

# The Olive Branch Petition

IN CONGRESS IN PHILADELPHIA

October 26, 1774

To the King's most excellent Majesty:

MOST GRACIOUS SOVEREIGN, We, your majesty's faithful subjects, of the colonies of New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the counties of Newcastle, Kent, and Sussex on Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, on behalf of ourselves and the inhabitants of these colonies, who have deputed us to represent them in general Congress, by this our humble petition beg leave to lay our grievances before the throne.

A standing army has been kept in these colonies ever since the conclusion of the late war, without the consent of our Assemblies; and this army, with a considerable naval armament, has been employed to enforce the collection of taxes. The authority of the commander-in-chief, and under him the brigadier-general, has, in time of peace, been rendered supreme in all the civil governments of America.

The commander-in-chief of all your majesty's forces in North America has, in time of peace, been appointed governor of a colony.

The charges of usual officers have been greatly increased and new, expensive, and oppressive offices have been multiplied.

The judges of admiralty and vice-admiralty courts are empowered to receive their salaries and fees from the effects condemned by themselves.

The officers of the customs are empowered to break open and enter houses without the authority of any civil magistrate, founded on legal information.

The judges of courts of common law have been made entirely dependent on one part of the Legislature for their salaries as well as for the duration of their commissions.

Counselors, holding their commissions during pleasure, exercise legislative authority.

Humble petitions, from the representatives of the people, have been fruitless.

The agents of the people have been discountenanced, and governors have been instructed to prevent the payment of the salaries.

Assemblies have been repeatedly and injuriously dissolved.

Commerce has been burdened with many useless and oppressive restrictions.

By several acts of Parliament, made in the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth years of your majesty's reign, duties are imposed on us for the purpose of raising a revenue; and the powers of admiralty and

vice-admiralty courts are extended beyond their ancient limits, whereby our property is taken from us without our consent, the trial by jury in many civil cases is abolished, enormous forfeitures are incurred for slight offenses, vexatious informers are exempted from paying damages to which they are justly liable, and oppressive security is required from owners before they are allowed to defend their right. Both Houses of Parliament have resolved that colonists may be tried in England for offenses alleged to have been committed in America, by virtue of a statute passed in the thirty-fifth year of Henry the Eighth, and in consequence thereof attempts have been made to enforce that statute. A statute was passed in the twelfth year of your majesty's reign, directing that persons charged with committing any offense therein described, in any place out of the realm, may be indicted and tried for the same in any shire or county within the realm, whereby inhabitants of these colonies may, in sundry cases by that statute made capital, be deprived of a trial by their peers of the vicinage.

In the last session of Parliament, an act was passed for blocking up the harbor of Boston; another, empowering the governor of the Massachusetts Bay to send persons indicted for murder in that province to another colony, or even to Great Britain, for trial, whereby such offenders may escape legal punishment; a third for altering the chartered constitution of government in that province, and a fourth for altering the limits of Quebec, abolishing the English and restoring the French laws, whereby great numbers of British Frenchmen are subjected to the latter, and establishing an absolute government and the Roman Catholic religion throughout those vast regions that border on the westerly and northerly boundaries of the free, Protestant, English settlements; and a fifth for the better providing suitable quarters for officers and soldiers in his majesty's service in North America.

To a sovereign who glories in the name of Britain, the bare recital of these acts must, we presume, justify the loyal subjects who fly to the foot of his throne and implore his clemency for protection against them.

From this destructive system of colony administration, adopted since the conclusion of the last war, have flowed those distresses, dangers, fears, and jealousies that overwhelm your majesty's dutiful colonists with affliction; and we defy our most subtle and inveterate enemies to trace the unhappy differences between Great Britain and these colonies from an earlier period, or from other causes, than we have assigned.

Had they proceeded on our part from a restless levity of temper, unjust impulses of ambition, or artful suggestions of seditious persons, we should merit the opprobrious terms frequently bestowed upon us by those we revere. But, so far from promoting innovations, we have only opposed them, and can be charged with no offense unless it be one to receive injuries, and be sensible of them.

Had our Creator been pleased to give us existence in a land of slavery, the sense of our condition might have been mitigated by ignorance and habit. But, thanks be to his adorable goodness, we were born the heirs of freedom, and ever enjoyed our right under the auspices of your royal ancestors, whose family was seated on the throne to rescue and secure a pious and gallant nation from the popery and despotism of a superstitious and inexorable tyrant. Your majesty, we are confident, justly rejoices that your our title to the crown is thus founded on the title of your people to liberty; and, therefore, we

doubt not but your royal wisdom must approve the sensibility that teaches your subjects anxiously to guard the blessing they received from divine Providence, and thereby to prove the performance of that compact which elevated the illustrious house of Brunswick to the imperial dignity it now possesses.

The apprehension of being degraded into a state of servitude from the preeminent rank of English freemen, while our minds retain the strongest love of liberty, and clearly foresee the miseries preparing for us and our posterity, excites emotions in our breasts which, though we can not describe, we should not wish to conceal. Feeling as men, and thinking as subjects, in the manner we do, silence would be disloyalty. By giving this faithful information, we do all in our power to promote the great objects of your royal cares, the tranquility of your government and the welfare of your people.

Duty to your majesty, and regard for the preservation of ourselves and our posterity, the primary obligations of nature and society, command us to entreat your royal attention; and, as your majesty enjoys the signal distinction of reigning over freemen we apprehend the language of freemen will not be displeasing. Your royal indignation, we hope, will rather fall on those designing and dangerous men, who, daringly interposing themselves between your royal person and your faithful subjects, and for several years past incessantly employed to dissolve the bonds of society, by abusing your majesty's authority, misrepresenting your American subjects, and prosecuting the most desperate and irritating projects of oppression, have at length compelled us, by the force of accumulated injuries, too severe to be any longer tolerable, to disturb your majesty's repose by our complaints.

These sentiments are extorted from hearts that much more willingly would bleed in your majesty's service. Yet so greatly have we been misrepresented, that a necessity has been alleged of taking away our property from us without our consent, "to defray the charge of the administration of justice, the support of civil government, and the defense, protection, and security of the colonies." But we beg leave to assure your majesty that such provision has been and will be made for defraying the first two articles as has been and shall be judged, by the Legislatures of the several colonies, just and suitable to their respective circumstances; and, for the defense, protection, and security of the colonies, their militia, if properly regulated, as they earnestly desire may immediately be done, would be fully sufficient, at least in times of peace; and in case of war, your faithful colonists will be ready and willing, as they ever have been, when constitutionally required, to demonstrate their loyalty to your majesty, by exerting their most strenuous efforts in granting supplies and raising for ces. Yielding to no British subjects in affectionate attachment to your majesty's person, family, and government, we too dearly prize the privilege of expressing that attachment by those proofs that are honorable to the prince who receives them and to the people who give them, ever to resign it to any body of men upon earth.

Had we been permitted to enjoy in quiet the inheritance left us by our forefathers, we should at this time have been peaceably, cheerfully, and usefully employed in recommending ourselves by every testimony of devotion to your majesty, and of veneration to the state from which we derive our origin. But though now exposed to unexpected and unnatural scenes of distress by a contention with that nation in whose parental guidance, on all important affairs, we have hitherto, with filial reverence, constantly trusted, and therefore can derive no instruction in our present unhappy and perplexing circumstances from any former experience, yet we doubt not the purity of our intention and the

integrity of our conduct will justify us at that grand tribunal before which all mankind must submit to judgment.

We ask but for peace, liberty, and safety. We wish not a diminution of the prerogative, nor do we solicit the grant of any new right in our favor. Your royal authority over us, and our connection with Great Britain, we shall always carefully and zealously endeavor to support and maintain.

Filled with sentiments of duty to your majesty, and of affection to our parent state, deeply impressed by our education, and strongly confirmed by our reason, and anxious to evince the sincerity of these dispositions, we present this petition only to obtain redress of grievances and relief from fears and jealousies occasioned by the system of statutes and regulations, adopted since the close of the late war, for raising a revenue in America; extending the powers of courts of admiralty and vice admiralty; trying persons in Great Britain for offenses alleged to be committed in America, affecting the province or Massachusetts Bay; and altering the government and extending the limits of Quebec; by the abolition of which system the harmony between Great Britain and these colonies, so necessary to the happiness of both, and so ardently desired by the latter, and the intercourses will be immediately restored. In the magnanimity and justice of your majesty and Parliament, we confide for a redress of our other grievances, trusting that, when the causes of our apprehensions are removed, our future conduct will prove us not unworthy of the regard we have been accustomed, in our happier days, to enjoy; for, appealing to that Being who searches thoroughly the hearts of his creatures, we solemnly profess that our councils have been influenced by no other motives than a dread of impending destruction.

Permit us, then, most gracious sovereign, in the name of all your faithful people in America, with the utmost humility, to implore you, for the honor of Almighty God, whose pure religion our enemies are undermining; for your glory, which can be advanced only by rendering your subjects happy, and keeping them united; for the interests of your family, depending on an adherence to the principles that enthroned it; for the safety and welfare of your kingdoms and dominions, threatened with almost unavoidable dangers and distresses, that your majesty, as the loving father of your whole people, connected by the same bonds of law, loyalty, faith, and blood though dwelling in various countries, will not suffer the transcendent relation formed by these ties to be further violated, in uncertain expectation of effects that, if attained, never can compensate for the calamities through which they must be gained.

We, therefore, most earnestly beseech your majesty that your royal authority and interposition may be used for our relief, and that a gracious answer may be given to this petition.

That your majesty may enjoy every felicity through a long and glorious reign, over loyal and happy subjects, and that your descendants may inherit your prosperity and dominions till time shall be no more, is, and always will be, our sincere and fervent prayer.

By order of the Congress,

Henry Middleton, President.