

# IN HIS OWN WORDS: JAMES OTIS ON NATURAL RIGHTS

## Excerpts from *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, 1764

**Directions:** Read the excerpts from Otis's essay, and then follow the directions on Handout D.

1. The end of government being the good of mankind points out its great duties: it is above all things to provide for the security, the quiet, and happy enjoyment of life, liberty, and property. There is no one act which a government can have a right to make that does not tend to the advancement of the security, tranquility, and prosperity of the people. . . .
2. The colonists, being men, have a right to be considered as equally entitled to all the rights of nature with the Europeans, and they are not to be restrained in the exercise of any of these rights but for the evident good of the whole community. . . .
3. The colonists are by the law of nature freeborn, as indeed all men are, white or black. . . . Nothing better can be said in favor of [the slave] trade that is the most shocking violation of the law of nature, has a direct tendency to diminish the idea of the inestimable value of liberty, and makes every dealer in it a tyrant, from the director of an African company to the petty chapman in needles and pins on the unhappy coast. It is a clear truth that those who every day barter away other men's liberty will soon care little for their own. . . .
4. By being or becoming members of society they have not renounced their natural liberty in any greater degree than other good citizens, and if 'tis taken from them without their consent they are so far enslaved. . . . Now can there be any liberty where property is taken away without consent? . . . There can be no prescription old enough to supersede the law of nature, and the grant of God almighty; who has given to all men a natural right to be free. . . .

**Source:** "The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved." The Founders' Constitution.  
<<http://presspubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch2s5.html>>.