

James Lafayette Petition for Freedom, 1786

To the honorable the Speaker & Gentlemen of the gen. Assembly,

The petition of James (a slave belonging to Will. Armistead of New Kent county) humbly sheweth: That your petitioner persuaded of the just rights which all mankind have to freedom, notwithstanding his own state of bondage, with an honest desire to serve this Country in its defence thereof did, during the ravages of Lord Cornwallis thro' this state by the permission of his Master, enter into the service of the Marquis Lafayette: That during the time of his serving the Marquis he often at the peril of his life found means to frequent the British Camp, by which means he kept open a channel of the most useful communications to the army of the state: That at different times your petitioner conveyed inclosures, from the Marquis ^{across} up to the enemies lines, of the most important kind; the possession of which if discovered on him would have most certainly endangered the life of your petitioner: That he undertook & performed all commands with cheerfulness & fidelity, in opposition to the persuasion & example of many thousands of his unfortunate condition. For proof of the above your petitioner begs leave to refer to the certificate of the Marquis Lafayette hereto annexed; After taking his case as here stated into consideration he humbly intreats that he may be granted that freedom, which he flatters himself he has in some degree contributed to establish; & which he hopes always to prove himself worthy of: nor does he desire over this inestimable favor, unless his present master from whom he has experienced every thing which can make tolerable the state of slavery, shall be made adequate compensation for the loss of an invaluable workman, which your petitioner ~~for~~ ^{humbly requests} may be done & your petitioner shall ever pray &c.

Citation: Petition of James, New Kent County, November 30, 1786, Legislative Petitions
Digital Collection, Library of Virginia.