

James Otis to Catharine Macaulay

Boston, Massachusetts, 27 July 1769.

Autograph letter signed, 8 pages.

[*struck*: M^r] – Otis E^{rs}

Boston July 27.th

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Madam

I received by D^r Jeffries the singular honor of your letter with an elegant edition of your excellent history. This had been much admired here from its first publication & is every day sought after and read with great avidity. I have the pleasure to assure you that in proportion to ye number of inhabitants in each you have as many hearty friends to your name, fame and prosperity in N^o. America as in Britain. There are of these who scruple not to affirm that you have displayed greater talents for history than those who at any period have attempted ye British annals. All agree that you have exhibited a most illustrious proof of ye truth of an old observation which I shall express in my own way GOD & Nature, at least in [point] of genius, have been equally kind to both Sexes: And were it not for the Tyranny of Custom, the sage result of despots, priests, pedantrs & coxcombs every age & nation would furnish more frequent instances of Ladies rivalling [*struck*: y^e] gentlemen [2] in the arts and sciences. You have condescended to intimate your pleasure that I should transmitt you an account of American affairs. Were I equal to the business it would require a volume. At present I can only say N^o. America is as really distressed as you justly conceive – The governors of too many of the Colonies are not only unprincipled but as rapacious as old Vernes of Scicily – The revenue officers in general are to the last degree oppressive – The Commerce of ye Country is languishing & dying – And the Citizens talk of captures & prizes taken from his majestys truly loyal subjects here in much the same strain as it sent out against traitors rebels and other ye worst of his Ennemies. Indeed all those endearing appellations are liberally bestowed on ye Colonists for no apparent fault unless jointly & severally imploring ye heavenly grace petitioning ye King, & living as honestly and peaceably as possible on ye pitiful pittance

left them [sic: be] Blasphemy & Treason. It must be confessed should ye publications of Mr G—rge Gr__v__lle and ye Circulating Epistles of my Ld of It—ly once be established as ye rule & standard of political faith [3] the wearing of an old coat over again might be an hostile combination agt ye Commerce of Great Britain and a humble joint prayer or petition of two or three gathered together, Crimen Laesae Majestatis & Sr Fr_nc_s B[illegible]d of Nott_[illegible] Bart and the rest of ye Tory fools here might say Amen! But such doctrine will not be generally adopted in these latter days nor received very readily in any of ye regions of light which now distinguish ye Republic of letters. – The fervent supplications of Five dutiful millions from year to year either secreted or altogether rejected must sooner or later produce very serious effects to both Countries – This at least is to be feared. I say Five million; For including the American Isles his Majesty every day reigns in the hearts of [gt] number of North American subjects. Each of these, what ever be his colony in ye grand circulation of Commerce by his labor production & consumption contributes infinitely more to ye wealth power and grandeur of ye parent state than can his proportion of a paulty extorted revenue cheifly squandered [4] away among a few idle & insignificant placemen & pensioners I cannot now enlarge on a thousand embarrassments on trade which some of ye new regulations have occasioned. Some of the late Acts extend ye Admiralty Jurisdiction to a degree that subjects ye fortune of every merchant in America to ye Caprices of a sole uncontroullable Judge & he by ye tenor of his Commission is ordered to be paid as far as possible out of ye Confiscations he shall decree. Other acts, besides guarding an infamous informer with new triple [brass?/bias?] as if that race had none of their own have [struck: put] in effect put it in ye power of all revenue officers to take such fees as they please. For one of the late Acts says such fees shall be taken as usual & Customary. The very thing complained [off] “And where no fees are settled by usage, then such fees as are taken at ye nearest Custom house.” The great grievance complained of again. Good GOD! This is British liberty & felicity with a vengeance. People may hear these things for this generation but it will be marvellous if those[-t] are rapidly rising should, Eighty years from the date of this, at ye most moderate computation gives this Continent and the adjacent Isles Eighty millions of Inhabitants. [5] This consideration will weigh nothing with those who look not beyond the “poor bounties of an hour.” Others will often [revolve] it. The principal

political problem worthy ye contemplation of a British statesman is not ye ways & means of securing ye perpetual dependance of No. America for –t in ye rotation of human affairs should seem to be absolutely impossible but what are the most probable methods of securing this great good for ye longest possible period. By dependance I mean not subjugation but that subordination of the Colonies to ye parent state & that connexion union & harmony between both Countries which every honest man would wish to promote & [*inserted: to*] Continue. To ye great Question how is all this to be effected? I hesitate not in my Answer; By treating ye Colonists as the descendants of those who settled a New world with little or no experience to ye Old, deserve! This would be not only much better than from the first migration & settlement has ever been experienced; but infinitely better than –t discipline excercised over ye Colonists by every Stuartine Prince till ye Revolution [6] and by almost every minister since ye glorious acquisitions of ye late war their fellow subjects of Britain. In ye year 1620, was effected at New Plymouth ye first English settlement of any importance, N^o. of Virginia. At that time ye French had settled Quebec on the great River St Laurence and ye Dutch were pushing up the River Hudson which has ye next best communication with the immense western Lakes on this continent in comparison of which [*inserted: excepting*] ye [Euscine] & ye Caspian, [*struck: illegible*] the Inland seas of Europe Asia & Africa are but trifling fishponds. – In 1628. The Great Winthrop Father of the Massachusetts came over with his Colony, and with a few at Plymouth justly styled ye Fathers of New England settled a region which but for them in a few years would have been overrun & possessed by ye French & Dutch. Had that taken place in all human probability not a foot of N^o. America had appertained to Great [*inserted: Britain in [illegible]*] & if she had not fallen herself it must have been a miracle. It is a piece of justice due to ye memory of Gov^r Winthrop to observe here that he was a gentleman [7] a scholar a lawyer & a statesman, The paternal Estate he sold in England before he Embarked & his Lady fortune the produce of both which were expended in ye settlement if kept at home and managed with wordly ^oeconomy would long since have entitled him and his descendants to one of ye first peerages in Britain. It is well known that the Stewarts of whom, you have so true an Idea and who you regard just as they deserve would have sold their Colonies as well as [*inserted: their*] Kingdoms to France and Rome. It is equally clear to me that those who

are at ye bottom of ye present American system, and who they are time I hope will discover either thro Ignorance [*inserted: are*[affecting],] or as I rather think, by design are meditating the downfall of the most glorious empire in ye world. The fall of a State has this in common with Comets [*inserted: in* [illegible] [heaven]] & falling bodies, [*illegible*] ye motion is rapidly increased in ye approximation to ye Sun and the Earth. This difference however is observable that Comets approach ye sun but to gather new light & heat [*inserted:& energy*] which is a proper reduction to first principles, whereas fallen states & fallen houses, [8] seldom rise and flourish again even as part of ye materials of a new Fabric. This should teach one moderate state [mongers] a little more Caution in their Career. I have only to add that I have sent you a few papers & pamphlets that I hope will gratify your Curiosity. The bearer of this is Col Hoar who served with reputation in the Provincial service during ye two last wars and has been as first Col. At ye head of ye Massachusetts forces. I have the hon^r to be Madam a great admirer of your Genius & Learning and very much your obliged & Obedient Humble Serv^t.

James. Otis.

Mrss Macaulay.