

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

A Proclamation for Suppressing Rebellion and Sedition

GEORGE III

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King George III (1738–1820) refused to receive the Olive Branch Petition adopted by the Second Continental Congress in July 1775 and sent to the king in the hope that war might yet be avoided. Instead, on August 23, 1775 he responded to the hostilities that had already erupted in the American colonies with this Proclamation, declaring that the colonists “have at length proceeded to open and avowed rebellion” and calling on all “subjects of this Realm” to aid and assist in the suppression of the rebellion. This proclamation effectively ended many colonists’ hope that a useful and peaceable agreement could be reached between the American colonists and Great Britain.

Forget for a while that you are friendly to the cause of the colonists. Can you make the case for the king? Why does he insist that the colonists are rebels and traitors? Years later, Abraham Lincoln would insist that the Southern states that attempted to secede from the Union were in fact rebels against the Union, guilty of treasonous conduct, who must be militarily crushed. Can you distinguish the two cases, and if so, how?

Whereas many of our subjects in divers parts of our Colonies and Plantations in North-America, misled by dangerous and ill designing men, and forgetting the allegiance which they owe to the power that has protected and supported them; after various disorderly acts committed in disturbance of the public peace, to the obstruction of lawful commerce, and to the oppression of our loyal subjects carrying on the same; have at length proceeded to open and avowed rebellion, by arraying themselves in a hostile manner, to withstand the execution of the law, and traitorously preparing, ordering and levying war against us: And whereas, there is reason to apprehend that such rebellion hath been much promoted and encouraged by the traitorous correspondence, counsels and comfort of divers wicked and desperate persons within this Realm: To the end therefore, that none of our subjects may neglect or violate their duty through ignorance thereof, or through any doubt of the protection which the law will afford to their loyalty and zeal, we have thought fit, by and with the advice of our Privy Council, to issue our this Royal Proclamation, hereby declaring, that not only all our Officers, civil and military, are obliged to exert their utmost endeavours to suppress such rebellion, and to bring the traitors to justice, but that all our subjects of this Realm, and the dominions thereunto belonging, are bound by law

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to be aiding and assisting in the suppression of such rebellion, and to disclose and make known all traitorous conspiracies and attempts against us, our crown and dignity; and we do accordingly strictly charge and command all our Officers, as well civil as military, and all others our obedient and loyal subjects, to use their utmost endeavours to withstand and suppress such rebellion, and to disclose and make known all treasons and traitorous conspiracies which they shall know to be against us, our crown and dignity; and for that purpose, that they transmit to one of our principal Secretaries of State, or other proper officer, due and full information of all persons who shall be found carrying on correspondence with, or in any manner or degree aiding or abetting the persons now in open arms and rebellion against our Government, within any of our Colonies and Plantations in North-America, in order to bring to condign¹ punishment the authors, perpetrators, and abettors of such traitorous designs.

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Given at our Court at St. James's the twenty-third day of August, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five, in the fifteenth year of our reign.

GOD save the KING.

¹ *Appropriate to the crime or wrongdoing; fitting and deserved.*