



“The Celebrated Abbé Raynal” Born This Day in 1713

“The celebrated Abbé Raynal.”

Have you ever noticed that so many men referred to by our Founding Fathers as “celebrated” or “renown” are completely unknown to us today? The Abbé Raynal is one of those men.

Abbé Raynal, whose full name was Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, was a French writer and philosopher born on April 12, 1713 in the city of Saint-Geniez-d’Olt in southern France. Raynal initially studied theology and became a priest, but later left the Church and became involved in intellectual and political circles in Paris.

Raynal’s most famous work is the book *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (*Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of Europeans in the East and West Indies*), which was published in 1770.

However, the work for which Raynal was often spoken of by our Founding Fathers — John Adams and Benjamin Franklin were personal friends of Raynal — was his *The Revolution in America*, published in 1782.

It is noteworthy that Thomas Paine published a response to Raynal’s account of the War for Independence and its causes.

One need only read the works of Raynal — and the other forgotten men who influenced our Founding Fathers — to discover instantly that their merit exceeds their reputation. Raynal’s respect for the bravery displayed by the Americans in their commitment to die in resistance to tyranny rather than to live in submission to it is evident and motivating.

Witnessing the power of the works of the Abbé Raynal is their absence in the libraries of American schools. A man described by John Adams as “the amiable assertor of the rights of man” is certainly not one whose books will be welcome in classrooms teaching students to criticize and condemn our Founding Fathers.

To combat the curricular disregard of Raynal, I present here a few of the more inspiring and insightful quotations from his books. Challenge yourself to see if, after reading these selections, you can understand why Abbé Raynal was celebrated by the Founders.

Government owes its birth to the necessity of preventing and repressing the injuries which



the associated individuals had to fear from one another....

They who govern, are, perhaps, too much accustomed to hold men in contempt. They regard them too much as slaves, subdued and bent down by nature, whilst they are only so from habit....

Forget not that the lever of power has no other fulcrum than opinion; that the power of those who govern, is, in reality, but the power of those who suffer government.

Remind not people attentively occupied by their labors, or sleeping in their chains, to lift up their eyes to truth too terrible for you; and whilst they are obeying, bring not to their remembrance their right to command. When the moment of this fearful rousing shall arrive; when they shall have thought in earnest that they are not made for their magistrates, but that their magistrates are made for them; when they shall once have been able to bring themselves together, to feel the communication of kindred minds, and to pronounce with a voice unanimous; "We will not have this law; this practice is offensive...."

Opinion is the property most dear to man, dearer even than his life, and consequently much dearer than his wealth....

The pretensions of the colonists rested on the nature of their charters, and on the still more solid basis of that right of every English subject, not to be taxed without consent, expressed by himself or his representative. This right, which ought to be that of every people, since it is founded on the eternal law of reason, originated so far back as in the reign of the first Edward. From that epoch the Englishman has never lost sight of it. In peace, in war, under weak or wicked kings, in slavish or tumultuous times, it has been his unpermitted claim....

This Englishman has been seen ... never to renounce the right of self-taxation. It was in the defense of it that he has shed rivers of blood, that he has punished or dethroned his kings....

[The Englishman] felt that [the right of self-taxation] was the only barrier which could forever limit despotism; that the moment which strips a people of this privilege, condemns it to oppression; and that the funds, raised in appearance for its security, are sooner or later subservient to its ruin....

How much more ought the English natives of America to be attached to the glorious birth right they inherit! They know the price at which their ancestors had bought it. The very soil which they inhabit must produce in them a sentiment favorable to these ideas.

Finally, a letter written by Raynal to the people of America was published posthumously in the *National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser* newspaper on November 3, 1800. Raynal's message to the citizens of the young country is worthy of being read by Americans today. That letter reads in part:

Guard against the spirit of conquest; the tranquility of the empire decreases as it is extended; have arms to defend yourselves, and have none to attack.

Seek ease and health in labour; prosperity, in agriculture and manufactures; strength, in good manners and virtue. Make the sciences and arts prosper, which distinguish the civilized man from the savage.

Especially watch over the education of your children.



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on April 12, 2023

Wherever we see the youth depraved, that nation is on the decline.

Let liberty have an immovable foundation in the wisdom of your contributions and let it be the cement which unites your states, which cannot be destroyed.

Guillaume-Thomas Raynal died in 1796 in Passy, France, at the age of 82.

As you can see from the selections presented above, there is truly much to be celebrated in the writings of the esteemed abbé.



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