

Prince Hall's Petition to the Massachusetts Legislature, February 27, 1788

To the honourable the senate and house of representatives of the commonwealth of Massachusetts, in general court assembled, on the 27th February, 1788. The petition of a great number of blacks, freemen of said commonwealth,

Humbly sheweth,

That your petitioners are justly alarmed at the inhuman and cruel treatment that three of our brethren, free citizens of the town of Boston, lately received. A captain, under pretence that his vessel was in distress on an island below in this harbour, having got them on board, put them in irons, and carried them off from their wives and children, to be sold for slaves; this being the unhappy state of these poor men, what can your petitioners expect but to be treated in the same manner by the same sort of men? What then are our lives and liberties worth, if they may be taken away in such a cruel and unjust manner as this? May it please your honours, we are not insensible, that the good laws of this state, forbid all such bad actions; notwithstanding, we can assure your honours, that many of our free blacks, that have entered on board vessels as seamen, have been sold for slaves; and some of them we have heard from, but know not who carried them way. Hence it is, that many of us, who are good seamen, are obliged to stay at home through fear, and one half of our time loiter about the streets, for want of employ; whereas if they were protected in that lawful calling, they might get a handsome livelihood for themselves and theirs, which, in the situation they are now in, they cannot. One thing more we would beg leave to hint: that is, that your petitioners have, for some time past, beheld with grief, ships cleared out from this harbour for Africa, and there they either steal, or cause others to steal, our brothers and sisters, fill their ships' holds full of unhappy men and women crouded together, then set out to find the best market, to sell them there, like sheep for the slaughter, and then return here, like honest men, after having sported with the lives and liberty of their fellow-men; and at the same time call themselves christians. Blush, O heavens, at this! These our weighty grievances, we cheerfully submit to your honours, without dictating in the least, knowing by experience that your honours have, and we trust ever will, in your wisdom, do us that justice that our present

condition requires, as God and the good laws of this commonwealth shall dictate to you.
And as in duty bound, your petitioners shall ever pray.

PRINCE HALL

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