



Volume 20

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**America's Revolution (48) – Mr. Seldon's
Penny – I**

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: In the 1760s and 1770s British colonists in North America struggled to justify or even to describe the foundation of their increasing discontent with their relationship with Britain. Eventually a full-

blown constitutional argument or justification for liberation would find expression in the writings of Thomas Paine and in Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, but in the wake of the Stamp Act Crisis of 1765 and 1766 colonial advocates were trying to find the ideas that might give respectability to their determination to protect their property from Parliamentary tax schemes. For colonial theorists, protection of property was not an idle exercise, not some exercise in selfish acquisition. Property for Americans represented the heart and soul of liberty. The very purpose of civil society was the "preservation and regulation of property.

In the previous century, when Parliamentary Puritans were struggling with King Charles I, one of their most learned champions was John Seldon. One of his pithy aphorisms was quoted repeatedly in America

during the Stamp Act upheavals. He said, “My penny is as much my own as the King’s ten pence is his: if the King may defend his ten pence, why not Selden his penny?” Selden’s insistence on the sacred nature of property was given a much fuller expression later in the 1600s by John Locke in his *Two Treatises of Government*. The American colonists were schooled by Locke and adopted his ideas enthusiastically. Locke spoke of property first as material possessions but then also as “lives, liberties or estates.” In short, property represents a man’s rights, his freedom, and his equality. Locke acknowledged that just as a man may alienate or give away his material possessions, he can surrender his freedom or his rights, but in the case of both, his consent is required. It cannot be taken away lawfully. Following Locke, the colonists insisted that taxing a person when he is not represented in Parliament was akin to

“perpetual bondage and slavery.” The Stamp Act was seen as an attack on property and liberty. Next time: Parliamentary power, but not Parliamentary rights.

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