

The Olive Branch Petition: A Last Call for Peace by Grant Mercer

By the summer of 1775, the Patriots had commenced preparing for war, stockpiling weapons and training troops. Yet many Colonists, still feeling loyalty to the Crown, yearned for a peaceful reconciliation. To assure these Colonists that every effort had been made to avoid war, a final plea to the King – the Olive Branch Petition - was made.

Benjamin Franklin initially drafted the Olive Branch Petition (Kline). The Petition reaffirmed America's allegiance to the Crown, but also included a lengthy list of grievances about the treatment of the Colonists. The language was deemed far too aggressive and many felt it would provoke the King even further (Borneman 392). The Second Continental Congress assigned Thomas Jefferson the task of rewriting the Petition (Ferling 145). John Dickinson, who desperately hoped to avoid a final break with England, provided the final edits (Kline). Together, they chose words not to anger the King, but to assure him they were "still dutiful subjects," holding "utmost deference for his Majesty" ("America's Homepage"). The Petition did, however, ask the King for relief as the Colonists were "alarmed by a new system of statutes and regulations adopted for the administration of the Colonies" ("America's Homepage"). Patriots hoped that George III was unaware that his "Ministers, persevering in their measures, and proceeding to open hostilities for enforcing them, have compelled us to arm in our own defence" ("America's Homepage") and would come to the aid of his loyal subjects.

Forty-eight Colonists signed the Olive Branch Petition, including Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Patrick Henry ("America's Homepage"). While many did not agree with beseeching the King for a peaceful resolution, they added their

signatures as a show of colonial unity (Borneman 394). John Dickinson viewed the Petition as a “measure of peace” (Ferling 140). John Adams, on the other hand, viewed the Petition as a “measure of imbecility” (Ferling 140), but he understood that the Colonists should not be forced into war, but would “eventually recognize the best means of protecting their liberties” (Middlekauff 313).

The Petition left American shores on July 8, 1775, arriving in London six weeks later (“Olive Branch Petition, 1775”). Even as the Colonists debated the wording of the Petition, the King had voiced his opinion that “once these rebels have felt a smart blow, they will submit, and no situation can ever change my fixed resolution” (Borneman 392). The King was true to his word, refusing to even read the Petition once it arrived. As Benjamin Franklin had predicted the King had “neither temper nor wisdom enough to seize the golden opportunity” for peace (Ferling 141).

The King’s outright rejection of the Olive Branch Petition showed the Colonists that only two options remained - total submission or total independence. George III’s refusal to read the Petition confirmed that the King had indeed blessed Parliament’s harsh actions: No relief from punishing decrees would be forthcoming from the Crown. The haughty dismissal of the Olive Branch Petition removed all doubts that war would soon be upon the Colonies. The last call for peace had gone unheeded by an arrogant monarch.

Works Cited

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