

## Slaves' Appeal to Thomas Gage, Royal Governor of Massachusetts, May 25, 1774

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By 1774 the American colonies were awash with claims against the British government based upon ideas of natural rights. For the most part the white leaders of the American Revolution did not see that such universal rights language reprobated slavery. Here a group of enslaved people petition the governor of Massachusetts for relief and invoke three main lines of argument against slavery. First is the language of "natural rights" - "we are a freeborn people and have never forfeited this blessing by any compact". Second, the petitioners highlight the sexual and moral outrage of slavery. Third, they cite the demands of Christian brotherhood.

Such arguments were of little avail - slavery remained in the United States for another 90 years. One of the oddities of history is that, all things being equal, if there had no been revolution, slavery would have ended much earlier. The "Land of the Free" was only free for some, whereas the exact arguments made here [natural law, moral outrage, Christian brotherhood] were successful in the British Empire in leading to a ban on slavery in 1833.

The Petition of a Grate Number of Blacks of this Province who by divine permission are held in a state of Slavery within the bowels of a free and Christian Country

Humbly Shewing

That your Petitioners apprehend we have in common with all other men a naturel right to our freedoms without Being depriv'd of them by our fellow men as we are a freeborn Pepel and have never forfeited this Blessing by aney compact or agreement whatever. But we were unjustly dragged by the cruel hand of power from our dearest frinds and sum of us stolen from the bosoms of our tender Parents and from a Populous Pleasant and plentiful country and Brought hither to be made slaves for Life in a Christian land. Thus we are deprived of every thing that hath a tendency to make life even tolerable, the endearing ties of husband and wife we are strangers to for we are no longer man and wife than our masters or mistresses thinkes proper marred or onmarred. Our children are also taken from us by force and sent maney miles from us wear we seldom or ever see them again there to be made slaves of for Life which sumtimes; is vere short by Reson of Being dragged from their mothers Breest Thus our Lives are imbittered to us on these accounts By our deplorable situation we are rendered incapable of shewing our obedience to Almighty God how can a slave perform the duties of a husband to a wife or parent to his child How can a husband leave master to work and cleave to his wife How can the wife submit themselves to there husbands in all things How can the child obey thear parents in all things. There is a great number of us sencear ... members of the Church of Christ how can the master and the slave be said to fulfil that command Live in love let Brotherly Love contuner and abound Beare yea onenothers Bordenes How can the master be said to Beare my Borden when he Beares me down whith the Have chanes of slavery and operson against my will and how can we fulfill our parte of duty to him whilst in this condition and as we cannot searve our God as we ought whilst in this situation. Nither can we reap an equal benefet from the laws of the Land which doth not justifi but condemns Slavery or if there had bin aney Law to hold us in Bondage we are Humbely of tile opinion ther never was aney to inslave our children for life when Born in a free Countrey. We therfor Bage your Excellency and Honours will give this its deer weight and

consideration and that you will accordingly cause an act of the legislative to be passed that we may obtain our Natural right our freedoms and our children be set at liberty at the year of twenty one for whomever seeks more petitioners is in Duty ever to pray.