

1779 Freedom Petition submitted by slaves to the New Hampshire state legislature, published in the *New-Hampshire Gazette*, July 15, 1780 (Vol. XXIV, No. 1233) Original in New Hampshire Historical Society.

Published in the *New-Hampshire Gazette*, July 15, 1780 (Vol. XXIV, No. 1233):

The following is a copy of the petition of a number of the Negroes now detained in slavery at Portsmouth, &c. lately presented the General Assembly of this State, who accordingly granted them a hearing; but, we hear, the further consideration thereof is postponed . . .

The petition of *Nero Brewster*, and others, natives of Africa, now forcibly detained in slavery, in said state, most humbly sheweth, That the God of Nature gave them life and freedom, upon terms of the most perfect equality with other men; that freedom is an inherent right of the human species, not to be surrendered, but by consent, for the sake of social life; that private or public tyranny and slavery, are alike detestable to minds conscious of the equal dignity of human nature; that in power and authority of individuals, derived solely from a principle of coercion, against the wills of individuals, and to dispose of their persons and properties, consists the completed idea of private and political slavery; that all men being amenable to the Deity for the ill improvement of the blessings of his providence, they hold themselves in duty bound, strenuously to exert every faculty of their minds, . . .; that thro' ignorance & brutish violence of their native countrymen and by similar designs of others, (who ought to have taught them better) & by the avarice of both, they, while but children, and incapable of self defense, whose infancy might have prompted protection, were seized, imprisoned, and transported from their native country, where (tho' ignorance and inchristianity prevailed) they were born free to a country, where (tho' knowledge, christianity and freedom, are their boast) they are compelled, and their unhappy posterity, to drag on their lives in miserable servitude. . . .

Permit again your humble slaves to lay before this honorable Assembly, some of those grievances which they daily experience and feel; tho' fortune hath dealt out our portions with rugged hand, yet hath she [kindled?] in the disposal of our persons to those who claim us as their property; of them, as masters, we do not complain; but, from what authority they assume the power to dispose of our lives, freedom and property, we would wish to know.—Is it from the sacred volumes of christianity? There we believe it not to be found! but here hath the cruel hand of slavery made us incompetent judges; but those, we are told, are founded in reason and justice; it cannot be found there! It is from the volumns of nature? No, here we can read with others! Of this knowledge, slavery cannot wholly deprive us; here, we know we ought to be free agents! here, we feel the dignity of human nature! here, we feel the passions and desires of men, tho' check'd by the rod of slavery! here, we feel a just equality! here, we know that the God of Nature made us free! Is their authority assumed from customs? If so, let that custom be abolished, which is not founded in nature, reason nor religion. Should the humanity and benevolence of this honorable Assembly restore us of that state of liberty of which we have been so long deprived we conceive that those, who are our present masters, will not be sufferers by our liberation, as we have most of us spent our whole strength and the prime of our lives in their service; and as freedom inspires a noble, confidence, and gives the mind an emulation to vie in the noblest efforts of enterprize, and as justice and humanity are the result of your deliberations, we fondly hope that the eye of pity and the heart of justice may commiserate our situation and put us upon the equality of free-men, and give us an opportunity of evincing to the world our love of freedom, by exerting ourselves in her cause, in opposing, the efforts of tyranny and oppression over the country in which we ourselves have been so injuriously enslaved.

Therefore, your humble slaves most devoutly pray, for the sake of insured liberty, for the sake of justice, humanity, and the rights of mankind; for the honor of religion, and by all that is dear, that your honors would graciously interpose in our behalf, and enact such laws and regulations as in your wisdom . . . we may regain our liberty and be rank'd in the class of free agents, and that the name of SLAVE may no more be heard in a land gloriously contending for the sweets of freedom; and your humble slaves as in duty bound will ever pray.

Portsmouth. Nov. 12, 1779