

AN
O R A T I O N

D E L I V E R E D

MARCH 5th, 1772.

AT THE

REQUEST OF THE INHABITANTS

OF THE

TOWN OF *BOSTON*;

TO

COMMEMORATE THE BLOODY TRAGEDY

OF THE

FIFTH OF *March*, 1770.

BY

Dr. JOSEPH WARREN.

Quis talia fando,
Myrmidonum, Dolopumve, aut duri miles Ulyffei,
Temperet a lacrymis.

VIRGIL.

B O S T O N :

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1772.

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At a Meeting of the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of the Town of BOSTON, duly qualified and legally assembled in Faneuil-Hall, and from thence adjourn'd to the Old South Meeting-House, on Thursday the 5th Day of March, Anno Domini, 1772.

Voted Unanimously,

THAT the Moderator *Richard Dana*, Esq; the Honorable *John Hancock*, Esq; Mr. *Samuel Adams*, *Joseph Jackson*, Esq; Mr. *Henderson Inches*, Mr. *David Jeffries*, and Mr. *William Molineux*, be and hereby are appointed a Committee to return the Thanks of this Town to *Joseph Warren*, Esq; for the Oration just now delivered by him at their Request, in Commemoration of the horrid Massacre perpetrated on the Evening of the 5th of *March*, 1770, by a Party of Soldiers of the XXIXth Regiment; and to desire a Copy thereof for the Press. *Attest,*
William Cooper, *Town-Clerk.*

GENTLEMEN,

THE generous Candor of my Fellow-Citizens prevails on me to give a Copy of what was Yesterday delivered, for the Press.

I am, Gentlemen, with much Respect,
Your most humble Servant,

JOSEPH WARREN.

March 6, 1772.

An Oration.

WHEN we turn over the historic page, and trace the rise and fall of states and empires; the mighty revolutions which have so often varied the face of the world strike our minds with solemn surprize, and we are naturally led to endeavor to search out the causes of such astonishing changes.

That Man is formed for *social life*, is an observation which upon our first enquiry presents itself immediately to our view, and our reason approves that wise and generous principle which actuated the first founders of civil government; an institution which hath its origin in the *weakness* of individuals, and

hath for its end, the *strength and security* of all: And so long as the means of effecting this important end, are thoroughly known and religiously attended to, Government is one of the richest Blessings to mankind, and ought to be held in the highest veneration.

In young and new-formed communities, the grand design of this institution is most generally understood, and most strictly regarded; the motives which urged to the social compact cannot be at once forgotten, and *that* equality which is remembered to have subsisted so lately among them, prevents those who are cloathed with authority from attempting to invade the freedom of their Brethren; or if such an attempt is made, it prevents the community from suffering the offender to go unpunished: Every member feels it to be his interest, and knows it to be his duty, to preserve inviolate the constitution on which the public safety depends,* and is equally ready to assist the *Magistrate* in the execution of the laws, and the *subject* in defence of his right; and so long as this noble attachment to a constitution, founded on free and benevolent principles exists in full vigor in any state, *that* state must be flourishing and happy.

It was *this* noble attachment to a free constitution, which raised ancient Rome from the smallest beginnings to that bright summit of happiness and glory to which she arrived; and it was the loss of *this* which plunged her from *that* summit into the black gulph of infamy and slavery. It was *this* attachment which inspired her senators with wisdom; it was *this* which glowed in the breasts of her heroes; it was *this* which guarded her liberties, and extended her dominions, gave peace at home and commanded respect abroad: And when *this* decayed, her magistrates lost their reverence for justice and the laws, and degenerated into tyrants and oppressors—her senators forgetful of their dignity, and seduced by base corruption, betrayed their country—her soldiers regardless of their relation to the community, and urged *only* by the hopes of plunder and rapine, unfeelingly committed the most flagrant enormities; and hired to the trade of death, with relentless fury they pepe-

* Omnes ordines ad conservandam rempublicam, mente, voluntate, studio, virtute, voce, consentiunt. Cicero.

trated the most cruel murders, whereby the streets of imperial Rome were drenched with her *noblest* blood—Thus *this empress* of the world lost her dominions abroad, and her inhabitants dissolute in their manners, at length became contented *slaves*; and she stands to this day, the scorn and derision of nations, and a monument of this eternal truth, that PUBLIC HAPPINESS DEPENDS ON A VIRTUOUS AND UNSHAKEN ATTACHMENT TO A FREE CONSTITUTION.

It was *this* attachment to a constitution, founded on free and benevolent principles, which inspired the first settlers of this country:—They saw with grief the daring outrages committed on the free constitution of their native land—they knew that nothing but a civil war could at that time restore it's pristine purity. So hard was it to resolve to embrue their hands in the *blood* of their brethren, that they chose rather to quit their fair possessions and seek another habitation in a distant clime—When they came to this new world, which they fairly purchased of the Indian natives, the only rightful proprietors, they cultivated the then barren soil by their incessant labor, and defended their dear-bought possessions with the fortitude of the christian, and the bravery of the hero.

After various struggles, which during the tyrannic reigns of the house of STUART, were constantly kept up between right and wrong, between liberty and slavery, the connection between Great-Britain and this Colony was settled in the reign of King William and Queen Mary by a compact, the conditions of which were expressed in a Charter; by which all the liberties and immunities of BRITISH SUBJECTS were confirmed to this Province, as fully and as absolutely as they possibly could be by any human instrument which can be devised. And it is undeniably true, that the greatest and most important right of a British subject is, that *he shall be governed by no laws but those to which he either in person or by his representative hath given his consent*: And this I will venture to assert, is the grand basis of British freedom; it is interwoven with the constitution; and whenever this is lost, the constitution must be destroyed.

The *British constitution* (of which ours is a copy) is a happy compound of the three forms (under some of which all governments may be ranged) viz. Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Democracy: Of these three the *British Legislature* is composed,

and without the consent of each branch, nothing can carry with it the force of a law: In most cases, either the aristocratic or the democratic branch may propose a law, and submit it to the deliberation of the other two; but, when a law is to be passed for raising a tax, that law can originate only in the democratic branch, which is the House of Commons in Britain, and the House of Representatives here—The reason is obvious: They, and their constituents are to pay much the largest part of it, but as the aristocratic branch, which in Britain, is the House of Lords, and in this province, the Council, are also to pay some part, THEIR consent is necessary; and as the monarchic branch, which in Britain is the King, and with us, either the King in person, or the Governor whom he shall be pleased to appoint to act in his stead, is supposed to have a just sense of his own *interest*, which is *that* of all the subjects in general, HIS consent is also necessary, and when the consent of these three branches is obtained, the taxation is most certainly legal.

Let us now allow ourselves a few moments to examine the *late acts of the British parliament for taxing America*—Let us with candor judge whether they are constitutionally binding upon us:—If they are, IN THE NAME OF JUSTICE let us submit to them, without one murmuring word.

First, I would ask whether the members of the British House of Commons are the Democracy of this Province? if they are, they are either the people of this province, or are elected by the people of this province, to represent them, and have therefore a constitutional right to originate a Bill for taxing them: It is most certain they are neither; and therefore nothing done by *them* can be said to be done by the democratic branch of our constitution. I would next ask, whether the Lords who compose the aristocratic branch of the British legislature, are Peers of America? I never heard it was (even in these extraordinary times) so much as pretended, and if they are not, certainly no act of *theirs* can be said to be the act of the aristocratic branch of our constitution. The power of the monarchic branch we with pleasure acknowledge, resides in the King, who may act either in person or by his representative; and I freely confess that I can see no reason why a PROCLAMATION *for raising money in America* issued by the King's *sole* authority, would not be equally consistent with our constitution, and therefore

equally binding upon us with the *late acts of the British parliament for taxing us*; for it is plain, that if there is any validity in *those acts*, it must arise altogether from the monarchical branch of the legislature: And I further think that it would be at least as equitable; for I do not conceive it to be of the least importance to us by *whom* our property is taken away, so long as it is taken without our consent; and I am very much at a loss to know by what figure of rhetoric, the inhabitants of this province can be called FREE SUBJECTS, when they are obliged to obey implicitly, such laws as are made for them by men three thousand miles off, whom they know not, and whom they never have empowered to act for them; or how they can be said to have PROPERTY, when a body of men over whom they have not the least controul, and who are not in any way accountable to them, shall oblige them to deliver up any part, or the whole of their substance, without even asking their consent: And yet, whoever pretends that the late acts of the British parliament for taxing America ought to be deemed binding upon us, must admit at once that we are absolute SLAVES, and have no property of our own; or else that we may be FREE-MEN, and at the same time under a necessity of obeying the *arbitrary commands of those* over whom we have no controul or influence; and that we may HAVE PROPERTY OF OUR OWN, which is entirely at the disposal of another. Such gross absurdities, I believe will not be relished in this enlightened age: And it can be no matter of wonder that the people quickly perceived, and seriously complained of the inroads which these acts must unavoidably make upon their *Liberty*, and of the hazard to which their *whole property* is by *them* exposed; for, if they may be taxed without their consent even the smallest trifle, they may also without their consent be deprived of every thing they possess, although never so valuable, never so dear. Certainly it never entered the hearts of our ancestors, that after so many dangers in this then desolate wilderness, their hard-earned property should be at the disposal of the British parliament; and as it was soon found that this taxation could not be supported by reason and argument, it seemed necessary that one act of oppression should be enforced by another, and therefore, contrary to our just rights as possessing, or at least having a just title to possess, all the *liberties* and IMMUNITIES of British

subjects, a standing army was established among us in time of peace; and evidently for the purpose of effecting *that*, which it was one principal design of the founders of the constitution to prevent, (when they declared a standing army in time of peace to be AGAINST LAW) namely, for the enforcement of obedience to acts which upon fair examination appeared to be unjust and unconstitutional.

The ruinous consequences of standing armies to free communities may be seen in the histories of SYRACUSE, ROME, and many other once flourishing STATES; some of which have now scarce a name! Their baneful influence is most suddenly felt, when they are placed in populous cities; for, by a corruption of morals, the public happiness is immediately affected; and that this is one of the effects of quartering troops in a populous city, is a truth, to which many a mourning parent, many a lost, despairing child in this metropolis, must bear a very melancholy testimony.—Soldiers are also taught to consider arms as the only arbiters by which every dispute is to be decided between contending states;—they are instructed *implicitly* to obey their commanders, without enquiring into the justice of the cause they are engaged to support: Hence it is, that they are ever to be dreaded as the ready engines of tyranny and oppression.—And it is too observable that they are prone to introduce the same mode of decision in the disputes of individuals, and from thence have often arisen great animosities between *them* and *the inhabitants*, who whilst in a naked defenceless state, are frequently insulted and abused by an armed soldiery. And this will be more especially the case, when the troops are informed, that the intention of their being stationed in any city, is to OVERAWE THE INHABITANTS. That, *this* was the avowed design of stationing an armed force in this town, is sufficiently known; and WE, my fellow-citizens have seen, WE have felt the tragical effects!—THE FATAL FIFTH OF MARCH 1770, CAN NEVER BE FORGOTTEN—The horrors of THAT DREADFUL NIGHT are but too deeply impressed on our hearts—Language is too feeble to paint the emotions of our souls, when our streets were stained with the BLOOD OF OUR BRETHREN,—when our ears were wounded by the groans of the *dying*, and our eyes were tormented with the sight of the mangled bodies of the *dead*.—When our alarmed imagination presented to our view our

houses wrapt in flames,—our children subjected to the barbarous caprice of the raging soldiery—our beauteous virgins exposed to all the insolence of unbridled passion,—our virtuous wives endeared to us by every tender tie, falling a sacrifice to that worse than brutal violence, and perhaps like the famed LUCRETIA, distracted with anguish and despair, ending their wretched lives by their own fair hands.—When we beheld the authors of our distress parading in our streets, or drawn up in regular *battalia*, as though in a hostile city; our hearts beat to arms; we snatched our weapons, almost resolved by one decisive stroke, to avenge the death of our SLAUGHTERED BRETHREN, and to secure from future danger, all that we held most dear: But propitious heaven forbad the bloody carnage, and saved the threatned victims of our too keen resentment, not by their discipline, not by their regular array,—no, it was royal GEORGE'S livery that proved their shield—it was that which turned the pointed engines of destruction from their breasts.* The thoughts of vengeance were soon buried in our inbred affection to Great-Britain, and calm reason dictated a method of removing the troops more mild than an immediate recourse to the sword. With united efforts you urged the immediate departure of the troops from the town—you urged it, with a resolution which ensured success—you obtained your wishes, and the removal of the troops was effected, without one drop of *their blood* being shed by the inhabitants!

The immediate actors in the tragedy of THAT NIGHT were surrendered to justice.—It is not mine to say how far they were guilty! they have been tried by the country and ACQUITTED of murder! And they are not to be again arraigned at an earthly bar: But, surely the men who have promiscuously scattered *death* amidst the *innocent* inhabitants of a populous city, ought to see well to it, that they be prepared to stand at the bar of an OMNISCIENT JUDGE! And all who contrived or encouraged the stationing troops in this place, have reasons of

* I have the strongest reason to believe that I have mentioned the only circumstance, which saved the troops from destruction. It was then, and now is, the opinion of those who were best acquainted with the state of affairs at that time, that had thrice that number of troops, belonging to any power at open war with us, been in this town in the same exposed condition, scarce a man would have lived to have seen the morning light.

eternal importance, to reflect with deep contrition on their base designs, and humbly to repent of their impious machinations.

The infatuation which hath seemed for a number of years to prevail in the British councils with regard to us, is truly astonishing! What can be proposed by the repeated attacks made upon our freedom, I really cannot surmise; even leaving justice and humanity out of the question, I do not know one single advantage which can arise to the British nation, from our being enslaved:—I know not of any gains, which can be wrung from us by oppression, which they may not obtain from us by our own consent in the smooth channel of commerce: We wish the wealth and prosperity of *Britain*; we contribute largely to both.—Doth what we contribute lose all its value, because it is done voluntarily? The amazing increase of riches to *Britain*, the great rise of the value of her lands, the flourishing state of her navy; are striking proofs of the advantages derived to her, from her commerce with the Colonies; and it is our earnest desire that she may still continue to enjoy the same emoluments, until her streets are paved with AMERICAN GOLD; only, let us have the pleasure of calling it our own, whilst it is in our hands;—but this it seems is too great a favor—we are to be governed by the *absolute commands of others, our property is to be taken away without our consent*—if we complain, our complaints are treated with contempt; if we assert our rights, that assertion is deemed insolence; if we humbly offer to submit the matter to the impartial decision of reason, the SWORD is judged the most proper argument to silence our murmurs!—But, this cannot long be the case—surely, the *British* nation will not suffer the reputation of their justice, and their honor, to be thus sported away by a *capricious ministry*; no, they will in a short time open their eyes to their true interest: They nourish in their own breasts a noble love of Liberty, they hold her dear, and they know that all who have once possessed her charms had rather die than suffer her to be torn from their embraces—They are also sensible that *Britain* is so deeply interested in the prosperity of the colonies, that she must eventually feel every wound given to their freedom; they cannot be ignorant that more dependence may be placed on the affections of a BROTHER, than on the forced services of a SLAVE—They must approve your efforts for the preservation of

your rights; from a sympathy of soul they must pray for your success: And I doubt not but they will e'er long exert themselves effectually to redress your grievances. Even in the dissolute reign of king CHARLES II, when the house of *Commons* impeached the Earl of Clarendon of high treason, the first article on which they founded their accusation was, that "*he had designed a standing army to be raised, and to govern the kingdom thereby.*" And the eighth article was, that "*he had introduced an arbitrary government into his Majesty's plantations.*"—A terrifying example, to those who are now forging *chains* for this COUNTRY!

You have my friends and countrymen often frustrated the designs of your enemies, by your unanimity and fortitude: It was your union and determined spirit which expelled those troops, who polluted your streets with INNOCENT BLOOD.—You have appointed this anniversary as a standing memorial of the BLOODY CONSEQUENCES OF PLACING AN ARMED FORCE IN A POPULOUS CITY, and of your deliverance from the dangers which then seemed to hang over your heads; and I am confident that you never will betray the least want of spirit when called upon to guard your freedom.—None but they who set a just value upon the blessings of Liberty are worthy to enjoy her—Your illustrious fathers were her zealous votaries—when the blasting frowns of tyranny drove her from public view, they clasped her in their arms, they cherished her in their generous bosoms, they brought her safe over the rough ocean, and fixed her seat in this then dreary wilderness; they nursed her infant age with the most tender care; for her sake, they patiently bore the severest hardships; for her support, they underwent the most rugged toils: In her defence, they boldly encountered the most alarming dangers; neither the ravenous beasts that ranged the woods for prey; nor the more furious savages of the wilderness; could damp their ardor!—Whilst with one hand, they broke the stubborn glebe; with the other, they grasped their weapons, ever ready to protect her from danger.—No sacrifice, not even their own blood, was esteemed too rich a libation for her altar! God prospered their valour, they preserved her brilliancy unsullied, they enjoyed her whilst they lived, and dying, bequeathed the dear inheritance, to your care. And as they left you this glorious legacy, they have undoubtedly

transmitted to you, some portion of their noble spirit, to inspire you with virtue to merit her, and courage to preserve her; you surely cannot, with such examples before your eyes, as every page of the history of this country affords,* suffer your liberties to be ravished from you by lawless force, or cajoled away by flattery and fraud.

The voice of your Fathers blood cries to you from the ground; MY SONS, SCORN TO BE SLAVES! In vain we met the frowns of tyrants—In vain, we left our native land—In vain, we crossed the boisterous ocean, found a new world, and prepared it for the happy residence of LIBERTY—In vain, we toiled—In vain, we fought—We bled in vain, if you, our offspring want valour to repel the assaults of her invaders!—Stain not the glory of your worthy ancestors, but like them resolve, never to part with your birth-right; be wise in your deliberations, and determined in your exertions for the preservation of your liberties.—Follow not the dictates of passion, but enlist yourselves under the sacred banner of reason: Use every method in your power to secure your rights: At least prevent the curses of posterity from being heaped upon your memories.

If you with united zeal and fortitude oppose the torrent of oppression; if you feel the true fire of patriotism burning in your breasts; if you from your souls despise the most gaudy dress that slavery can wear; if you really prefer the lonely cottage (whilst blest with liberty) to gilded palaces surrounded with the ensigns of slavery; you may have the fullest assurance that tyranny with her whole accursed train will hide their hideous heads in confusion, shame and despair—If you perform your part, you must have the strongest confidence, that THE SAME ALMIGHTY BEING who protected your pious and venerable fore-fathers—who enabled them to turn a barren wilderness into a fruitful field, who so often *made bare his arm* for their salvation, will still be mindful of you their offspring.

May THIS ALMIGHTY BEING graciously preside in all our councils.—May he direct us to such measures as he himself shall approve, and be pleased to bless.—May we ever be a people favored of GOD.—May our land be a land of Liberty,

* At simul heroum laudes, et facta parentis
Jam legere, et quæ sit poteris cognoscere virtus.

the seat of virtue, the asylum of the oppressed, *a name and a praise in the whole earth*, until the last shock of time shall bury the empires of the world in one common undistinguished ruin!

FINIS.