

Pesa más la libertad: Slavery, Legal Claims, and the History of Afro-Latin American Ideas
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In 1677 and 1681, four enslaved men of African descent held in a jail in Lima, Peru, sent a series of petitions requesting *amparo*, or royal protection for the vulnerable, to the highest jurisdictions in the Spanish Empire. Their final petition, written in collaboration with an unknown adviser with legal and theological knowledge and drawing upon the men's experience laboring in a hat manufactory (*obraje*) alongside Indigenous workers, argued for freedom for themselves and for all other enslaved men and women of mixed Spanish and African heritage. In that petition the men drew upon existing critiques of just war and the African slave trade, and they questioned why conversion to Christianity had not cleansed their souls of the supposed stain of Blackness. Their language suggests a world where racial theories were inverted and Black subjects understood themselves to deserve the legal status of Indians. Although the petitions were unsuccessful, the radical power of their ideas forced the monarch's Council of the Indies to respond. The documents reveal the circulation of complex antislavery arguments within an enslaved community and a shared intellectual world that included Indigenous, Black, and Spanish thinkers.