

No taxation without representation

“No taxation without representation” is a slogan originating during the 1750s and 1760s that summarized a primary grievance of the British colonists in the Thirteen Colonies, which was one of the major causes of the American Revolution. In short, many in those colonies believed that, as they were not directly represented in the distant British Parliament, any laws it passed taxing the colonists (such as the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act) were illegal under the Bill of Rights 1689, and were a denial of their rights as Englishmen.

The phrase captures a sentiment central to the cause of the English Civil War, as articulated by John Hampden who said “what an English King has no right to demand, an English subject has a right to refuse” in the Ship money case.[citation needed] “No Taxation Without Representation,” in the context of British American Colonial taxation, appeared for the first time in the February 1768 London Magazine’s headline, on page 89, in the printing of Lord Camden’s “Speech on the Declaratory Bill of the Sovereignty of Great Britain over the Colonies.”

Prior to the American Revolution

The British Parliament had controlled colonial trade and taxed imports and exports since 1660. By the 1760s, the Americans were being deprived of a historic right. The English Bill of Rights 1689 had forbidden the imposition of taxes without the consent of Parliament. Since the colonists had no representation in Parliament, the taxes violated the guaranteed Rights of Englishmen. Parliament initially contended that the colonists had virtual representation, but the idea “found little support on either side of the Atlantic”.

John Dunmore Lang wrote in 1852, “The person who first suggested the idea [of Parliamentary representation for the colonies] appears to have been Oldmixon, an American annalist of the era of Queen Anne or George I. It was afterwards put forward with approbation by the celebrated Dr. Adam Smith, and advocated for a time, but afterwards rejected and strongly opposed, by Dr. Benjamin Franklin.”