

WILLIAM PITT, LORD CHATHAM, ADDRESS ON THE TAXATION OF THE AMERICAN  
COLONIES  
DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.  
JANUARY 14, 1766.

**INTRODUCTION**

MR. GEORGE GRENVILLE, during his brief administration from 1763 to 1765, adopted a plan for replenishing the exhausted treasury of Great Britain, which had been often proposed before, but rejected by every preceding minister. It was that of levying direct taxes on the American colonies. His famous Stamp Act was brought forward February 7th, 1765. It was strongly opposed by Colonel Barré, who thus indignantly replied to the charge of ingratitude, brought by Charles Townsend against the Americans, as "children planted by our care, nourished by our indulgence, and protected by our arms," &c. "*They planted by your care?*" said Colonel Barré: "No! Your oppressions planted them in America. They fled from your tyranny to a then uncultivated and inhospitable country, where they exposed themselves to almost all the hardships to which human nature is liable; and, among others, to the cruelties of a savage foe, the most subtle, and, I will take it upon me to say, the most formidable of any people on earth; and yet, actuated by principles of true English liberty, they met all hardships with pleasure, compared with those they suffered in their native land from the hands of those who should have been their friends. *They nourished by your indulgence?* They grew by your neglect of them! As soon as you began to care about them, that care was exercised in sending persons to rule them, who were, perhaps, the deputies of deputies to some members of this House--sent to spy out their liberties, to misrepresent their actions, and to prey upon them--men promoted to the highest seats of justice; some of whom, to my knowledge, were glad, by going to a foreign country, to escape being brought to the bar of a court of justice in their own. *They protected by your arms?* They have nobly taken up arms in your defense; have exerted a valor, amid their constant and laborious industry, for the defense of a country whose frontier was drenched in blood, while its interior yielded all its little savings to your emolument. . . . The people are, I believe, as truly loyal as any subjects the King has; but a people jealous of their liberties, and who will vindicate them, if they should ever be violated."

A few months after [passage of the Stamp Act], the ministry of Mr. Grenville came abruptly to an end, and was followed by the administration of Lord Rockingham. That able statesman was fully convinced that nothing but the repeal of the Stamp Act could restore tranquility to the colonies, which, according to Colonel Barre's predictions, were in a state of almost open resistance. The news of this resistance reached England at the close of 1765, and Parliament was summoned on the 17th of December. The plan of the ministry was to repeal the Stamp Act; but, in accordance with the King's wishes, to re-assert (in doing so) the *right* of Parliament to tax the colonies. Against this course Mr. Pitt determined to take his stand; and when the ordinary address was made in answer to the King's speech, he entered at once on the subject of American taxation, in a strain of the boldest eloquence.

## SPEECH &c.

MR. SPEAKER,-- . . .

I will only speak to one point, a point which seems not to have been generally understood. I mean to the *right*. Some gentlemen [alluding to Mr. Nugent] seem to have considered it as a point of honor. If gentlemen consider it in that light, they leave all measures of right and wrong, to follow a delusion that may lead to destruction. It is my opinion, that this kingdom has no right to lay a tax upon the colonies. At the same time, I assert the authority of this kingdom over the colonies to be sovereign and supreme, in every circumstance of government and legislation whatsoever. They are the subjects of this kingdom; equally entitled with yourselves to all the natural rights of mankind and the peculiar privileges of Englishmen; equally bound by its laws, and equally participating in the constitution of this free country. The Americans are the sons, not the bastards of England! Taxation is no part of the governing or legislative power. The taxes are a voluntary *gift* and *grant* of the Commons alone. In legislation the three estates of the realm are alike concerned; but the concurrence of the peers and the Crown to a tax is only necessary to clothe it with the form of a law. The gift and grant is of the Commons alone. In ancient days, the Crown, the barons, and the clergy possessed the lands. In those days, the barons and the clergy gave and granted to the Crown. They gave and granted what was their own! At present, since the discovery of America, and other circumstances permitting, the Commons are become the proprietors of the land. The Church (God bless it!) has but a pittance. The property of the lords, compared with that of the commons, is as a drop of water in the ocean; and this House represents those commons, the proprietors of the lands; and those proprietors virtually represent the rest of the inhabitants. When, therefore, in this House, we give and grant, we give and grant what is our own. But in an American tax, what do we do? "We, your Majesty's Commons for Great Britain, give and grant to your Majesty"--what? Our own property? No! "We give and grant to your Majesty" the property of your Majesty's commons of America! It is an absurdity in terms.

There is an idea in some that the colonies are *virtually* represented in the House. I would fain know by whom an American is represented here. Is he represented by any knight of the shire, in any county in this kingdom? *Would to God that respectable representation was augmented to a greater number!* Or will you tell him that he is represented by any representative of a borough? a borough which, perhaps, its own representatives never saw! This is what is called *the rotten part of the Constitution*. It can not continue a century. If it does not drop, it must be amputated.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of a virtual representation of America in this House is the most contemptible idea that ever entered into the head of a man. It does not deserve a serious refutation.

The Commons of America, represented in their several assemblies, have ever been in possession of the exercise of this, their constitutional right, of giving and granting their own money. They would have been slaves if they had not enjoyed it! At the same time, this kingdom, as the supreme governing and legislative power, has always bound the colonies by her laws, by her regulations, and restrictions in trade, in navigation, in manufactures, in every thing, except that of taking their money out of their pockets without their consent.

[As soon as Lord Chatham concluded, . . . Mr. George Grenville, who followed in the debate, expatiated at large on the tumults and riots which had taken place in the colonies, and declared that they bordered on rebellion. He condemned the language and sentiments which he had heard as encouraging a *revolution*.]

Gentlemen, sir, have been charged with giving birth to *sedition* in America. They have spoken their sentiments with freedom against this unhappy act, and that freedom has become their crime. Sorry I am to hear the liberty of speech in this House imputed as a crime. But the imputation shall not discourage me. It is a liberty I mean to exercise. No gentleman ought to be afraid to exercise it. It is a liberty by which the gentleman who calumniates it might have profited. He ought to have desisted from his project. The gentleman tells us, America is obstinate; America is almost in open rebellion. I rejoice that America has resisted. Three millions of people, so dead to all the feelings of liberty as voluntarily to submit to be slaves, would have been fit instruments to make slaves of the rest. . . . But, for the defense of liberty, upon a general principle, upon a constitutional principle, it is a ground on which I stand firm--on which I dare meet any man. . . .

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The gentleman asks, When were the colonies emancipated? I desire to know, when were they made slaves? But I dwell not upon words. When I had the honor of serving his Majesty, I availed myself of the means of information which I derived from my office. I speak, therefore, from knowledge. My materials were good. I was at pains to collect, to digest, to consider them; and I will be bold to affirm, that the profits to Great Britain from the trade of the colonies, through all its branches, is two millions a year. This is the fund that carried you triumphantly through the last war. The estates that were rented at two thousand pounds a year, threescore years ago, are at three thousand at present. Those estates sold then from fifteen to eighteen years purchase; the same may now be sold for thirty. You owe this to America. This is the price America pays you for her protection. And shall a miserable financier come with a boast, that he can bring "a pepper-corn" into the exchequer by the loss of millions to the nation?<sup>7</sup> I dare not say how much higher these profits may be augmented. Omitting [*i. e.*, not taking into account] the immense increase of people, by natural population, in the northern colonies, and the emigration from every part of Europe, I am convinced [on other grounds] that the commercial system of America may be altered to advantage. You have prohibited where you ought to have encouraged. You have encouraged where you ought to have prohibited. Improper restraints have been laid on the continent in favor of the islands.

In such a cause, your success would be hazardous. America, if she fell, would fall like the strong man; she would embrace the pillars of the state, and pull down the Constitution along with her. Is this your boasted peace--not to sheathe the sword in its scabbard, but to sheathe it in the bowels of your countrymen? . . . The Americans have not acted in all things with prudence and temper: they have been wronged; they have been driven to madness by injustice. Will you punish them for the madness you have occasioned? Rather let prudence and temper come first from this side. I will undertake for America that she will follow the example. There are two lines in a ballad of Prior's, of a man's behavior to his wife, so applicable to you and your colonies, that I can not help repeating them:

"Be to her faults a little blind;  
Be to her virtues very kind."

Upon the whole, I will beg leave to tell the House what is my opinion. It is, that the Stamp Act be repealed absolutely, totally, and immediately. That the reason for the repeal be assigned, viz., because it was founded on an erroneous principle. At the same time, let the sovereign authority of this country over the colonies be asserted in as strong terms as can be devised, and be made to extend to every point of legislation whatsoever; that we may bind their trade, confine their manufactures, and exercise every power whatsoever, except that of taking their money out of their pockets without their consent.

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The motion for the address received the approbation of all. About a month after, February 26th, 1766, a bill was introduced repealing the Stamp Act; but, instead of following Mr. Pitt's advice, and abandoning all claim to the right of taxing the colonies, a Declaratory Act was introduced, asserting the authority of the King and Parliament to make laws which should "bind the colonies and people of America *in all cases whatsoever!*" Lord Camden, when the Declaratory Act came into the House of Lords, took the same ground with Mr. Pitt in the House of Commons. "My position," said he, "is this-- I repeat it--I will maintain it to the last hour: *Taxation and representation are inseparable*. This position is founded on the laws of nature. It is more; it is in itself an eternal law of nature. For whatever is a man's own is absolutely his own. No man has a right to take it from him without his consent, either expressed by himself or his representative. Whoever attempts to do this, attempts an injury. Whoever does it, commits a robbery. He throws down and destroys the distinction between liberty and slavery." Other counsels, however, prevailed. The Stamp Act was repealed, but the Declaratory Act was passed; its principles were carried out by Charles Townsend the very next year,

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