

African Americans Petition for Freedom, 1777 (excerpt)

To the Honorable Counsel & House of [Representa]tives for the State of Massachusitte in General Court assembled, Jan. 13, 1777.

The petition of A Great Number of Blackes detained in a State of slavery in the Bowels of a free & Christian Country Humbly shuwith that your Petitioners apprehend that they may have in Common with all other men a Natural and Unalienable Right to that freedom which the Grat Parent of the Unavers hath Bestowed equalley on all menkind and which they have Never forfuted by any Compact of agreement whatever—but thay wher Unjustly Dragged by the hand of cruel Power from their Derest friends and sum of them Even torn from the Embraces of their tender Parents—from A populous Pleasant and plentiful contry and in violation of Laws of Nature and off Nations and in defiance of all the tender feelings of humanity Brough[t] hear Either to Be sold Like Beast of Burthen & Like them Condemned to Slavery for Life—Among a People Profesing the mild Religion of Jesus A people Not Insensible of the Secrets and Rationable being Nor without spirit to Resent the unjust endeavours of others to Reduce them to a state of Bondage and Subjection your honouer Need not to be informed that A Life of Slavery Like that of your petitioners Deprived of Every thing Requisite to Render Life Tolable is far worse than Nonexistence.

[In Imitat]ion of the Lawdable Example of the Good People of these States your petitioners have Long and Patiently waited the Evnt of petition after petition By them presented to the Legislative Body of this state and cannot but with Grief Reflect that their Success hath ben but too similar they cannot but express their Astonishment that It has Never Bin Considered that Every Principle from which Amarica has Acted in the Cours of their unhappy Deficulates with Great Briton Pleads Stronger than A thousand arguments in favowrs of your petitioners they therfor humble Beseech your honours to give this peti[ti]on its due weight & consideration and cause an act of the Legislatur to be past Wherby they may Be Restored to the Enjoyments of that which is the Naturel Right of all men—and their Children who wher Born in this Land of Liberty may not be heald as Slaves after they arrive at the age of Twenty one years so may the Inhabitance of thes Stats no longer chargeable with the inconsistancy of acting themselves the part which they condem and oppose in other Be prospered in their present Glorious struggle for Liberty and have those Blessing to them, & c.

Excerpted from: Donald McQuade et. al. (eds.), *The Harper American Literature* 2nd ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1990).