

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY GRANT  
HISTORY CONNECTED  
*EQUALITY, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE LAW*

JOSEPH W. JUSSAUME  
LOWELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
H. J. ROBINSON MIDDLE SCHOOL  
8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE U.S. HISTORY

UNIT: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

**LESSON PLAN: MASSACHUSETTS SLAVERY AND  
THE CALL FOR INDEPENDENCE**  
**A TWO DAY (90 minute periods) LESSON PLAN**

JUNE 7, 2010

## **Abstract of Lesson Plan:**

First, it should be noted, that at the Robinson Middle School, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers teach 90 minute lessons, every other day. Therefore, a traditional 3-day lesson plan with 60 minute blocks will not work for this project. I have, therefore, designed a 2-day lesson plan to be run over two 90 minute periods.

At the beginning of the school year, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students spend a few weeks learning about the concept of natural rights. They learn of the origins for thinking about natural rights and how such ideas fit into the British system of government. They also learn how those ideas were brought with the colonists when they settled in the New World and established their own societies. As the students begin their study of the American Revolution, the emphasis continues on natural rights. As the class moves through the unit, the students begin to understand how the colonists, who thought of themselves as freeborn English citizens, began to believe that their natural rights were being denied by the British government; more specifically their rights to life, liberty and property. This lesson is designed to take that learning a step further. The class will examine how African American slaves living in Massachusetts, began to realize that the arguments being made by the colonists against England, were based on the premise that all men are created equal and free. The students will discover that African Americans used the same arguments to attempt to secure freedom for themselves.

The lesson fits perfectly into the Massachusetts Social Science Frameworks and the National Standards for Historical Thinking. More specifically, it covers Massachusetts Frameworks US1.3 (Explain the influence and ideas of the Declaration of Independence and the political philosophy of Thomas Jefferson) and US1.5 (Explain the role of Massachusetts in the Revolution, including important events that took place in Massachusetts and important leaders from Massachusetts). In addition, the lesson is designed to cover Historical Thinking Standards 2B and 2C; 3B and 3C; 4A and 4B; and 5A. Pursuant to the Massachusetts Frameworks for U.S. History I, students are to gain an understanding that ideas can change history and influence historical events. The same ideas used by the American patriots were not lost on African Americans living in Massachusetts as slaves at the time of the American Revolution.

This lesson would not be possible without the increased knowledge gained regarding African Americans living in Massachusetts presented in our History Connected Seminars and the discussions in both the seminars and the book group. Prior to attending the classes, I did not have enough background knowledge to be able to put together a useful lesson plan on this subject. The seminars and book group have provided me with that knowledge.

## **TWO-DAY LESSON PLAN** **(Two 90 minute blocks)**

### **Massachusetts Social Science Curriculum Frameworks Standards Addressed:**

---

1. US1.3-Explain the influence and ideas of the Declaration of Independence and the political philosophy of Thomas Jefferson.
2. US1.5-Explain the role of Massachusetts in the Revolution, including important events that took place in Massachusetts and important leaders from Massachusetts.

### **Standards in Historical Thinking Addressed:**

---

1. 2B-Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage.
2. 2C-Identify the central question(s) the historical narrative addresses.
3. 3B-Consider multiple perspectives.
4. 3C-Analyze cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causation, including the importance of the individual, the influence of ideas.
5. 4A-Formulate historical questions.
6. 4B-Obtain historical data from a variety of sources.
7. 5A-Identify issues and problems in the past.

### **Essential Questions to Guide Learning:**

---

1. Why did slaves petition the Massachusetts government for their freedom?
2. How did colonial petitions to the British government influence slave petitions to the Massachusetts government?
3. Did slaves have ideas about natural rights? If so, what were they?

### **Objectives for the Lesson:**

---

1. Students will be able to identify and explain 3 natural rights included in the documents they examine.
2. Students will be able to compare and contrast the Statement of Natural Rights in the Declaration of Independence, to the petitions by the slaves of Massachusetts and find 2 similarities and 2 differences.
3. Students will be able to create their own one-page petition to the Massachusetts Legislature from the citizens of Massachusetts, on behalf of the slaves of Massachusetts. Their petition will include 3 student designed questions based on their learning from this lesson.

### **Materials Needed:**

---

Handouts (one set per group), chart paper, computers with on-line access, markers, parchment paper

## ACTIVITIES

Both days of this lesson plan require the students to work in small groups. They will also need access to one computer with on-line access per group. Each group will be given a series of documents (attached to this lesson) and will access other documents on-line. In addition, the groups will work at the computers when putting together their final product and printing the results. This lesson will work best in a library setting so that students can work at the computers and study tables and spread their materials out. You will need to reserve library time.

### DAY ONE

Launch-(15 minutes) The teacher will guide the students in a brief discussion of natural rights. The students have already learned about natural rights philosophy at this point and are beginning to examine how that philosophy has influenced the events leading up to the American Revolution.

Explore-(50 minutes) The students will need to work in groups of 4 or 5 students. If you wish you can give each student a job (examiners, scribe, presenter, etc.).

The teacher hands out the primary source documents: 1) Slave Petition to the Massachusetts Legislature, 1773; 2) Excerpts from Slave Petition to Governor Gage, 1774; 3) Image and Transcript of the Original Draft of the Declaration of Independence, 1776; 4) Image and Transcription of 1777 Petition presented to the Massachusetts Legislature by Prince Hall and eight other black Bostonians; Petition to King George from the Continental Congress, 1774 (Emphasis on page 6). Each group is responsible for examining the primary source documents looking for evidence of a call for natural rights. Each group must identify at least 3 natural rights within the documents. The group records the examples of calls for natural rights from the primary source documents on their chart paper. Students then travel as a group to a computer with online access and go to the Massachusetts Historical Society website at [www.masshist.org](http://www.masshist.org). Students navigate to the section of the website dedicated to the coming of the American Revolution (it is right on the first page). Within that section, the students explore the online primary source documents, looking for additional evidence from colonial representatives or slaves, asking for the recognition of natural rights. Any examples the students find also get recorded on their chart paper.

Summary-(25 minutes) Each group gets 5 minutes to present their findings to the class. Each presentation must include the 3 or more natural rights they identified in the documents. In addition, each group will explain to the class, how the calls for

recognition of natural rights from the colonies to England are similar to the calls for natural rights from the slaves to the Massachusetts government.

The teacher collects the chart papers from the groups after presentation for use in the next class.

## **DAY TWO**

The students report back to their same groups. The teacher hands out the chart papers from the previous class.

**Launch-(15 minutes)** The teacher leads the class in a discussion of the previous day's activities, asking volunteers to share information that they found useful to the previous class' activities.

**Explore-(60 minutes)** The same groups take the information that they compiled from the previous day's activities and continues to explore the Massachusetts Historical Society website for further information. The groups use the evidence found to put together a chart comparing the slave petitions to the Massachusetts Government to the petitions put forth by the colonists to the British government. On the left side of the chart are similarities between the petitions; on the right side of the chart are differences between the two. The students must have at least 2 differences and 2 similarities. The charts will be presented during the summary portion of the lesson.

After the students have completed their charts, each group will begin drafting their own petition to the Massachusetts Legislature on behalf of the slaves of Massachusetts. The petition will be based on the information that they have found during the previous activities. The petitions must contain at least 3 high-quality questions posed to the Massachusetts legislature inquiring as to why African American slaves are not free. The petitions are to be one page in length. The students will draft the petitions on the computers (one per group) and will print the petitions on the parchment paper provided. Each student will get a petition to take home as well as one to be handed in for a grade. The petitions will follow John Collins Writing format (3 focus correction areas will be given along with point totals) Focus correction areas can be whatever the teacher wishes, but the first two should be content related and the third should be focused on an english-language arts component. The majority of the points should be awarded for content.

**Summary-(15 minutes)** Each group will present their charts and will read their petitions out loud to the class. The class will take a vote on which petition they wish to support.

### **Sample FCA's for the petitions:**

- 1) Your petition must contain 3 well constructed questions to the legislature based on what you have discovered in the documents. (40 points)

- 2) **You petition must contain 3 reasons why African American slaves should be free based on natural rights philosophy. (40 points)**
- 3) **You have written you petition without any spelling mistakes or grammatical errors. (20 points)**

## ANNNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Book Used:

Curriculum Specialists at Primary Source, Inc., The, ed. *Making of Freedom: African Americans in U.S. History, A Song Full of Hope 1770-1830*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2004.

This resource book is book two in a series of four. It is a wonderful resource for information about African American History in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and a great source of primary sources. The documents used for the above lesson plan were taken directly from this resource, namely: Documents 2.1.4, 2.1.5, 2.1.6a, 2.1.6b, 2.1.7a, and 2.1.7b.

### Website Used:

Massachusetts Historical Society, <http://www.masshist.org/revolution>

The website at the Massachusetts Historical Society is a great place to find primary source documents from all periods of Massachusetts History. In particular, the newly developed section on the *Coming of the Revolution* contains almost every document in the society's archives including newspaper articles, petitions, official documents of the Continental Congress, official documents of the Massachusetts Legislature, letters from the Committees of Correspondence, broadsides, diary entries, etc. It is one of my favorite resources for primary source documents from the American Revolution. The Petition to King George from the Continental Congress used in the above lesson plan came from this site.

## Document 2.1.4

### **Slave Petition to the Massachusetts Legislature, 1773**

Boston, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1773

Sir,

The efforts made by the legislative of this province in their last sessions to free themselves from slavery, gave us, who are in that deplorable state, a high degree of satisfaction. We expect great things from men who have made such a noble stand against the designs of their fellow-men to enslave them. We cannot but wish and hope, Sir, that you will have the same grand object, we mean civil and religious liberty, in view of your next session. The divine spirit of freedom, seems to fire every humane breast on this continent, except such as are bribed to assist in executing the execrable pain.

We are very sensible that it would be highly detrimental to our present masters, if we were allowed to demand all that of right belongs to us for past services; this we disclaim. Even the Spaniards, who have not those sublime ideas of freedom that Englishmen have, are conscious that they have no right to all the services of their fellow men, we mean the Africans, whom they have purchased with their money, therefore they allow them one day a week to work for themselves, to enable them to earn money to purchase the residue of their time, which they have a right to demand in such portions as they are able to pay for (a due appraisalment of their services being made, which always stands at the purchase money.) We do not pretend to dictate to you Sir, or to the honorable Assembly, of which you are a member: we acknowledge our obligations to you for what you have done already, but as the people of this province seem to be actuated by the principles of equity and justice, we cannot but expect your house will again take our deplorable case into serious consideration, and give us that ample relief which, as men, we have a natural right to.

But since the wise and righteous governor of the universe, has permitted our fellow men to make us slaves, we bow in submission to him, and determine to behave in such a manner as that we may have reason to expect the divine approbation of, and assistance in our, peaceable and lawful attempts to gain our freedom.

We are willing to submit to such regulations and laws as may be made relative to us, until we leave this province, which we determine to do as soon as we can from our joynt labours procure money to transport ourselves to some part of the coast of Africa, where we propose a settlement. We are very desirous that you should have instructions relative to us, from your town, therefore we pray you to communicate this letter to them, and ask this favor for us.

On Behalf of our fellow Slaves in this Province;  
And by Order of their Committee  
Peter Bestes, Sambo Freeman, Chester Joie  
For the Representative of the Town of Thompson

## Document 2.1.5

### **Excerpts from Slave Petition to Governor Gage, 1774**

*A petition to Massachusetts Governor Thomas Gage and the General Court, May 25, 1774 from "a Grate Number of Blackes of the Province... held in a state of Slavery within a free and christian Country."*

Your Petitioners apprehend we have in common with all other men and naturel right to our freedoms without Being depriv'd of them by our fellow men as we are freeborn Pepel and have never forfeited this Blessing by aney compact or agreement whatever. But we were unjustly dragged by the cruel hand of power from our dearest frinds and sum of us stolen from the bosoms of our tender Parents and from a Populous Pleasant and plentiful country and Brought hither to be made slaves for Life in a Christian land. Thus we are deprived of every thing that hath a tendency to make life even tolerable, the endearing ties of husband and wife we are strangers to... Our children are also taken from us by force and sent maney miles from us... Thus our Lives are imbittered... there is a great number of us sencear... members of the Church of Christ how can the master and the slave be said to fulfil that command Live in love let Brotherly love contuner and abound Beare my Borden when he Beares me down with the... Chanes of slavery... Nither can we reap an equal benefit from the laws of the Land which doth not justifi but condemns Slavery or if there had bin aney Law to hold us in Bondage... there never was aney to enslave our children for life when Born in a Free Countrey. We therefore Bage your Excellency and Honours will... cause an act of legislative to be passed that we may obtain our natural right our freedoms and our children to be set a lebety at the year of twenty-one.

*When resubmitted in June 1774, the petitioners added these words: "give and grant to us some part of the unimproved land, belonging to the province, for a settlement, that each of us may there quietly sit down under his own fig tree" and enjoy "the fruits of his labour."*

**Source:** Kaplan, Sydney and Emma N. Kaplan. *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989, 13, 15.

Image and transcription of 1777 petition presented to the Massachusetts Legislature by Prince Hall and eight other black Bostonians

137

To the Honorable Council & House of Representatives  
for the State of Massachusetts-Bay, in General Court assembled  
January 13<sup>th</sup> 1777

The Petition of a great number of Negroes who are detained  
in a state of Slavery, in the Bowels of a free & Christian Country  
humbly shewing

That your Petitioners apprehend that they have, in common  
with all other Men, a natural & unalienable right to that freedom, which  
the great Parent of the Universe hath bestowed equally on all Mankind,  
& which they have never forfeited by any compact or agreement  
whatsoever. — But they were unjustly dragged by the cruel hands of  
Savage from their dearest & best Friends, some of them even torn from  
the embraces of their tender Parents — Brought a weeping, yelping &  
wretched Country — & in violation of the laws of Nations & of Nature  
& in defiance of all the tender feelings of humanity, brought hither  
to be sold like Beasts of Burthen, & like them condemned to a  
hard & servile Labour — among a People professing the most Religion of Jesus  
Christ — & not impossible of the sword of rational Freedom — & who  
ought to resent the unjust encroachments of others, to rescue them from  
a state of bondage & subjection — Your Honors need not to be informed  
that a life of Slavery, like that of your Petitioners, deprives of every  
social privilege, of every thing requisite to render life even tolerable,  
it is worse than Non-Existence — In imitation of the laudable example  
of the good People of these States, your Petitioners have long & patiently  
waited the event of Petition after Petition by them presented to the  
Legislative Body of this State, & can not but with grief reflect that  
their success has been but too similar — They can not but regret the  
astonishment that it has never been considered that every prudent  
Lawyer which a Justice has acted in the course of their unhappiness  
difficulties with Great-Britain, which stronger than a thousand  
arguments in favor of your Petitioners — They therefore beseech  
your Honors, to give this Petition its due weight & consideration  
think an Act of the Legislature to be just & equitable, if they would  
be restored to the enjoyment of that Freedom which is the natural  
right of all Men — & their Children (who were born in this  
Land Liberty) may not be held as Slaves after they arrive at the age  
of twenty one Years — & may, <sup>the Legislature</sup> be no longer chargeable with the  
consequences of acting themselves, the part which they and even  
others) be proposed in their present glorious struggle for Liberty,  
we that depend on your Honors for the success of our Cause, do not wish to  
disturb your Honors, but we do wish to see your Honors  
and your Petitioners hand and voice united in every way

Courtesy of Massachusetts Archive

Document 2.1.6b

*Note: Petitions such as this one were often printed and distributed to the public. Transcribers often made changes from the original. You will notice that the transcription below differs somewhat from the words on the actual image.*

To the Honorable Counsel & House of Representatives for the State of Massachusetts Bay in General Court assembled, January 13, 1777:

The petition of A Great Number of Blackes detained in a State of slavery in the bowels of a free & Christian County Humbly sheweth that your Petitioners apprehend that they have in Common with all other men a Natural and Unalienable Right to that freedom which the Grat Parent of the Universe that Bestowed equally on all menkind and which they have Never forfeited by any Compact or agreement whatever - but that wher Unjustly Dragged by the hand of cruel Power and their Derest friends and sum of them Even torn from the Embraces of their tender Parents—from A populous Pleasant and Plentiful country and in violation of Laws of Nature and of Nations and in Defiance of all the tender feelings of humanity Brough here Either to Be sold like Beast of burthen & Like them Condemned to Slavery for Life—Among A People Professing the mild Religion of Jesus A people Not Insensible of the Secrets of Rational Being Nor without spirit to Resent the unjust endeavors of others to Reduce them to a state of Bondage and Subjugation your honouner Need not to be informed that A Live of Slavery Like that of your petitioners Deprived of Every social privilege of Every thing Requisite and render Life Tolable is far worse that Nonexistence.

(In imitat)ion of the Lawdable Example of the Good People of these States your petitioners have Long and Patiently waited the Event of petition after petition. By them presented to the Legislative Body of this state and cannot but with Grief Reflect that their Success hath been but too similar they Cannot but express their Astonishment that It have Never Bin Considered that Every Principle from which America has Acted in the Course of their unhappy Difficulties with Great Briton Pleads Stronger than A thousand arguments in favors of your petitioners they therfor humble Beseech your honours to give this petition its due weight and consideration & cause an act of the legislature to be past Wherby they may be Restored to the Enjoyments of that which is the Natural right of all men—and their Children who wher Born in this Land of Liberty may not be held as Slaves after they arrive at the age of twenty one years so may the Inhabitance of this States No longer chargeable with the inconstancy of acting themselves that part which they condemn and oppose in others Be prospered in their present Glorious struggle for Liberty and have those Blessings to them, &c.

Courtesy of Massachusetts Archives

Document 2.1.7a

Image and transcription of the original draft of the Declaration of Independence, 1776

A Declaration by the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for <sup>one</sup> people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the ~~separate and equal~~ <sup>separate and equal</sup> station to which the laws of nature & of nature's god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to ~~take~~ <sup>the</sup> separation.

We hold these truths to be ~~self-evident~~ <sup>self-evident</sup>, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with ~~unalienable~~ <sup>unalienable</sup> rights, that among these are ~~life, liberty, & the pursuit of happiness~~ <sup>life, liberty, & the pursuit of happiness</sup>; that to secure these ~~rights~~ <sup>rights</sup>, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, & to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles & organizing it in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety & happiness. prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light & transient causes: and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. but when a long train of abuses & usurpations [begun at a distinguished period] & pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them ~~to absolute despotism~~ <sup>under a despotic</sup>, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, & to provide new guards for their future security. such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; & such is now the necessity which constrains them to ~~expunge~~ <sup>expunge</sup> their former systems of government. the history of ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> present ~~king of Great Britain~~ <sup>king of Great Britain</sup> is a history of ~~repeated~~ <sup>repeated</sup> injuries and usurpations, [among which, ~~appears no solitary fact~~ <sup>appears no solitary fact</sup>] to contradict the uniform tenor of the rest, [all of which] ~~have~~ <sup>have</sup> in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. to prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world, for the truth of which we pledge a faith not unswerving by falsehood.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Document 2.1.7b

***Jefferson's "original Rough draught" of the Declaration of Independence***

A Declaration of the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for a people to advance from that subordination in which they have hitherto remained, & to assume among the powers of the earth the equal & independent station to which the laws of nature & of nature's god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the change.

We hold these truths to be sacred & undeniable; that all men are created equal & independent, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent & inalienable, among which are the preservation of life, & liberty, & the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these ends, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government shall become destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, & to institute new government, laying it's foundation on such principles & organising it's powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety & happiness. prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light & transient causes: and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. but when a long train of abuses & usurpations, begun at a distinguished period, & pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to subject them to arbitrary power, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government & to provide new guards for their future security. such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; & such is now the necessity which constrains them to expunge their former systems of government. the history of his present majesty, is a history of unremitting injuries and usurpations, among which no one fact stands single or solitary to contradict the uniform tenor of the rest, all of which have in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. to prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world, for the truth of which we pledge a faith yet unsullied by falsehood.

he has refused his assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good:

he has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate & pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has neglected utterly to attend to them.

he has refused to pass other laws for the accomodation of large districts of people unless those people would relinquish the right of representation, a right inestimable to them, formidable to tyrants alone:

he has dissolved Representative houses repeatedly & continually, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people:

he has refused for a long space of time to cause others to be elected, whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise, the state remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, & convulsions within:

he has endeavored to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither; & raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands:

he has suffered the administration of justice totally to cease in some of these colonies, refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers:

he has made our judges dependant on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and amount of their salaries:

he has erected a multitude of new offices by a self-assumed power, & sent hither swarms of officers to harrass our people & eat out their substance:

he has kept among us in times of peace standing armies & ships of war:

he has affected to render the military, independant of & superior to the civil power:

he has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitutions and unacknoleged by our laws; giving his assent to their pretended acts of legislation, for quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;

for protecting them by a mock-trial from punishment for any murders they should commit on the inhabitants of these states;

for cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;

for imposing taxes on us without our consent;

for depriving us of the benefits of trial by jury;

for transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offences: for taking away our charters, & altering fundamentally the forms of our governments;

for suspending our own legislatures & declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever:

he has abdicated government here, withdrawing his governors, & declaring us out of his allegiance & protection:

he has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns & destroyed the lives of our people:

he is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation & tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty & perfidy unworthy the head of a civilized nation:

he has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, & conditions of existence:

he has incited treasonable insurrections in our fellow-subjects, with the allurements of forfeiture & confiscation of our property:

he has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. this piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce: and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, & murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them; thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.

in every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms; our repeated petitions have been answered by repeated injury. a prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a people who mean to be free. future ages will scarce believe that the hardness of one man, adventured within the short compass of 12 years only, on so many acts of tyranny without a mask, over a people fostered & fixed in principles of liberty.

Nor have we been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. we have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend a jurisdiction over these our states. we have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration & settlement here, no one of which could warrant so strange a pretension: that these were effected at the expence of our own blood & treasure, unassisted by the wealth or the strength of Great Britain: that in constituting indeed our several forms of government, we had adopted one common king, thereby laying a foundation for perpetual league & amity with them: but that submission to their parliament was no part of our constitution, nor ever in idea, if history may be credited: and we appealed to their native justice & magnanimity, as well as to the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations which were likely to interrupt our correspondence & connection. they too have been deaf to the voice of justice & of consanguinity, & when occasions have been given them, by the regular course of their laws, of removing from their councils the disturbers of our harmony, they have by their free election re-established them in power. at this very time too they are permitting their chief magistrate to send over not only soldiers of our common blood, but Scotch & foreign mercenaries to invade & deluge us in blood. these facts have given the last stab to agonizing affection, and manly spirit bids us to renounce for ever these

unfeeling brethren. we must endeavor to forget our former love for them, and to hold them as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends. we might have been a free & great people together; but a communication of grandeur & of freedom it seems is below their dignity. be it so, since they will have it: the road to glory & happiness is open to us too; we will climb it in a separate state, and acquiesce in the necessity which pronounces our everlasting Adieu!

We therefore the representatives of the United States of America in General Congress assembled do, in the name & by authority of the good people of these states, reject and renounce all allegiance & subjection to the kings of Great Britain & all others who may hereafter claim by, through, or under them; we utterly dissolve & break off all political connection which may have heretofore subsisted between us & the people or parliament of Great Britain; and finally we do assert and declare these a colonies to be free and independant states, and that as free & independant states they shall hereafter have power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, & to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. And for the support of this declaration we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, & our sacred honour.

*Source:* Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Vol. 1, 1760–1776. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950, 243–247.



America's oldest historical society, founded 1791.

# THE COMING OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION 1764 - 1776

- [Introduction](#)
- [Explore](#)
- [Topic List](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [For Teachers](#)
- [For Students](#)
- [FAQ](#)

[Back to The First Continental Congress](#)

## ***The petition of grand American Continental Congress, to the King's Most Excellent Majesty***

United States. Continental Congress

18.2 cm x 11.4 cm

[Boston: Printed and sold by Isaiah Thomas, 1774]

### Page Viewing Options NOTE

2 3 4 5 ... 8 | next

Jump:

[overview](#) | [screen size](#) | [hi-res](#) | [transcription](#) [HELP](#)

[Page 1]

THE  
 PETITION  
 OF THE  
 GRAND AMERICAN CONTINENTAL  
 CONGRESS,  
 TO THE  
 KING'S  
 Most Excellent Majesty.

AMERICA:  
 BOSTON, Printed and sold at the Printing-Office, near  
 the MILL-BRIDGE .

[Page 2]

*[This page is blank.]*

[Page 3]

The first PETITION, &c.  
 1774

*[A note on the bottom of the page states that the handwritten additions were made by Thomas Pemberton.]*

**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, 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 impowered to receive their salaries and fees from the effects condemned by themselves.**

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

**[Page 4]**

**The judges of courts of common law have been made intirely dependant on one part the legislature for their salaries as well as for the duration of their commissions.**

**Councillors, 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 burthened 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 offences ; vexatious informers are exempted from paying damages to which they are justly liable, and opprressive 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 offences 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 offence 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 harbour 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

[Page 5]

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 cle-

mency for protection against them.

From this destructive system of colony administration, adopted since the conclusion of the late war, have slowed 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-Britian and these colonies, from an earlier period, or from other causes than war have assigned; had they proceeded on our part from a restless levity of temper, unjust impulses of ambition, or a [ . . . ] ful suggestions of seditious persons, we should merit the opprobrious terms frequently bestowed on us by those we revere. But, so far from promoting innovations, we have opposed them, and can be charged with no offence, 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 adoreable 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. 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.

[Page 6]

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 tranquillity 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, who daringly interpos-

ing 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 alledged of taking our property from us without our consent, "to defray the charge of the administration of justice, the support of civil government, and the defence, 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 two first 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 defence, protection, and security of the colonies, their militias, if properly regulated, as they earnestly desire may immediately be done, would be fully sufficient, at least in time 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

[Page 7]

loyalty to your Majesty, by exerting their most strenuous efforts in granting supplies and raising forces. Yielding to no British subjects, in affectionate attachment to your majesty's person, family, and government, we too dearly prize that privilege of expressing that attachment, by those proofs which are honourable 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, chearfully 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, on 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 favour. Your royal authority over us and our connection with Great-Britain, we shall always carefully and zealously endeavour 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, 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 offences alledged 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

[Page 8]

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.

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 honour 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 interest 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 bands of law, loyalty, faith and blood, though dwelling in various countries, will not suffer the transcendent relation formed by these ties, to be farther 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.

[Introduction](#)[Explore](#)[Topic List](#)[Resources](#)[For Teachers](#)[For Students](#)[FAQ](#)

© 2008 Massachusetts Historical Society | All rights reserved

Site maintained at MHS by [webmaster@masshist.org](mailto:webmaster@masshist.org)