in a meeting with General Washington on July 3, 1775. Their petition to permit the enlistment of free blacks was granted on December 10, 1775. That would lead to the service of thousands of black soldiers and sailors, including slaves who received there freedom as a condition of service.

In 1775 Prince Hall and 14 other African Americans were initiated into a British military lodge, and in 1784 they were granted a charter to operate their own lodge, as they were generally unwelcome in the mainstream American Lodges. In 1827 they formed a separate Lodge, and the result would be that the 1.5 million Masons in the U.S. whose backgrounds were largely European would be cut off from their African American brethren for more than 200 years. While our nation has seen many changes following World War II, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which altered the way Americans of all races interact with one another, particularly in schools, universities, hospitals, employment, and especially the military, our churches, and some of our largest institutions, such as the Masonic Order, were only slowly unifying.

This is clearly evident in the District of Columbia, which is part of the Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction. The Prince Hall Masons here are large and active, as is the Scottish Rite Order. I felt it was time to begin what could be a long, slow process toward unification. One of the things that I did was to officially present a copy of our revised standard Pike ritual to the Supreme Councils of Prince Hall Scottish Rite Freemasonry and to initiate on-going communications and activities between the two groups. Many past and current members of Congress are Masons. Many of our most illustrious founding fathers, such as Benjamin Franklin and John Hancock, as well as fourteen Presidents were Masons. In the dozen or more meetings Liberty Fund D.C. has had with staff and members of Congress, I have tried to impress on those Masons the common nature of this history.

From the first musket fire on the road between Lexington and Concord, and continuing through the end of the Revolutionary war, the struggle for Independence and liberty was a joint venture of whites, African Americans and Indians. I think that the National Liberty Memorial will begin to tell these important stories until they become so rooted in

future generations that the tendency toward unity, rather than separation, will grow stronger at a more rapid pace.

In June of 1985, Charles F. Bates, then Grand Master of the Prince Hall Masons of the District of Columbia, and Earle L. Bradford, then chairman of the Steering Committee of the Conference of Prince Hall Grand Masters testified before a committee in the House of Representatives on legislation to set aside land on the Mall at Constitution Gardens for the special Americans to be honored by the National Liberty Memorial, including Prince Hall and his son Primus.

Grand Master Bradford said, "As Prince Hall Masons throughout this country and abroad, we have pledged ourselves to defend and protect the Constitution, its Bill of Rights, and to work toward the goal of one Nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all." As a veteran of World War II, I was witness to this devotion.

Finally, Grand Master Bates said, "Too long have blacks felt like outsiders in their own country. Their contributions compare favorably with any other group." I believe that in the National Liberty Memorial, their contributions to enduring principles and Independence will ring loudly in the memorial's relationship to other symbols on the Mall. Like the striker in a bell alternating from one side to the other to create sound, this memorial will redefine, clarify and uplift -- for Americans who have felt left out -- those historically-central symbols of our democracy, including the Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial and Memorial to the 56 Signers of the Declaration of Independence.