

Petition about Navigation Rights of Mississippi River, 1793

TO THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

The Remonstrance of the Citizens West of the Allegany Mountains .

Respectfully Sheweth.

THAT Your Remonstrants are entitled by Nature and by stipulation, to the undisturbed Navigation of the river Mississippi, and consider it a right inseparable from their prosperity. That in colonizing this distant and dangerous desert (sic), they always contemplated the free enjoyment of this right, and considered it as an inseparable appendage to the country they had sought out, had fought for, and acquired.—That for a series of years during their early settlement, their petitions to government to secure this right, were answered by its alleged weakness, and your Remonstrants taught to expect, that the time was approaching fast, when both power and inclination would unite to establish it on the firmest grounds. In this anxious expectation they waited, and to the insolence of those who arrogated its exclusive exercise, they patiently submitted, till the government of America had so strengthened itself as to hold out an assurance of future protection to all its citizens, and of redress for all their wrongs.

That protection has not been extended to us, we need only refer to our present situation, and that that situation has not been concealed from, or unknown to, Congress, we appeal to its archives. We have, without ceasing, deplored to you our degraded situation, and burdened you with our humble petitions and requests. But alas! we still experience, that the strong nerved government of America, extends its arm of protection to all the branches of the union, but to your Remonstrants. That it is competent to every end, but that single one, by which alone it can benefit us; the protection of our Territorial rights. It is competent to exact obedience, but not to make that return which can be the only just and natural exchange for it.

Long have your Remonstrants been anxiously in quest of the obstacles that have stood in your way, to the establishment of this our right; and as long has their pursuit been fruitless. Formal and tardy negotiations (sic) have no doubt been often projected, and have as often miscarried. It is true, some negotiations (sic) were once attempted, that were neither formal nor tardy , and gave an early shock to our encreasing (sic) population and to our peace of mind; but your Remonstrants are constrained to be of opinion, that the neglect or local policy of American councils, has never produced one single real effort to procure this right. Could the Government of America be for ten years seriously in pursuit of the establishment of a grand Territorial right, which was arrogantly suspended, and return to that quarter of the union to whom it was all-important, but an equivocal answer?—We think it high time that we should be thoroughly informed of the situation on which your negotiations (sic), if any, have left this right: for apathy itself has grown hopeless from long disappointed expectation.

Your Remonstrants yield not in patriotism to any of their fellow-citizens: but patriotism, like every other thing, has its bounds. We love those states from which we were all congregated, and no event (not even an attempt to barter away our best rights) shall alien our affections from the individual

members who compose them: But attachment to governments cease to be natural, when they cease to be mutual. To be subjected to all the burthens, and enjoy none of the benefits arising from government, is what we will never submit to. Our situation compels us to speak plainly. If wretchedness and poverty await us, it is of no concern to us how they are produced. We are gratified in the prosperity of the Atlantic states, but would not speak the language of truth and sincerity, were we not to declare our unwillingness, to make any sacrifices to it, when their importance and those sacrifices result from our distresses. If the interest of Eastern America requires that we should be kept in poverty, it is unreasonable from such poverty to exact contributions. The first, if we cannot emerge from, we must learn to bear; but the latter, we never can be taught to submit to.

From the General Government of America, therefore, your Remonstrants now ask protection, in the free enjoyment of the navigation of the river Mississippi, which is withheld from them by the Spaniards. We demand it as a right which you have the power to invest us with, and which not to exert, is as great a breach of our rights, as to withhold. We declare, that nothing can retribute us for the suspension or loss of this inestimable right. We declare it to be a right which must be obtained; and do also declare, that if the General Government will not procure it for us, we shall hold ourselves not answerable for any consequences that may result from our own procurement of it. The God of nature has given us both the right and means of acquiring and enjoying it; and to permit a sacrifice of it to any earthly consideration, would be a crime against ourselves, and against our posterity.