

bay

An Act for preventing ~~the wicked & unnatural~~ practice of holding persons in Slavery

When as the practice of holding Africans & the children born of them, or any other persons ^{in Slavery} ~~is~~ ^{is} unjustifiable, ~~contrary to the laws of nature,~~ ~~scandalous to the Professors of the Religion of Jesus Christ,~~ ~~and a disgrace to all civil governments,~~ especially at a time when

~~appealing to Heaven by the sword to secure their natural~~ ~~they are asserting their natural freedom~~ ~~& unalienable Rights of human~~ ~~man~~ ~~kind~~

wherefore for preventing ^{such} a practice for the future, & establishing to every ^{Person} ~~man~~ residing within this State the invaluable blessing of Liberty - Be it enacted by the Council & House of Representatives in General Court assembled & by the Authority of the same, That all persons whether Black or other complexion, ^{above 21 years of age} now held in Slavery, shall from & after the day of ~~next~~ be free from any subjection to any master or mistress who have claimed their servitude by right of purchase, heirship, free gift, or otherwise, & they are hereby intitled to all the freedom rights, & privileges, & immunities that do, or of right ought to belong to any of the subjects of this State, any usage, or custom to the contrary notwithstanding

And be it enacted by the Authority aforesaid that all ^{written Deeds} Bargains, sales, or conveyances, ~~or other writings~~ or contracts without writing, whatsoever for conveying or transferring any property in any person ^{or to} ~~the~~ service & labour of any person who ^{that has been or hereafter shall be made} ~~is~~ ^{is} more than twenty one years of age, to a third person except by order of some Court of record, or by ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{voluntary} ~~contract~~ ^{contract} for a term ^{not} ~~not~~ ^{exceeding} ~~exceeding~~ ^{seven} ~~seven~~ ^{years} ~~years~~ of each person, has been ~~deemed~~ ^{deemed} ~~guilty~~ shall be & hereby is declared null & void.

And whereas diverse persons now have in their service Negroes, ^{Slaves or} ~~others~~, or others who have been deemed their property, ~~who~~ are now incapable of earning their living, by reason of age or infirmities, & may be desirous of continuing in the service of their masters or mistresses - be it therefore

131 therefore enacted by the Assembly aforesaid that whatever Negro or Molatto
that who shall be desirous of continuing in the service of his master or mistress
& shall voluntarily declare the same before two Justices of the County
in which said master or mistress resides, shall have a right to continue
in the service, & to a maintenance from this Master or Mistress, and if
they ^{are} incapable of earning their living shall be supported by the
said master or Mistress or their heirs during their lives, ^{Provided} anything
in this Act to the contrary notwithstanding

Provided that nevertheless that nothing in this Act shall be under-
stood to prevent any master of Vessell, or other person from
bringing into this State any persons, not Africans, from any other
part of the world except the United States of America, & selling
their service for a term of time not exceeding 5 years, if 21 years of
age, or if under 21 not exceeding the time when they he or she so brought
into the State shall be 26 years of age, to pay for & in consideration
of the transportation & other charges said master or mistress or other
person may have been at, agreeable to contracts made with the
persons so transported, or their Parents or Guardians in their be-
half, before they are brought from their own Country -

Bill. Negroes
Ordered to lie, till the
second Reading of the
Bill
Speaker of the House

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 shewing

That your Petitioners apprehend that they have, in common
with all other Men, a natural & 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
whatsoever. But they were unjustly dragged, by the cruel hands of
Power, from their dearest friends & some of them even torn from
the embraces of their tender Parents - From a populous, pleasant &
spacious Country - & in violation of the Laws of Nature & of Nations
& in defiance of all the tender feelings of humanity, brought hither
to be sold like Beasts of Burthen, & like them condemned to slavery
for life - Among a People professing the only Religion of Jesus -
A People not insensible of the sweets of rational freedom - Nor without
spirit to resent the unjust endeavours of others to reduce them to a
state of Bondage & Subjection - Your Honors need not to be informed
that a Life of Slavery, like that of your Petitioners, deprives 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 States, your Petitioners have long & patiently
waited the event of Petition after Petition by them presented to the
Legislative Body of this State, & 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 & consideration,
to make 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 preserved in their present glorious struggle for Liberty, &
have those blessings secured to them by Heaven, of which servile
minds can not wish to deprive their fellow-Men.
And your Petitioners, as in Duty bound, shall ever pray