

**Petition by African Americans for Freedom
to the Massachusetts Council and the House of Representatives (1777)**

In 1773, Prince Hall, a free African American living in Boston, had begun a petition campaign to persuade the Massachusetts legislature to end slavery in the colony. Though his earlier petitions had gone unanswered, he and a group of seven other black Massachusettsans submitted this petition to the legislators in 1777. The petition was signed by Hall and seven other Black men. Four of the eight signers (including Hall) were free, but the status of the other four signers has not been determined.

To the Honorable Council and House of Representatives for the State of Massachusetts-Bay in General Court assembled January 13th, 1777. The Petition of a great number of Negroes who are detained in a state of Slavery in the Bowels of a free and Christian Country Humbly Shewing:

That your Petitioners apprehend that they have, in common with all other Men, a natural and unalienable right to that freedom, which the great Parent of the Universe hath bestowed equally on all Mankind, and which they have never forfeited by any compact or agreement whatever— But they were unjustly dragged, by the cruel hand of Power, from their dearest friends, and some of them even torn from the embraces of their tender Parents, from a populous, pleasant and plentiful Country—and in Violation of the Laws of Nature and of Nation and in defiance of all the tender feelings of humanity, brought hither to be sold like Beasts of Burden, and like them condemned to slavery for Life—Among a People professing the mild Religion of Jesus—A People not insensible of the sweets of rational freedom—Nor without spirit to resent the unjust endeavors of others to reduce them to a State of Bondage and Subjection.

Your Honors need not to be informed that a Life of Slavery, like that of your petitioners, deprived of every social privilege, of every thing requisite to render Life even tolerable, is far worse than Non-Existence—In imitation of the laudable example of the good People of these States, your Petitioners have long and patiently waited the event of Petition after Petition by them presented to the legislative Body of this State, and can not but with grief reflect that their success has been but too similar.

They can not but express their astonishment, that it has never been considered, that every principle from which America has acted in the course of her unhappy difficulties with Great-Britain, pleads stronger than a thousand arguments in favor of your Petitioners.

They therefore humbly beseech your Honors, to give this Petition its due weight and consideration, and cause an Act of the Legislature to be passed, whereby they may be restored to the enjoyment of that freedom which is the natural right of all Men—and their Children (who were born in this Land of Liberty) may not be held as Slaves after they arrive at the age of twenty one years.

So may the Inhabitants of this State (no longer chargeable with the inconsistency of acting, themselves, the pan which they condemn and oppose in others) be prospered in their present glorious struggles for liberty; and have those blessings secured to them by Heaven, of which benevolent minds can not wish to deprive their fellow Men.

And your Petitioners, as in Duty Bound shall ever pray.

Prince Hall

Lancaster Hill
Peter Bess
Brister Slenser
Jack Pierpont
Nero Funelo
Newport Sumner
Job Look