

From Edmund Burke's

Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies

Given in Parliament, 22 March 1775

“In this character of the Americans a love of freedom is the predominating feature which marks and distinguishes the whole . . . This fierce spirit of liberty is stronger in the English colonies, probably than in any other people of the earth, and this from a great variety of powerful causes . . . First, the people of the colonies are descendants of Englishmen. England, Sir, is a nation which still, I hope, respects, and formerly adored, her freedom. The colonists emigrated from you when this part of your character was most predominant; and they took this bias and direction the moment they parted from your hands. They are therefore not only devoted to liberty, but to liberty according to English ideas and on English principles.”

“But the religion most prevalent in our **northern** [emphasis mine] colonies is a refinement on the principle of resistance; it is the dissidence of dissent, and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion.

“In **Virginia and the Carolinas** [emphasis mine] they have a vast multitude of slaves. Where this is the case in any part of the world, those who are free are by far the most proud and jealous of their freedom. Freedom is to them not only an enjoyment, but a kind of rank and privilege . . . I do not mean, Sir, to commend the superior morality of this sentiment, which has at least as much pride as virtue in it; but I cannot alter the nature of man.”

“Three thousand miles of ocean lie between you and them. No contrivance can prevent the effect of this distance in weakening government. Seas roll, and months pass between the order and the execution; and the want of a speedy explanation of a single point is enough to defeat an whole system.”

“We cannot, I fear, falsify the pedigree of this fierce people, and persuade them that they are not sprung from a nation in whose veins the blood of freedom circulates. The language in which

they would hear you tell them this tale would detect the imposition; your speech would betray you. An Englishman is the unfittest person on earth to argue another Englishman into slavery.”

“ . . . an empire is the aggregate of many states under one common head, whether this head by a monarch or a presiding republic. It does, in such constitutions, frequently happen . . . that the subordinate parts have many local privileges and immunities. Of course disputes, often, too, very bitter disputes, and much ill blood, will arise. But though every privilege is an exemption (in the case) from the ordinary exercise of the supreme authority, it is no denial of it.”