

1761-1762. Import Duty on Slaves

Source: E. Donnan (1932/1969). *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*. NY: Octagon, v. III.

1761. Petition of the Merchants of Philadelphia

A Petition from the Merchants against the Bill for Duty on the Negroes.

To the Honorable James Hamilton, Esquire, Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Pennsylvania, etc. The Petition of Divers Merchants of the city of Philadelphia Trading to his Majesty's Colony's in the West Indies.

Humbly Sheweth: That we are informed there is now a bill before your honor for your assent, laying a duty on the importation of negroes, and that it is to take place immediately on the publication.

We, the subscribers, ever desirous to extend the Trade of this Province, have seen, for some time past, the many inconveniencys the Inhabitants have suffer'd for want of Labourers and artificers, by numbers being inlisted for His Majesty's Service, and near a total Stop to the importation of German and other white Servants, have for some time encouraged the importation of Negroes, and acquainted our friends and correspondents in several parts of His Majesty's dominions (who are no Way apprehensive of a Bill of this Nature), that an Advantage may be gained by the Introduction of Slaves, which will Likewise be a means of reducing the exorbitant price of Labour, and, in all probability, bring our Staple Commoditys to their usual prices; And as many of us have embarked in this Trade through the motives before mentioned, We humbly beg your honour will take into Consideration the hardships we shall Labour under by such a Law taking immediate effect, when we have it not in our power to countermand, our Orders or advise our friends; therefore humbly pray that such time may be allowed (before the Law takes place) as your honor shall think most Conducive to extricate your petitioners from the impending danger.

1762. Governor Josiah Hardy To The Board Of Trade, 1762. Perth Amboy Jany. 20th 1762.

My Lords, . . . I found by these minutes that they intended bringing in a bill to lay a small duty on Negroes imported into this Province, but on a message from me acquainting them that his Majesty's instructions would not allow my assenting to such a Bill, they dropt it; but at the same time they represented to me the inconvenience the Province is expoed to in lying open to the free importation of Negroes, when the Provinces on each side have laid duties on them; for which reason great Numbers of Negroes are landed in this Province every Year in order to be run into New York and Pennsylvania besides overstocking this Country with Slaves of which in the general opinion there are already too many. They have therefore desired I would lay this matter before your Lordships, as they look upon it as a great hardship, I could therefore wish Your Lordships would please to take into consideration and intercede with his Majesty to grant them such relief as in his wisdom he may think fit.

1762. John Watts to Gedney Clarke, New York, 30th March 1762

Sir, . . . He (Governor Robert Monckton) mentions to me your scheme but as I take it for granted to be now all at an end little will be necessary to say on the occasion, but that I should not have had nor still have any objection to be concerned in it, if they sell reasonable which I cannot imagine they will as things are represented to me. For this market they must be young the younger the better if not quite children, those advanced in years will never do I should imagine a cargo of them none exceeding thirty might turn out at fifty pounds a head gross sales. Males are best. Such a numbers as you mention we cannot easily vend, form fifty to a hundred would run high enough, but Virginia could take off a great many. Our duty is four pound a head from the West Indies forty shillings from Africa. New Jersey pays none at all for which reason the master might lay a mile or two below the town and send up the word. . .

1762. John Watts To Gedney Clarke, 1762. New York 3d April 1762.

Sir, . . . This will barring the Danger of Sea and Enemy, be delivered you by Capt: Joseph Bragg of the Sloop Deborah belonging to Mr: Astin. Upon considering the perplexed Circumstances I was in, I could think of no better Method than to take the Cargo to myself, a Bottomry Bill on the Sloop, for what may be about the Ballance of my Acct: and send both to you to do as you judge right and fit on all Sides; both as I understand you to be Mr. Astin's friend and as it is proper you should know the grounds upon which I proceed, I send you a Copy of Messrs: Maxwell and Udnys Letter to me and another to Capt: Lowell which paint things in such abominable Colours that I am determined to settle my Affairs with that Gentleman while it is in my Power, and decline any farther intercourse least I should hereafter be dragg'd into a repetition of these vexatious Inconsistancys.

He-first proposed that I should fit the Sloop properly for a Guinea Voyage credit him for a Loading and send her to Esequibo, she was accordingly so fitted a Cargo on board (not all that she has at present) and on the point of sailing, when I received Maxwell and Udnys Letter which put an end to that Scheme.

If this proposal faild I was next to take a freight for Barbados if such a thing could be obtained, and if that failed too and nothing better offerd I was even to return her to him in Ballast, so intent was his mind upon the Guinea Voyage after he had persuaded Capt: Braggs to undertake it, who has a thorough experience in that Business. There is a kind of intimacy between Messrs: Maxwell and Udny and Capt; Bragg, and as soon as he came to understand their representation of Mr: Astin he trembled to think of returning to Esequibo upon Mr: Astins strength only, for fear of being shut up there and both disappointed and deceivd too as he had been before, this led him willingly to throw himself upon your protection, in hopes that something more effectual might be done than he believ'd Mr: Astin could carry through. . . .