

Butler Lodge Short Takes Volume VI

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Prince Hall Masonry

Not only was Freemasonry the first social group open to both members of nobility and commoners, but it was also the first to admit men of any race or religion. That said, it was still a product of the eighteenth century and thus suffered from eighteenth century passions and prejudices. In the United States (which was under English Masonic jurisdiction until after the Revolutionary War) there was no prohibition against free blacks from joining a Lodge; however, because it requires a unanimous, secret ballot to admit new members, free blacks often found it difficult to be accepted into Lodges. Regardless, it was able to happen.

On March 6th, 1775, Prince Hall, a free black man, was initiated along with fourteen others into Lodge 441, an Irish Military Lodge attached to the 38th Foot Regiment at Fort William (now Fort Independence) alongside Boston Harbor. The men were given all three Masonic degrees in a single night and were granted a special dispensation that allowed them to form their own Lodge – African Lodge No. 1 – but this dispensation did not allow them to initiate new members. Other free blacks were required to be initiated in a different Lodge before they could join African Lodge No. 1. By the end of the Revolution War, African Lodge No. 1 had thirty-three members.

Before the War of Independence, all Lodges in the Americas were chartered under the authority of the Grand Lodge of England. After the war, states began forming their own Grand Lodges (sometimes more than one) as well as administering and charting new Lodges in their territory. Despite operating for more than a decade, Prince Hall and African Lodge No. 1 did not receive a new charter from either of the two Grand Lodges in Massachusetts. After various failed negotiations, Prince Hall wrote and received a charter from the Grand Lodge of England (although it took three years to arrive) and started operating as Lodge No. 459 on May 6th, 1787. Prince Hall died in 1807.

Between 1792 and 1813, Lodge No. 459 chartered two additional African Lodges in the United States. After years of disputes with the Grand Lodge of England, Lodge No. 459 broke off and formed its own Grand Lodge in 1827, which has remained independent ever since. They are now referred to as "Prince Hall" Lodges or "Prince Hall Masonry." Currently, there are around 4,000 Prince Hall Lodges—mostly in the United States—with approximately 250,000 members.

Prince Hall Lodges are recognized by most other "mainstream" Masonic Lodges, and Masons from Prince Hall Lodges can join any of the coordinate or appendant Masonic Groups. Membership in Prince Hall (or any Masonic Lodge) is not limited by race, but many African American Masons tend to drift toward Prince Hall Lodges and its rich history and legacy.

Editor's Note: Lodges in the American colonies were chartered under the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland, Ireland, and France; not just England. But the interaction between Prince Hall and his Brothers were exclusively with the Grand Lodge of England. At this time of this publication, all but three U.S. State Grand Lodges recognize their Prince Hall counterpart.

The Illuminati: The Original James Bond Villain

The Bavarian Illuminati, made famous from Dan Brown's best-selling novel *Angels and Demons*, is without a doubt the most iconic villainous organization that ever hit pop culture. Although the group has been disbanded for more than two-hundred years it has not stopped generations of authors, conspiracy theorists, and media professionals from blaming the organization for any event ranging from the French Revolution to the foundation of the World Bank. However, these accusers do have one thing right: at the time of its creation, the goal of the Illuminati was world domination, despite approaching this in a very comical and ridiculous manner.

The Illuminati was created in Bavaria Germany in 1776 by Adam Weishaupt, a professor of Catholic canon law at Ingolstadt University. Weishaupt believed that through the possession and control of information he could create a perfect utopian society. Like a James Bond super villain, he set about this task and incidentally created the "Bund der Perfektibilisten" (Covenant of Perfectibility).

Weishaupt's first task was to infiltrate a local Masonic Lodge and recruit its members into his new ultrasecret society. Soon, the name was changed to "Illuminatenorden" (Order of Illuminati).

The Illuminati's model to achieve world domination was to infiltrate its members into all echelons of society and create an "information superhighway" back to Weishaupt, who would use the information to influence and shape society. They never formed a militant arm, however; and at its peak the Illuminati boasted no more than 2,000 members, but did manage to spread into several surrounding countries.

In 1784, less than eight years after its founding, internal conflicts and disputes between Weishaupt and Adolph Knigge arose. Things quickly fell apart. The group's intentions were discovered and declared illegal – its members were arrested and Weishaupt was driven into exile. By 1800, the Illuminati was all but extinct, leaving Weishaupt in disgrace. He lived for more than thirty years after the dissolution of his group.

The Bavarian Illuminati might have remained nothing more than a historical footnote if it had not been for its proximity to the French Revolution and the American Revolution. As the French Revolution's reign of terror ended with more than 40,000 executions (approximately 17,000 of them by guillotine) French society, unable to cope with its own responsibility for the hysteria, quickly accused the Illuminati as the impetus behind the revolution and subsequent reign of terror. Although no documented evidence has ever been produced establishing a connection between the two, the Illuminati legend was born.

Several groups claiming to be the remnants of the Bavarian Illuminati have formed and disbanded throughout the years, but none have been able to prove an authentic link to Weishaupt's original group. In hindsight, the Illuminati's goals seem rather ludicrous, but have ultimately provided pop culture with generations of theorist fodder.

SPECIAL NOTE: Despite what is believed today, The Athena owl, and not the Eye of Providence, was the original symbol of the Illuminati.

Are There Female Freemasons?

Since its development during a time period when women were considered property, Freemasonry has remained an exclusively male fraternity. Although there are officially sanctioned female Masonic groups – the Order of the Eastern Star, International Order of the Rainbow for Girls, and Job's Daughters International – these are deemed appendant bodies and members are not regarded as Freemasons.

Women have sought admission into the Lodges from the very beginning. The creation of the adjoining female groups was a way to temporarily appease this desire, but the aspiration to be actual Freemasons was eventually too great to resist – by the late 1800s, female and co-ed Lodges began appearing in both Europe and the United States. Unlike most contemporary fraternal organizations, Freemasonry falls outside of modern copyright laws, making its symbols and foundational texts subject to public domain. Legally, anyone can call themselves a Freemason and set up their own "Lodge"; however, to counter these unauthorized Lodges, mainstream Masonic Lodges have adopted a worldwide system of recognition called "regularity."

What is Regularity?

Based on an unwritten but fairly uniform set of guidelines, Grand Lodges recognize other Grand Lodges by declaring them either regular or irregular (clandestine). Freemasons from regular Lodges are universally forbidden from visiting or communing with irregular Lodges; there is also no official communication between regular and irregular Lodges; irregular Lodges are to be treated as if they do not exist.

This informal system of recognition was not designed solely to keep women out of Freemasonry, but preferably to curb attempts from individuals or groups aiming to profit

from posing as the legitimate fraternity. It also has the benefit of keeping the rituals and traditions uniform throughout the world.

As mentioned previously, women have been organizing themselves into Masonic Lodges since the late 1800s. The Grand Orient of France - the oldest Masonic organization in continental Europe – allows both men and women to join. "The Honorable Order of American Co-Masonry, The American Federation of Human Rights" headquartered in Larkspur, Colorado, has been in operation for more than a century.

At the time of this writing, neither the Grand Orient of France nor any other Masonic groups that admits women are considered "regular" by the majority of the world's grand Lodges, and therefore official visitation is banned.

Katie M. Cumsille, the Secretary General of the "Honorable Order of American Co-Masonry, The American Federation of Human Rights," whom was interviewed for this article, tells that the AFHR

"...is not, and has never collectively sought reorganization from other mainstream Grand Lodges."

In all other respects these groups consider themselves to be regular Freemasons, even if they are not recognized by the other larger groups.