

James Otis

It is hard to say exactly when the ‘American Revolution’ started.

However, John Adams gives a hint that it may have been on February 24, 1761, inside the Old Town House (now the Old State House) in Boston,

“Then and there was the first scene of the first Act of opposition to the Arbitrary claims of Great Britain. [James] Otis was a flame of fire! ... American Independence was then & there born.”

James Otis originally supported Britain’s policies toward the Massachusetts colony.

Though he held appointed positions in the colonial government, he gradually grew disenchanted with the English Parliament.

In 1761, Otis gave a tirade in Boston against the British use of writs of assistance.

The writs, or court orders, allowed the government to search colonists’ homes and businesses. Their purpose: to seize undeclared imports that deprived the British treasury of funds. Otis noted,

“One of the most essential branches of English liberty is the freedom of one’s house.”

“A man’s house is his castle; and whilst he is quiet, he is as well guarded as a prince in his castle.”

“This writ, if it should be declared legal, would totally annihilate this privilege. Custom-house officers may enter our houses when they please; we are commanded to permit their entry. Their menial servants may enter, may break locks, bars, and everything in their way; and whether they break through malice or revenge, no man, no court can inquire. Bare suspicion without oath is sufficient.”

This case, and the arguments he made, was the basis for the Fourth Amendment of the Bill of Rights (protects people from unreasonable searches and seizures by the government).

Of the speech, historian John T. Morse wrote,

“This was the first log of the pile which afterward made the great blaze of the Revolution.”

Or, as John Adams wrote,

“Then and there the Child Independence was born. In fifteen years i.e. in 1776. he grew up to Manhood, & declared himself free.”



James Otis was called the most important American of the 1760s.

“Mr. Otis’s popularity was without bounds.” As Adams notes, “For ten years afterwards Mr. Otis at the head of his Country’s cause, conducted the Town of Boston & the people of the Province with a prudence & fortitude, at every sacrifice of personal interest, & amidst unceasing persecution; which would have done honour to the most virtuous Patriot or Mastyr of Antiquity.”

This broadsheet is dedicated to the 250th Anniversary Celebration of the Declaration of Independence for more information visit the National Society Sons of the American Revolution website at: www.sar.org

Presented by: The Hawaii Society Sons of the American Revolution

<https://hawaiisar.org/> For more:
<https://bit.ly/3NtVUQ2>