



**Volume 20**

**Number 018**

**America's Revolution (46) – British  
Constitutional Debate – II**

**Lead: In the 1700s the United States broke from England. No colony in history had done that before. This series examines America's Revolution.**

**Intro: *A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts***

**Content: William Pitt the Elder was one of Britain's great First Ministers. He had led the nation to victory in the Seven Years' War and in winter 1766 rose to call for repeal of the Stamp Tax, one of the first of**

**several revenue schemes Parliament passed in the 1760s and 1770s to get America to help pay for the troops that Britain stationed in America to protect Americans. His argument was that Britain had no right to lay a tax on the colonies because Americans were not represented in Parliament.**

**He affirmed that Americans were bound by the laws passed by Parliament, but Americans also shared all the rights of Englishmen and one of the those rights, as contained in the British Constitution, was that no man could be taxed unless represented in the institution levying the tax. In this argument he echoed the argument being made in America and asserted that taxes were “no part of the legislative or governing power.” Taxes were a voluntary gift of the Commons to the monarch. When the Commons levies a tax it “gives and grants what is our own.” But, he thundered,**

**when Parliament taxes Americans, who clearly did not elect members to Parliament, they were giving away property that belonged to someone else. It was not their gift to give.**

**He dismissed the silly notion of “virtual representation” that some had made up, as absurd. ‘Who in England represented Americans? “The knights of the shire, the representative of a borough, “a borough, which perhaps, its own representative never saw?” Members of Parliament sat back shocked and awaited the inevitable response from the one who had authored the Stamp Tax. Next time: The Empire strikes back.**

**At the University of Richmond’s School of Professional and Continuing Studies, I’m Dan Roberts.**



## Resources

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