

The First Continental Congress  
Philadelphia, October 1774

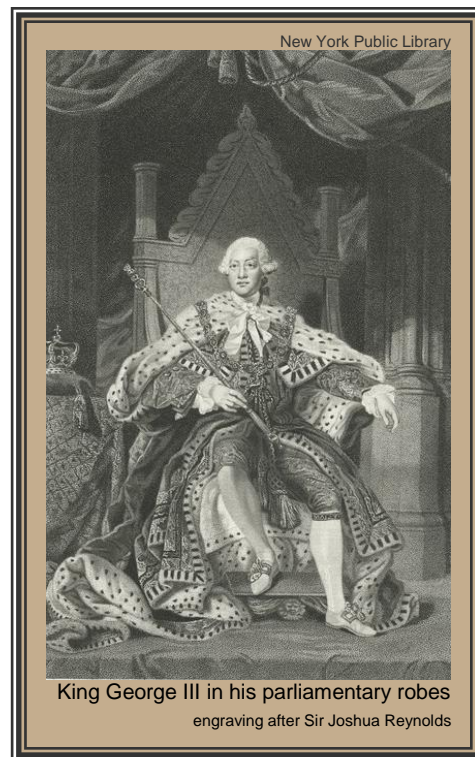
## PETITION TO KING GEORGE III

EXCERPTS

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, in behalf of ourselves and the inhabitants of those 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 [French and Indian 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, of the brigadiers general, has in time of peace been rendered supreme in all the civil governments in 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 officers 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.
- Councilors, holding their commissions during pleasure, exercise legislative authority.
- Humble and reasonable 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 their salaries.
- Assemblies have been frequently and injuriously dissolved, and commerce 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 rights.

\_\_\_ Both houses of Parliament have resolved that the 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.

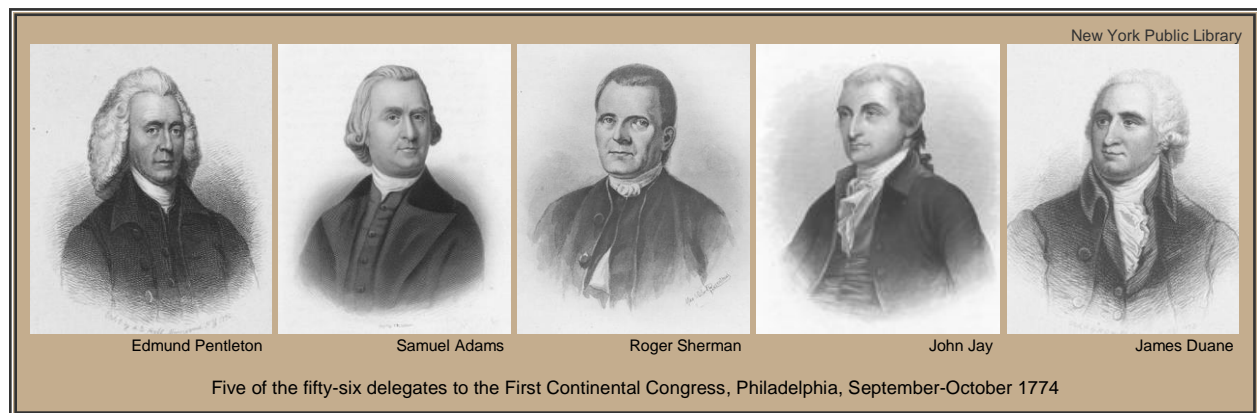
\_\_\_ A statute was passed in the twelfth year of your majesty's reign directing that persons charged with committing any offense therein described, in any place out of the realm, may be indicted and tried for the same in any shire or county within the realm, whereby inhabitants of these colonies may, 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 extending the limits of Quebec, abolishing the English and restoring the French laws, whereby great numbers of British freemen are subject 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 Briton*," 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. . . .

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 rights under the auspices of your royal ancestors whose family was seated on the British throne to rescue and secure a pious and gallant nation from the popery and despotism of a superstitious and inexorable tyrant.<sup>1</sup> Your majesty, we are confident, justly rejoices that your 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.



<sup>1</sup> King James II, a Roman Catholic, was deposed in 1688 during the Glorious Revolution and replaced by William III of the House of Brunswick (Hanover).

The apprehension of being degraded into a state of servitude from the pre-eminent rank of English freeman, while our minds retain the strongest love of liberty and clearly foresee the miseries preparing for us and our posterity, excites emotions in our hearts which, though we cannot 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 of 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 cannot be displeasing. Your royal indignation, we hope, will rather fall on those designing and dangerous men<sup>2</sup> 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. . . .

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.

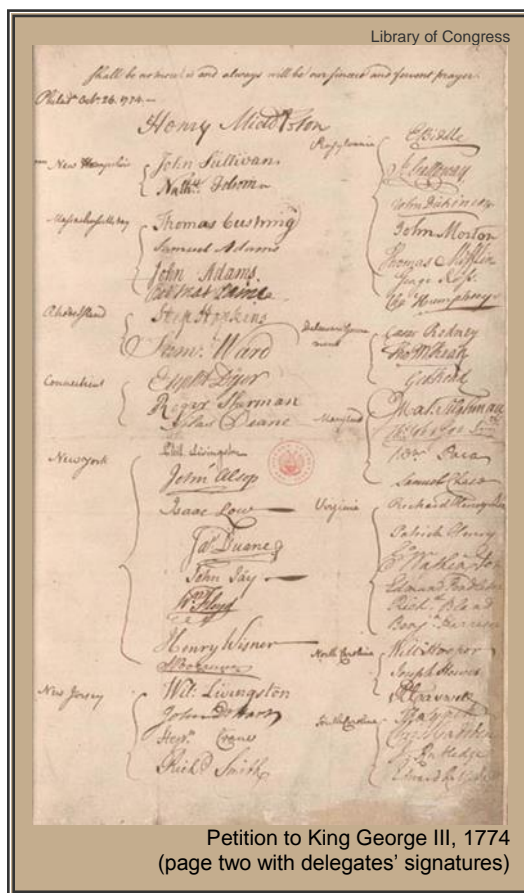
Filled with sentiments of duty to your majesty and affection to the parent state, deeply impressed by our education and strongly confirmed by our reason, and anxious to evince the sincerity of these dispositions, we present this petition only to obtain redress of grievances and relief from fears and jealousies [suspicions], occasioned by the system of statutes and regulations adopted since the close of the late war for raising a revenue in America, extending the power of courts of Admiralty and Vice-Admiralty, trying persons in Great Britain for offenses alleged to be committed in America, affecting the province of 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 usual 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 thoroughly searches the hearts of his creatures, we solemnly profess that our councils have been influenced by no other motive than a dread of impending destruction. . . .

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. . . .

The delegates agreed that if the offending acts of Parliament were not repealed, the colonies would boycott British goods after December 1, and they would meet in a second continental congress the following May.

The petition, presented by Benjamin Franklin while serving as a colonial agent in London, was rejected by Parliament and the king.



<sup>2</sup> I.e., the British Prime Minister and cabinet officials.