



James Otis: The Pre-Revolutionist (Classic History Series)

John Clark Ridpath, Charles K. Edmunds

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On the awakening of American feelings between 1760 and 1761: The most conspicuous, the most ardent and influential in this revival, from 1760 to 1766, were, first and foremost, before all and above all, James Otis. — Novanglus, and Massachusettensis, by John Adams and Jonathan Sewall IF ANY ONE MAN set in motion the spirit the led to the outbreak of the American quest for independence, that man was James Otis, Jr. The son of a lawyer and a distinguished lawyer himself, Otis abandoned his career to speak for the rights, liberties, and privileges owed to the American colonists as citizens of the British Empire. Before Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Alexander Hamilton, and Thomas Jefferson, Otis spoke forcefully against the abuses of a distant Parliament out of touch with and insensitive to the needs of an unrepresented population. In need of revenue after the costly wars, corrupted with purchased government offices and favors for the newly-rich land barons of England, violating the official charters establishing the American colonies, Parliament levied unlawful taxes, authorized warrantless searches, sent armed troops to American shores in a time of peace. Known for his unwavering honesty, his refusal to take up a cause he did not consider just, Otis spoke with a powerful, persuasive voice in the State Assembly, in courts, and in other venues. He could also be considered the first casualty of the Revolution: In 1769, Otis was attacked and severely beaten by a revenue officer, leaving him with a serious head injury. He forgave the man who had inflicted the injury and refused the court's damage award after receiving an apology. Unfortunately, the physical trauma so seriously affected his faculties that he was forced to leave the fight for justice and freedom to the many patriots he had so intensely inspired.

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