

**LANCASTER HILL, PETER BESS, BRISTER SLENSER,  
PRINCE HALL, ET AL.  
(fl. 1777)**

“The Petition of a Great Number of Negroes Who Are Detained in a State of  
Slavery” (January 13, 1777)

To the Honorable Council & 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 & Christian Country, Humbly Showing—

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, & 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—& in Violation of the Laws of Nature & of Nation & in defiance of all the  
tender feelings of humanity, brought hither to be sold like Beasts of Burden, & 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 & Subjection—

Your Honors need not 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 United States,  
your Petitioners have long & patiently waited the event of Petition after Petition by them  
presented to the Legislative Body of this State, [Massachusetts], & 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, & 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—& 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  
part which they condemn & oppose in others) be prospered in their present glorious struggles for  
liberty; & have those blessings secured to them by Heaven, of which benevolent minds can not  
wish to deprive their fellow Men.