

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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MISSION 1: "For Crown or Colony?"

Slaves Petition the Massachusetts Legislature, 1777

This petition to the Massachusetts legislature was drafted by Prince Hall, a free African American who fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill, on behalf of the state's enslaved people. Throughout the revolutionary era, scores of slaves signed petitions that linked their demands for freedom with the cause of American independence.

To the Honorable Counsel & House of Representatives for the State of Massachusetts in General Court Assembled, January 13, 1777:

The petition of a great number of blacks detained in a state of slavery in the bowels of a free & Christian country humbly show that your petitioners [state] that they have in common with all other men a natural and inalienable right to that freedom which the Great Parent of the Universe has bestowed equally on all mankind and which they have never forfeited by any compact or agreement whatever. They were unjustly dragged by the hand of cruel 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 laws of nature and of nations, and in defiance of all the tender feelings of humanity brought here to be sold like beasts of burden and like them condemned to slavery for life....

Every principle from which America has acted in the course of their unhappy difficulties with Great Britain pleads stronger than a thousand arguments in favor of your petitioners, and they, therefore humbly beseech that your honors 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 enjoyments of that which is the natural right of all men -- and their children who were born in this land of liberty -- not be held as slaves.

Source: Collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society.