

Debating from the Perspective of King George III and Parliament

The king and Parliament were united in their belief that the British government had the right to control the American colonies. They believed that all citizens of Britain, no matter where they lived, were represented by Parliament and had a duty to obey British law and pay British taxes.

With your group, you will participate in a debate of this question: *Are the American colonists justified in rebelling against British rule?* Follow these steps to prepare for the debate:

Step 1: Carefully read the primary sources.

Highlight three key words and phrases in each quotation that you think most reveal how King George III and Parliament felt about British rule over the colonies. Then, on this handout, rephrase each quotation in one sentence.

George Grenville

As one of King George's prime ministers, George Grenville introduced the Stamp Act in 1765. Grenville made this comment in 1766 during a debate with William Pitt, a member of Parliament:

When I proposed to tax America, I asked [Parliament], if any gentleman would object to the right; I repeatedly asked it, and no man would attempt to deny it. Protection and obedience are reciprocal. Great Britain protects America; America is bound to yield obedience . . . The nation [Great Britain] has run herself into an immense debt to give them their protection; and now, when they are called upon to contribute a small share toward the public expense; an expense arising from themselves, they renounce your authority, insult your officers, and break out, I might almost say, into open rebellion.

William Pitt

As a member of Parliament, William Pitt supported the king but questioned the effectiveness of Britain's policies toward the colonies. He said this in response to George Grenville during a debate in Parliament in 1766:

I am no courtier of America; I stand up for this kingdom. I maintain, that parliament has a right to bind, to restrain America . . . 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.

Lord Frederick North

As another of King George's prime ministers, Lord Frederick North persuaded Parliament to pass the Tea Act in 1773. He made this comment about the importance of Parliament's maintaining control over the colonies during a speech before Parliament in 1774:

They [American colonists] deny our Legislative authority. Not all the places but there are those who hold and defend that doctrine. We must control them or submit to them.

King George III

Several months after rejecting a letter from the colonists asking for a peaceful resolution to their differences, King George III made these comments during a speech before Parliament in 1775:

Those who have long too successfully laboured to inflame my people in America by gross misrepresentations, and to infuse into their minds a system of opinions, repugnant to the true constitution of the colonies, and to their subordinate relation to Great-Britain, now openly avow their revolt, hostility and rebellion. They have raised troops, and are collecting a naval force; they have seized the public revenue, and assumed to themselves legislative, executive and judicial powers, which they already exercise in the most arbitrary manner, over the persons and property of their fellow-subjects: And altho' many of these unhappy people may still retain their loyalty, and may be too wise not to see the fatal consequence of this usurpation, and wish to resist it, yet the torrent of violence has been strong enough to compel their acquiescence, till a sufficient force shall appear to support them.

Step 2: Brainstorm arguments your group can make during the debate. From your group's perspective, list at least six reasons why you think American colonists are not justified in rebelling against Britain. Consider these questions as you develop your list:

- How do the colonies benefit from British rule?
- Why are the colonists' complaints about "taxation without representation" unjustified?
- What actions by the Patriots have most damaged relations between Britain and the colonies?

Step 3: Prepare materials for the debate. To bring your group's perspective to life during the debate, make sure everyone completes at least one of these tasks:

Create a nameplate. The nameplate should include your group's name in large letters, a slogan, and an illustration that represents your group's viewpoint.

Create costumes or props. Use simple materials to create costumes you can wear or items you can hold during the debate.

Memorize key phrases and facts. Memorize key phrases from the primary sources in Step 1. Also memorize key facts from Sections 2 and 3 that you could use to support your arguments during the debate. For example, explain why the Proclamation of 1763 was fair from your point of view. Practice reciting your quotations and facts dramatically.

Create metaphors or similes. Think of metaphors or similes you could use to explain your group's viewpoint. For example, you might say, "Britain's relationship with the colonies is like that of loving parents caring for their children."

Debating from the Perspective of Loyalists

Loyalists wanted to remain subjects of the British Empire. This group included religious leaders, wealthy landowners, and government workers. Some Loyalists were motivated by strong beliefs, such as the view that the king’s power came from God and that Britain was treating the colonies fairly. Others were motivated by self-interest, fearing the loss of property or government jobs if a rebellion succeeded. Many simply felt that the colonies were better off under British rule.

With your group, you will participate in a debate of this question: *Are the American colonists justified in rebelling against British rule?* Follow these steps to prepare for the debate:

Step 1: Carefully read the primary sources.

Highlight three key words and phrases in each quotation that you think most reveal how Loyalists felt about British rule over the colonies. Then, on this handout, rephrase each quotation in one sentence.

Reverend William Smith

Reverend William Smith (no relation to William Smith, a Moderate from New York) came to America in 1751. He was hired by Benjamin Franklin to teach at the University of Pennsylvania and became its first president. Smith was often critical of the Pennsylvania Assembly and was even jailed at one point for his printed attacks. In 1776, he warned colonists of what could be lost if they continued to follow a path toward independence from Britain.

That much of our former felicity was owing to the protection of England is not to be denied; and that we might still derive great advantages from her protection and friendship . . . is equally certain

. . . We have long flourished under our Charter Government. What may be the consequences of another form we cannot pronounce with certainty; but this we know, that it is a road we have not travelled, and may be worse than it is described.

Dorothea Gamsby

Dorothea Gamsby was 10 years old when she watched the Battle of Bunker Hill (an early conflict in the war) from her aunt and uncle’s house in 1775. She was later forced to leave Boston because it was unsafe for Loyalists. Years later, she made these comments to her granddaughter about the battle:

Men say it was not much of a fight, but to me it seems terrible. Charleston was in flames, women and children flying from their burning homes sought refuge in the city. Dismay and terror, wailing and distraction impressed their picture on my memory, never to be effaced . . . Then came the loads of wounded men attended by long lines of soldiers, the gay banners torn and soiled, a sight to be remembered a lifetime . . . I have read many times of the glory of war but this one battle taught me, however it be painted by poet or novelist, there is nothing but wo and sorrow and shame to be found in the reality.

Charles Inglis

Charles Inglis was a bishop of the Anglican Church in New York. Like many Anglicans, he remained loyal to the king during the American Revolution. In 1776, he explained why the colonies would benefit by maintaining a peaceful relationship with Britain:

By a Reconciliation with Great Britain—Peace—that fairest offspring and gift of Heaven—will be

restored . . . Agriculture, commerce, and industry would resume their wonted vigor. At present they languish and droop, both here and in Britain; and must continue to do so, while this unhappy contest remains unsettled . . . By a connection with Great-Britain, our trade would still have the protection of the greatest naval power in the world . . . The protection of our trade, while connected with Britain, will not cost us a fiftieth part of what it must cost, were we ourselves to raise a naval force sufficient for the purpose.

Daniel Leonard

Daniel Leonard was a prominent lawyer and a member of a wealthy family who was long established in Massachusetts. In 1774, a number of Patriots, outraged by Leonard's Loyalist views, drove him from his home. In 1776, in a letter to the people of Massachusetts, Leonard explained how the American colonists benefited from British rule:

Our merchants are opulent, and our yeomanry in easier circumstances than the noblesse of some states . . . Cities are springing up in the depth of the wilderness: Schools, colleges, and even universities are interspersed through the continent: Our country abounds with foreign refinements, and flows with exotic luxuries. These are infallible marks not only of opulence but of freedom.

Where are the [harnesses of] slavery [under the British] that our patriots would terrify us with? . . . we have neither racks nor inquisitions, tortures nor assassinations: The mildness of our criminal jurisprudence is proverbial, "a man must have many friends to get hanged in New England." Who has been arbitrarily imprisoned, dis-seized of his freehold, or despoiled of his goods? Each peasant that is industrious may acquire an estate, enjoy it his lifetime, and at death transmit a fair inheritance to his prosperity.

Step 2: Brainstorm arguments your group can make during the debate. From your group's perspective, list at least six reasons why you think American colonists are not justified in rebelling against Britain. Consider these questions as you develop your list:

- How have the Patriots' actions created misery for many colonists?
- How do the colonies benefit from British rule?
- What false claims have the Patriots made about British rule?

Step 3: Prepare materials for the debate. To bring your group's perspective to life during the debate, make sure everyone completes at least one of these tasks:

Create a nameplate. The nameplate should include your group's name in large letters, a slogan, and an illustration that represents your group's viewpoint.

Create costumes or props. Use simple materials to create costumes you can wear or items you can hold during the debate.

Memorize key phrases and facts. Memorize key phrases from the primary sources in Step 1. Also memorize key facts from Sections 2 and 3 that you could use to support your arguments during the debate. For example, explain why the Intolerable Acts were fair from your point of view. Practice reciting your quotations and facts dramatically.

Create metaphors or similes. Think of metaphors or similes you could use to explain your group's viewpoint. For example, you might say, "Patriots are like spoiled children who do not respect their parents."

Debating from the Perspective of Moderates

Moderates may have disagreed with British policy, but they were not openly rebellious. For some, it was mainly a matter of practicality. Perhaps they lived too far away from the conflicts to feel the impact or were too busy with everyday tasks to get involved in politics. For others, principles were the key factor. For example, Quakers did not wish to fight because of their religious beliefs. In general, Moderates sought peaceful solutions to the problems between Britain and the colonies.

With your group, you will participate in a debate of this question: *Are the American colonists justified in rebelling against British rule?* Follow these steps to prepare for the debate:

Step 1: Carefully read the primary sources.

Highlight three key words and phrases in each quotation that you think most reveal how Moderates felt about British rule over the colonies. Then, on this handout, rephrase each quotation in one sentence.

John Dickinson

John Dickinson was a lawyer who, along with other colonial leaders, formally protested the Stamp Act. A Moderate, he opposed not only British actions, but also the ideas of such Patriots as Samuel Adams. In 1767, after the passage of the Townshend Acts, he explained why he supported compromise rather than revolt against Britain:

The cause of liberty is a cause of too much dignity to be sullied by turbulence and tumult . . . Those who engage in it should breathe a sedate yet fervent spirit, animating them to actions of prudence, modesty, bravery, humanity, and magnanimity . . . Every government at some time or other falls into

wrong measures. These may proceed from mistake or passion. But every such measure does not dissolve the obligation between the governors and the governed. The mistake may be corrected; the passion may subside. It is the duty of the governed to endeavor to rectify the mistake, and to appease the passion.

John Reynell, James Pemberton, and Samuel Noble

John Reynell, James Pemberton, and Samuel Noble were Quakers. In 1774, after the passage of the Intolerable Acts, they wrote to the *Pennsylvania Gazette* to explain why they would not participate in a tea boycott:

The People called Quakers, tho' tenderly sympathizing with the Distressed . . . think it necessary to declare that no Person or Persons were authorized to represent us on this Occasion, and if any of our Community have countenanced or encouraged this Proposal, they have manifested great Inattention to our religious Principles and Profession and acted contrary to the Rules of Christian Discipline established for the Preservation of Order and good Government among us.

Joseph Galloway

Joseph Galloway was a prominent American lawyer and politician. He believed that the conflict between Britain and the colonies could be settled by legal means instead of revolt. In 1774, he wrote a letter to a member of Parliament explaining why he felt it was important for Britain and the colonies to compromise and avoid bloodshed:

Is it not high Time, my dear Sir, that both Countries should retreat a little, and take other

Ground, seeing That, which they are now upon, is likely to prove dangerous and distressing to Both? . . . that Great Britain ought not in Equity to exercise a Law-making Authority over the Colonies . . . And that the Colonies ought, as soon as possible, to be vested with a constitutional Power of communicating that Knowledge, as is the Case with other Members of the British Government.

William Smith

William Smith was a chief justice and a member of the royal council of New York. When the quarrels over colonial taxation began, Smith denounced British policy. However, when armed resistance broke out, he tried to act as a mediator between the king and the Continental Congress. In 1776, he explained his refusal to take sides in the independence movement:

I now set down—My Thoughts as a Rule for my own Conduct, at this melancholy Hour . . . That the present Animosities are imputable to the Pride & Avarice of Great Britain, in assuming an Authority, inconsistent with the Compact by which the Empire has been so long prosperously united . . . That it was the Duty of the American Assemblies, and of that Congress, acting as a whole for the Continent, to render a Plan to the Mother Country for restoring Peace . . . And consequently that the Declaration they then made, of the Right of Colonies to an exclusive Legislation, not only in all laws of Taxation, but of internal Polity, subject only to the negative of their Sovereign, was a Departure in Terms, from the Original Covenant.

Step 2: Brainstorm arguments your group can make during the debate. From your group’s perspective, list at least three reasons why you think American colonists may not be justified in rebelling against Britain and at least three reasons why they may be. Consider these questions as you develop your list:

- How did British actions create tensions between Britain and the colonies?
- What did Patriots do to increase tensions between Britain and the colonies?
- Why do Moderates reject the views of both Loyalists and Patriots?

Step 3: Prepare materials for the debate. To bring your group’s perspective to life during the debate, make sure everyone completes at least one of these tasks:

Create a nameplate. The nameplate should include your group’s name in large letters, a slogan, and an illustration that represents your group’s viewpoint.

Create costumes or props. Use simple materials to create costumes you can wear or items you can hold during the debate.

Memorize key phrases and facts. Memorize key phrases from the primary sources in Step 1. Also memorize key facts from Sections 2 and 3 that you could use to support your arguments during the debate. For example, explain how the British could have better responded to the Boston Tea Party. Practice reciting your quotations and facts dramatically.

Create metaphors or similes. Think of metaphors or similes you could use to explain your group’s viewpoint. For example, you might say, “Patience serves us with Britain as clothes do against the cold.”

Debating from the Perspective of Patriots

Patriots were those who had come to believe that the colonies must free themselves from British rule, through armed struggle if necessary. Some were merchants who were angry about British taxes. Some were lawyers who thought the colonies should have more say in making their own laws. Others were working people who believed independence would improve their economic condition.

With your group, you will participate in a debate of this question: *Are the American colonists justified in rebelling against British rule?* Follow these steps to prepare for the debate:

Step 1: Carefully read the primary sources.

Highlight three key words and phrases in each quotation that you think most reveal how Patriots felt about British rule over the colonies. Then, on this handout, rephrase each quotation in one sentence.

James Otis

James Otis was a highly respected lawyer and politician from Massachusetts. He spoke and wrote widely. He won praise for *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (1764), in which he made the case against Parliamentary taxation of the colonies. Here is an excerpt from that document:

The very act of taxing, exercised over those who are not represented, appears to me to be depriving them of one of their most essential rights, as freemen; and if continued, seems to be in effect an entire disenfranchisement of every civil right. For what one civil right is worth a rush, after a man's property is subject to be taken from him at pleasure, without his consent? If a man is not his own

assessor in person, or by deputy, liberty is gone, or it lays entirely at the mercy of others.

Abigail Adams

Abigail Adams, wife of John Adams, was one of the most respected intellectuals of her time. In 1774, in a letter to English historian Catharine Macaulay, she explained how the colonies did not desire independence unless Britain forced it on them:

Should I attempt to describe to you the complicated miseries and distresses brought upon us by the late inhumane acts of the British parliament my pen would fail me. Suffice to say, that we are invaded with fleets and Armies, our commerce not only obstructed, but totally ruined, the courts of Justice shut, many driven out from the Metropolis, thousands reduced to want, or dependent upon the charity of their neighbors for a daily supply of food, all the Horrors of a civil war threatening us on one hand, and the chains of Slavery ready forged for us on the other.

Patrick Henry

Patrick Henry was a Virginia lawyer and politician. In March 1775, he made a powerful speech in the House of Burgesses urging that legislature to take military action against the approaching British military force. The house was deeply divided but very much leaning toward not committing troops. Here is an excerpt from that speech:

Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace—but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they

have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

Thomas Paine

Thomas Paine emigrated from Britain to America in 1774, carrying letters of introduction from Benjamin Franklin. He soon became involved in the clashes between Britain and the colonies. In 1776, he published the enormously successful pamphlet *Common Sense*, in which he argued that the colonies had outgrown their need for British control and should be given independence. Here is an excerpt from that pamphlet:

But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families . . . I challenge the warmest advocate for reconciliation to show a single advantage that this continent can reap from being connected with Great Britain . . . Because, any submission to, or dependence on Great Britain, tends directly to involve this continent in European wars and quarrels; and sets us at variance with nations, who would otherwise seek our friendship . . . whenever a war breaks out between England and any foreign power, the trade of America goes to ruin, because of her connection with Britain.

Step 2: Brainstorm arguments your group can make during the debate. From your group’s perspective, list at least six reasons why you think American colonists are justified in rebelling against Britain. Consider these questions as you develop your list:

- How did British actions create tensions between Britain and the colonies?
- Why is it impossible for the colonies to compromise with Britain at this point?
- Why have the colonies outgrown the need to be controlled by Britain?

Step 3: Prepare materials for the debate. To bring your group’s perspective to life during the debate, make sure everyone completes at least one of these tasks:

Create a nameplate. The nameplate should include your group’s name in large letters, a slogan, and an illustration that represents your group’s viewpoint.

Create costumes or props. Use simple materials to create costumes you can wear or items you can hold during the debate.

Memorize key phrases and facts. Memorize key phrases from the primary sources in Step 1. Also memorize key facts from Sections 2 and 3 that you could use to support your arguments during the debate. For example, explain why the Stamp Act was unfair from your point of view. Practice reciting your quotations and facts dramatically.

Create metaphors or similes. Think of metaphors or similes you could use to explain your group’s viewpoint. For example, you might say, “At some point, a mother must let her child cross the street alone.”