

“Prince Hall, Petition to the General Court of Massachusetts” Printed in *The Independent Gazetteer; or The Chronicle of Freedom*, April 12, 1788

Image

N E W - Y O R K, April 8.

The following is a copy of a petition presented to the General Court of Massachusetts, by a free negro in the town of Boston.

To the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Bay, in General Court assembled, on the 27th February, 1788.

The Petition of a great number of *Blacks*, Freemen of this 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. The 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 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 honors, we are not insensible, that the good laws of this state forbid all such bad actions; notwithstanding, we can assure your honors, that many of our free blacks, that have entered on board of vessels, as seamen, have been sold for slaves; and some of them we have heard from, but know not who carried them away. Hence it is, that many of us, who are good seamen, are obliged to stay at home through fear, and the one half of our time loiter about the streets, for want of employ, whereas if they were protected in that 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, and fill their ships holds full of unhappy men and women, crowded 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 honors, without dictating in the least, knowing by experience that your honors 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 you.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners shall ever pray.

P R I N C E H A L L.

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(The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09728)

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Transcript

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Petition, 1 page.

[Excerpt]

NEW-YORK April 8.

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PRINCE HALL