

The Stamp Act Protests

Angelo Angelis
Hunter College

Overview

Did a 1 cent stamp launch the American Revolution?

"Such another Experiment as the Stamp-Act wou'd produce a general Revolt in America." - George Mason, 1766.

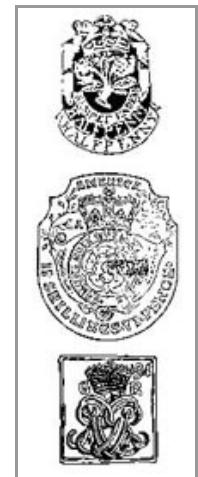
In March 1765, the British Parliament announced a stamp tax. Beginning that November, American colonists would be charged taxes on a variety of printed items, including newspapers, wills, and playing cards. In most cases, the tax would be small, beginning at a half-penny. The response was surprising, at least to the men in Britain who had designed and approved the tax. American colonists, having recently fought in support of Britain, rose up in protest against the tax before it went into effect. The protests began with petitions, led to refusals to pay the tax, and eventually to property damage and harassment of officials. The Stamp Act protests established a pattern of action against British officials that would, in some cases, involve physical assault, as shown in the image to the right. We will take a closer look at this and other images and evidence in exercises that follow. But consider these questions for now. What would cause Americans to act in this manner? Was the tax that expensive? Or were other issues at play? **But watch out. Stamp agents are on their way and Sons of Liberty are on the prowl!**



Goals and Questions

Goals

- To introduce students to major issues, events, and questions related to the origins of the American Revolution.
- To demonstrate the value of point and counterpoint in assessing history.
- To exercise students' analytical skills using primary and secondary sources.



Questions

Origins (Causes)

- Why did the British impose the Stamp Tax?
- Why did the American colonists resist?

Immediate Consequences (Effects)

- What form did colonial resistance take?
- How did social and economic status influence the role colonists played in the protests?
- Did the protests lead to repeal of the Stamp Act?

Long-term Consequences (Effects)

- What effect did protest and appeal have on colonial politics?
- What effect did repeal have on British policy concerning the colonies?

Background reading

In what context did the Stamp Act emerge?

Tensions between Great Britain and its American colonies emerged at a moment when the colonies were still celebrating the British victory against France. The colonies contributed much to the victory by sending militia, providing supplies and housing British troops during the **French and Indian War** —the American phase of a larger, transatlantic conflict. The war ended in 1763, leaving Britain with a staggering debt and with an increased empire that demanded more and closer administration.

Where could British officials look for **revenue**? Taxes were already high in Britain. But they had not been collected to any great extent in the colonies. Taxes based on trade between the British American colonies and British and foreign markets and suppliers presented one solution. **Regulations on trade** between the colonies and British and non-British merchants were already in place prior to 1763. These regulations aimed at protecting and increasing business opportunities for British merchants and at curtailing illegal trade or **smuggling** on the part of colonial merchants. They did not aim at collecting revenue.

But the British ministry failed for an extended period to fully enforce even these regulations. This failure can be viewed as part of a larger policy that historians refer to as **benign (or salutary) neglect** —a somewhat lax enforcement of imperial rule. **Customs officials** were responsible for enforcing the trade regulations. But they were often underpaid, overworked and had to fulfill their duties without legal or physical support. Some accepted bribes to look the other way when importers and ship masters violated import restrictions or failed to declare goods in order to avoid the payment of taxes.

The practice of benign neglect had also established an understanding of **home rule** in the colonies that gave the majority of authority for domestic governance (government and administration within the colonies) to the colonial legislatures.

Thus, the colonies accepted the authority of the **British Parliament** in imperial matters, although many colonial merchants and shipmasters worked to avoid the trade regulations imposed by Parliament. The British and British American perspectives were in conflict and they had already created tensions prior to the Stamp Act.

In 1760-1761, the colonies challenged attempts on the part of British official to use of **writs of assistance**, which had been recently authorized by the Parliament, to locate and seize smuggled goods. The writs were similar to modern-day search warrants, but they did not require evidence of wrongdoing or judicial approval. The colonists argued that the writs violated English constitutional protections against search and seizure of private and business property.

A second conflict emerged in 1764 over the **Sugar Act**. The act taxed all sugar and molasses imported from the French West Indies. The act also restricted exports of certain raw materials from the colonies by requiring that they go through British merchants. The Sugar Act aimed, in part, at improving import opportunities for British merchants by discouraging purchases from and sales to non-British suppliers. The Sugar Act would also raise revenue for use in supporting British troops in North America. Thus, the Sugar Act would hurt colonial merchants, shipmasters, anyone involved in the maritime trades and many consumers.

The colonists reacted with anger to the Sugar Act, not only because of the money involved and the complicated procedures it imposed, but also because the act violated certain fundamental principals of freedom, as they were understood in the British American colonies. First, the Sugar Act challenged the right to a local trial by a **jury of one's peers** by allowing customs officials to try smugglers in **vice-admiralty courts**. Defendants face a single justice, who would be a British appointed and paid official, without the benefit of a jury. Second, the Sugar Act violated a long-standing **precedent** in which Britain had not taxed the colonies to raise revenue. Now the colonies faced an **indirect tax**, a tax added to the cost of the goods, rather than a **direct tax** that would require payment from the consumers. This would set a new precedent. How far would the British Parliament go in taxing the colonists, if they allowed the Sugar Act to stand? The Stamp Act answered the question in negative terms for many of the colonists.

What options were left to the colonies, if they wanted to resist taxes and their enforcement? The colonists issued **petitions** to the governor and to British officials and published **pamphlets** for the public that outlined the reasons for

protesting the taxes. Merchants continued to smuggle taxable goods and, in some cases, increased the amount of illegal imports. Political leaders called on consumers to **boycott** taxed items by refusing to buy or consume them. Political leaders could also call on **crowds** to enforce boycotts by preventing the landing of goods or by harassing officials.

Were these crowds legal? In some ways, the crowds violated British riot laws. But crowds were also a long-standing English tradition and had been tolerated as long as they kept their actions within limits and aimed at specific goals. Political leaders from the highest ranks of society often acted as sponsors for the crowds. Middle-level citizens—artisans or craftsmen and merchants—provided the organization and leadership. But crowds could and often did get out of hand once they were underway. The property damage and physical violence that accompanied some crowd actions worried influential colonists on both sides of the political debate. Yet, the crowds were vital to the success of the resistance against British authority. They served as an important tool for recruiting ordinary citizens. Many of the men who participated in the crowd actions would also serve in the militia and the Continental Army during the American Revolution. Equally important was the impetus crowd actions added to the dissemination and popularization of political ideas.

Arguments against the taxes, particularly the early arguments made by James Otis, Jr., established the concept that taxes could not be constitutionally imposed by any political body that was not elected by the people (“no taxation without representation”). The constitutional critique of British tax policy expanded over the next few years to include a defense of the colonial charter and of English constitutional rights. These ideological debates combined with boycotts and crowd actions to provoke an aggressive response from British officials, particularly from the colonial governors, whose authority was most directly challenged.

Colonial governors assumed aggressive positions in defense of royal authority, locking horns with patriot leaders in the legislature. The British ministry dispatched troops to the colonies to support the governors and the collection of taxes and enforcement of trade regulations. The presence of British troops added to the growing anger of the colonists and a series of increasingly violent events. And the colonies found common ground in the protests against the taxes and in their response to British policy.

Activities

Activity 1: Why the Stamp Act? And why all the fuss?

INVESTIGATING THE ORIGINS

Interrogating the Evidence

Historians begin with a question or set of questions. They use these questions to examine evidence or sources in order to develop and support their arguments. This exercise asks you to examine a group of sources against a series of questions given below. Be sure that you create a set of reading notes for your responses. You will need them later in this module.

Read these notes before you read the Act:

1. The text below is highly condensed and extracted. The original Stamp Act would take up 21 typewritten pages, single spaced and in the standard print.
2. Vellum and parchment are expensive printing materials made from animal skins (sheep, lamb, or calf). They were more lasting than ordinary paper and were generally used for important documents, like royal proclamations and college diplomas. This is why college diplomas are often referred to as "sheepskins," even though they are no longer printed on this material.

The Stamp Act [condensed]

In Parliament March 19, 1765

An act for granting and applying certain stamp duties, and other duties, in the British colonies and plantations in America, towards further defraying the expences of defending, protecting, and securing the same; and for amending such parts of the several acts of parliament relating to the trade and revenues of the said colonies and plantations, as direct the manner of determining and recovering the penalties and forfeitures therein mentioned.

For every skin or piece of vellum or parchment, or sheet or piece of paper, on which shall be ingrossed, written or printed, any declaration, plea, replication, rejoinder, demurrer, or other pleading, or any copy thereof, in any court of law within the British colonies and plantations in America.

... any special bail and appearance upon such.

... any petition, bill, answer, claim, plea, replication, rejoinder, demurrer, or other pleading in any court of chancery or equity [civil court].

For every skin or piece of vellum or parchment, or sheet or piece of paper, on which shall

... any libel, answer, allegation, inventory, or renunciation in ecclesiastical matters in any court of probate, court of the ordinary.

... any copy of any will (other than the probate thereof).

... any register, entry, testimonial, or certificate of any degree taken in any university, academy, college, or seminary of learning.

...any pleading, in any admiralty court [courts regulating trade].

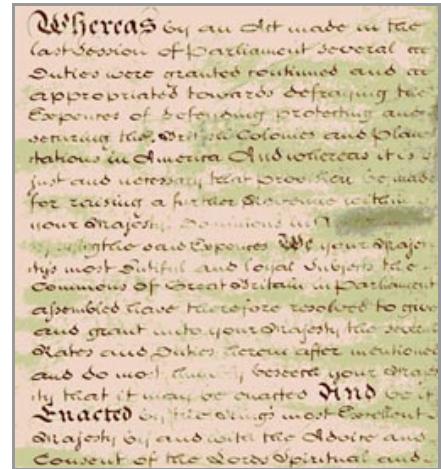
... any writ of covenant for levying of fines.

... any judgment, decree, sentence, or dismission, or any record of Nisi Prius or Postea, in any court within the said colonies and plantations, a stamp duty of four shillings.

... any affidavit, common bail or appearance, interrogatory deposition, rule, order, or warrant of any court.

... any licence, appointment, or admission of any counsellor, solicitor, attorney, advocate, or proctor, to practice in any court, or of any notary.

... any note or bill of lading [shipping manifest], which shall be signed for any kind of goods, wares, or merchandize, to be



For an original copy of the text of the Stamp Act and a complete transcript from the NATIONAL ARCHIVES website

exported.

... any grant, appointment, or admission of or to any publick beneficial office or (except commissions and appointments of officers of the army, navy, ordnance, or militia, of judges, and of justices of the peace).

... any licence for retailing of spirituous liquors.

... any licence for retailing wine.

... any probate of a will, letters of administration, or of guardianship for any estate above the value of twenty pounds sterling money.

... any bond for securing the payment of any sum of money [a sliding scale based on the amount of money].

... any deed or other instrument whatsoever, by which any quantity of land be granted, conveyed, or assigned [a sliding scale based on the size of the parcel].

... any indenture [labor contract], lease, conveyance, contract, stipulation, bill of sale, charter party, protest, articles of apprenticeship, or covenant.

... any passport, or let-pass, surrender of officer, or policy of assurance.

... any notarial act, bond, deed, letter, of attorney, procuration, mortgage, release, or other obligatory instrument.

... every pack of playing cards, and all dice.

... any pamphlet, and upon every news paper, containing publick news, intelligence, or occurrences, which shall be printed, dispersed, and made publick, within any of the said colonies and plantations.

... every advertisement to be contained in any gazette, news paper, or other paper, or any pamphlet.

... every almanack or calendar.

... every deed, instrument, note, memorandum, letter, or other instrument or writing, for or relating to the payment of any sum of money, or for making any valuable consideration for or upon the loss of any ship, vessel, goods, wages, money, effects, or upon any loss by fire, or for any other loss whatsoever.

... every deed, instrument, note, memorandum, letter, or other minument or writing, between the captain or master or owner of any ship or vessel, and any merchant, trader, or other person, in respect to the freight or conveyance of any money, goods, wares, merchandizes, or effects, laden or to be laden on board of any such ship or vessel.

Read the short biographies of the “colonists”

The following biographies reflect a mix of actual individuals and composite characters who are representative one segment of colonial society. Biographies of actual individuals include corresponding birth and death dates. Read the short biography as presented and then click (where available) and read the longer biography.

James Otis Jr. (1725-1783)

Graduate of Harvard College and noted lawyer from a prominent landowning and mercantile family. Had resigned his position in 1761 as advocate-general (attorney general) for Massachusetts to argue against writs of assistance (general search warrants that gave customs officials broad power to enter and search business and private spaces).



John Hancock (1737-1793)

Graduate of Harvard College, ambitious merchant, and ship owner, Hancock was one of the wealthiest men in the American colonies. Had visited England as a young man on a business mission under the sponsorship of his uncle, whose wealth he inherited. Hancock was also a leading member of the colonial assembly, where he joined forces with the “country” faction; that is with the faction that tended to oppose the governor.



Thomas Hutchinson (1711-1780)

<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1222.html>

Born in Boston to a prosperous mercantile family with firm connections to English merchants. Graduated from Harvard and devoted most of his energies to government service. Was appointed to governor's council in 1749. By 1760, he was the Chief Justice and Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts and the leading representative of the governor's or “court” faction in the legislature.



Thomas Printer (Composite)

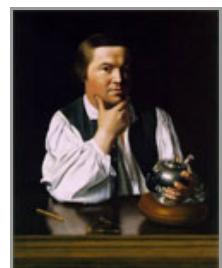
One of a number of men who operated printing presses in Boston (and the other colonial cities), producing newspapers, pamphlets, advertisements, books, and a variety of other printed matter. Among the most coveted assignments was that of official printer for the colonial government. This equated to a steady income. But the assignment was generally granted to one specific printer, who had some connection with the colonial administration. Printers were artisans (craftsmen), but they were also well versed in local politics and business, which provided them with a significant amount of information business and information.



Paul Revere (1734 -1818)

<https://www.paulreverehouse.org/bio/>

Revere was a noted artisan who worked in one of the more prestigious crafts—silversmith. His produced luxuries for the wealthiest segment of Boston. Accordingly, he competed against imports from Britain and his business suffered when the economy was weak. Revere supplemented his income by engraving copper plates that were used to print illustrations for books and a variety of other published materials. He was aided in his work by assistants in the form of apprentices and journeymen.



Jack Tar (Composite)

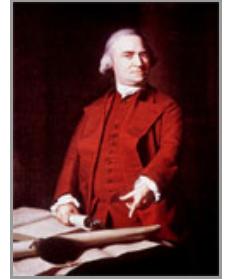
The term Jack Tar was used collectively to describe sailors in the eighteenth century. The term may originate from the use of tar to waterproof sailors' hats and clothing. Sailors in this period were positioned at the bottom of colonial society. They were rough men who earned a meager living in a dangerous trade. But they were also the most mobile and traveled segment of colonial society. Their livelihood, like that of other maritime laborers (shipbuilders, rope makers) depended on a vigorous economy that made steady use of shipping.



Samuel Adams (1722–1803)

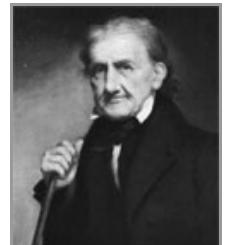
http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/signers/adams_s.htm

Harvard graduate with a variety of interests in business, Adams was noted for his religious intensity (Congregational) and for his active participation in local and colonial politics. Adams was regularly elected to the town meeting and colonial assembly, with strong support from ordinary voters. He was also noted for aggressive, florid editorials that appeared frequently in the Boston newspapers.



George Twelve Hewes (1742–1840)

Poor Boston shoemaker's apprentice who worked on the wharf near John Hancock's warehouse and place of business. Little is known about Hewes's life before the mid-1770s, but it most likely paralleled the lives of most of Boston's apprentices and laborers. The work was hard and the hours long. Whatever free time and spending money he might have might used to "buy" a place at the local tavern, where for the price of a beer or hard cider he could converse, play cards, or possibly hear the latest news read out loud from the latest copy of the local newspaper.



Read Benjamin Franklin's testimony before Parliament at:

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/Disp_Textbook.cfm?smID=3&psid=152

Pose the Following Questions

- What was Parliament's stated purpose for the tax, as it appears in the introduction of the Stamp Act?
- How did Parliament's position **compare** with Benjamin Franklin's testimony?
- Which colonists would be most opposed to the tax and which taxable item would most likely effect their decision?

Writing Exercise

Use the discussion board for your response.

Historians share their ideas with each other in a way that allows for a free exchange of interpretations. This exercise asks you to do this with your classmates using the discussion board assigned by your instructor.

- **Pick** one of the colonists and post a brief comment that explains why that particular colonist would be likely to oppose the stamp tax.
- **Comment** on at least two other postings that include colonists other than the one you chose.
- **Respond** to at least two of the comments made about your original posting.

Optional Secondary Exercise for in-class debate

As assigned by the instructor.

Read the biography of Thomas Dawes. Consider the following question: How would Dawes have reacted to crowd actions protesting the Stamp Act in 1765 and to a similar crowd action in 1788?

Thomas Dawes (1731-1809)

Portrait by Gilbert Stuart, c. 1806



Thomas Dawes was born in Boston, where he received a basic, but relatively undistinguished education. He was trained and worked as a mason, a well-respected craft in the colonial period. Dawes became involved in patriot politics in the early stages of the American Revolution. His connection to other craftsmen and ordinary laborers made him a valuable organizer for crowd actions. Dawes also became friendly with some of the leading patriot leaders (Samuel Adams, John Hancock and Joseph Warren) when he allowed them to use his small living space (a garret) for their secret meetings. His connection to the patriot leaders marked him as a conspirator and his home suffered damage during the British occupation of Boston.

Dawes' early and ardent involvement in patriot politics gave a significant boost to his political and economic careers. He secured a commission as a colonel in the Massachusetts militia, serving in that capacity during the American Revolution. Commissions at this level were granted by the state government and were usually given by members of the social elite.

The town of Boston elected him in 1779 to serve at the convention that drafted and enacted the Massachusetts state constitution. Other members of the Boston delegation included Samuel Adams, John Adams and John Hancock. Dawes served several terms in the Massachusetts House of Representatives and the Senate and was appointed in 1792 to the State Supreme Court (without benefit of legal training).

By 1788, Dawes had expanded his business to include development of property and homebuilding. In effect, Dawes had grown from a mason or builder of brick structures into an architect. His structures include two of the most important 18th century structures in Boston: the Old State House and the Brattle Street Church. Increasingly wealthy, Dawes built a spacious home next to the Boston home occupied by John Adams and he was one of a few men in Boston who owned a private carriage or coach. His political and economic prominence led to a number of honors. Dawes was inducted as a member of the Academy of Arts and Sciences, became a close associate of John Hancock and succeeded in placing his son, Thomas Jr., at Harvard, a privilege usually reserved at the time for men from prominent families. The portrait by Gilbert Stuart testifies to his success. Stuart, who was one of the most prominent American painters of the early 19th century, is well known for his portraits of George Washington.

Activity 2: What form did colonial resistance take?

INVESTIGATING THE PROTESTS

Interrogating the evidence

Historians draw their evidence from a variety of sources, including documents, vital records (such as birth certificates), images and artifacts (things people make and use). This exercise asks you to draw on a combination of documentary and visual evidence. Examine the evidence against the suggest questions and make notes for later use.

The protest in ideas and words

Read two of the following documents. Which specific words, phrases, or ideas appear particularly important or useful in communicating an idea? Who was the audience for the documents you selected.

- William Bradford, Stamp Act Protest
(<http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/882>)
- [Virginia Stamp Act Resolutions](http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/related/vsa65.htm)
(<http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/related/vsa65.htm>)
- [Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress](http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1751-1775/the-resolutions-of-the-stamp-act-congress-october-19-1765.php)
(<http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1751-1775/the-resolutions-of-the-stamp-act-congress-october-19-1765.php>)
- [Connecticut Resolutions on the Stamp Act](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/ct_resolutions_1765.asp)
(http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/ct_resolutions_1765.asp)



George Grenville

First Lord of the Treasury and later
Prime Minister

"Mr. Grenville strongly urg'd not only the power
but the right of Parliament to tax the colonys,
and hop'd in Gods Name... that none would
dare dispute their Sovereignty."

- Edward Monatague

The protest in action

Read two of the following reports of the protests. How did protests work? Who attended? Who or what was targeted? What was done?

1. Thomas Hutchinson Recounts the Mob Reaction to the Stamp Act in Boston, 1765

The distributor of stamps for the colony of Connecticut arrived in Boston from London; and, having been agent for that colony, and in other respects of a very reputable character, received from many gentlemen of the town such civilities as were due to him. When he set out for Connecticut, Mr. Oliver, the distributor for Massachusetts Bay, accompanied him out of town.

This occasioned murmuring among the people, and an inflammatory piece in the next *Boston Gazette*. A few days after, early in the morning, a stuffed image was hung upon a tree, called the great tree of the south part of Boston [subsequently called Liberty Tree]. Labels affixed denoted it to be designed for the distributor of stamps....

Before night, the image was taken down, and carried through the townhouse, in the chamber whereof the governor and council were sitting. Forty or fifty tradesmen, decently dressed, preceded; and some thousands of the mob followed down King street to Oliver's dock, near which Mr. Oliver had lately erected a building, which, it was conjectured, he designed for a stamp office. This was laid flat to the ground in a few minutes. From thence the mob proceeded for Fort Hill, but Mr. Oliver's house being in the way, they endeavored to force themselves into it, and being opposed, broke the windows, beat down the doors, entered, and destroyed part of his furniture, and continued in riot until midnight, before they separated...



Several of the council gave it as their opinion, Mr. Oliver being present, that the people, not only of the town of Boston, but of the country in general, would never submit to the execution of the stamp act, let the consequence of an opposition to it be what it would. It was also reported, that the people of Connecticut had threatened to hang their distributor on the first tree after he entered the colony; and that, to avoid it, he had turned aside to Rhode-Island. Despairing of protection, and finding his family in terror and great distress, Mr. Oliver came to a sudden resolution to resign his office before another night....

The next evening, the mob surrounded the house of the lieutenant-governor and chief justice [Hutchinson]. He was at Mr. Oliver's house when it was assaulted, and had excited the sheriff, and the colonel of the regiment, to attempt to suppress the mob. A report was soon spread, that he was a favourer of the stamp act, and had encouraged it by letters to the ministry. Upon notice of the approach of the people, he caused the doors and windows to be barred; and remained in the house....

Certain depositions had been taken, many months before these transactions, by order of the governor, concerning the illicit trade carrying on; and one of them, made by the judge of the admiralty, at the special desire of the governor, had been sworn to before the lieutenant-governor, as chief justice. They had been shewn, at one of the offices in England, to a person who arrived in Boston just at this time, and he had acquainted several merchants, whose names were in some of the depositions as smugglers, with the contents. This brought, though without reason, the resentment of the merchants against the persons who, by their office, were obliged to administer the oaths, as well as against the officers of the customs and admiralty, who had made the depositions; and the leaders of the mob contrived a riot, which, after some small efforts against such officers, was to spend its principal force upon the lieutenant-governor. And, in the evening of the 26th of August, such a mob was collected in King street, drawn there by a bonfire, and well supplied with strong drink. After some annoyance to the house of the registrar of the admiralty, and somewhat greater to that of the comptroller of the customs, whose cellars they plundered of the wine and spirits in them, they came, with intoxicated rage upon the house of the lieutenant-governor. The doors were immediately split to pieces with broad axes, and a way made there, and at the windows, for the entry of the mob; which poured in, and filled, in an instant, every room in the house.

The lieutenant-governor had very short notice of the approach of the mob. He directed his children, and the rest of his family, to leave the house immediately, determining to keep possession himself. His eldest daughter, after going a little way from the house, returned, and refused to quit it, unless her father would do the like. This caused him to depart from his resolutions, a few minutes before the mob entered. They continued their possessions until day light; destroyed, carried away, or cast into the street, every thing that was in the house; demolished every part of it, except the walls, as far as lay in their power; and had begun to break away from the brickwork. The damage was estimated at about twenty-five hundred pounds sterling, without any regard to a great collection of the publik as well as private papers, in the possession and the custody of the lieutenant governor. The town was, the whole night, under awe of this mob; many of the magistrates, with the field officers of the militia, standing by as spectators; and no body daring to oppose, or contradict.

2. John Holt's Account of the Stamp Act Riots in New York, 1765

The matter was intended to be done privately, but it got wind, and by ten o Clock I suppose 2000 people attended at the Coffee House, among them most of the principal men in town - The Culprits apologies did not satisfy the people, they were highly blamed and the Sons of Liberty found it necessary to use their influence to moderate the Resentment of the People. Two men were dispatched to the Collector for the Stamped Bonds of which he had 30 in all, he desired Liberty to confer with the Governor, which was granted. The Governor sent Word, if the Stamps were delivered to him, he would give his word and honor they should not be used; but if people were not satisfied with this, they might do as they pleased with them - The message being returned to the gathering multitude, they would not agree to the Governors proposal, but insist upon the Stamps being delivered and burned, one or two men attended by about a thousand others were then sent for the Stamps, which were brought to the Coffee House, and the Merchant who had used them was ordered himself to kindle the fire and consume them, those filled in and all, this was accordingly done amidst the Huzza's of the people who were by this time swelled to the Number one suppose of about 5000, and in another hour I suppose would have been 10,000 - The people pretty quietly dispersed soon After, but their Resentment was not allayed, Toward the evening . . .

tho' the Son of Liberty exerted themselves to the utmost , they could not prevent the gathering of the Multitude, Who went to Mr. Williams house, broke open the door and destroyed some furniture...

The people were generally satisfied and soon dispersed - but many of those of inferior Sort, who delight in mischief merely for it's own sake, or for plunder, seem yet to be in such a turbulent Disposition that the two mortified Gentlemen are still in some Danger, but the Sons of Liberty intend to Exert themselves in their defense. William Shepherd Attempts to Collect Customs Duties in Philadelphia, 1769. Having obtained the inspector general's leave of absence for the recovery of my health, I returned here on the 13th instant. I now in obedience to your commands signified to me when I had the honor to attend the board, do lay before your honours the following account of the disturbances which happened at Philadelphia, viz. On Saturday 1st instant, about ten o'clock in the morning, a seizure was made by the collector in consequence of an order from the inspector general, of near fifty pipes of Madeira wine, which was lodged in a store belonging to Mr. Andrew Hodge....

I waited upon the inspector general and acquainted him that I had great reason to suspect that it was the intention of some of the inhabitants to rescue the wines from the officers. He told me that he would take care to prevent it. I informed the collector of my not being able to get the key of the store, and with my apprehensions of the design of the inhabitants, and recommended that the wines being removed as soon as possible. He told me that he had no stores to put them in and that if he had, it was not in his power to get it removed on account of the rain. The rain was over about four o'clock in the afternoon when the collector went down to the store but was denied admittance therein by a man unknown who had armed himself with pistols and swore that if he pretended to enter he would blow his brains out, or words to that effect; upon which the collector retired and sent to the chief justice and procured a writ of assistance, and number of constables to assist him in the execution of his duty, and they returned to the store about five o'clock in the afternoon, but they were not able to afford him any help, the mob being so numerous. They ordered the constables off of the wharf, though I think they tarried there long enough to read the Riot Act or writ of assistance, but which I do not know. They likewise prevented the collector's executing his duty, obliging him to go away, swearing they would shoot him if he attempted it. The pelted him with stones, glass bottles, etc., one of which struck him in the lip and hurt it considerably....

(T)he lock which the collector put on the store was broke off by the mob and the door forced open and all the wines therein taken out and put on board three lighters or shallopss and carried up the river. All the time they were transacting this matter they swore revenge and destruction against me, taking it for granted that I was the cause of making the seizure....

3. Lt.-Gov. William Bull (Charleston, South Carolina) to the Board of Trade November 3, 1765

I think it my duty to acquaint your lordships with some very extraordinary and universal commotions which have happened in this town upon the arrival of the stamp papers....

Upon the arrival of the stamp papers on the 20th ultimo a great concourse of men assembled. Application was thereupon made to me for protection of the papers. As the intention of the populace were too well known to be doubted, I thought it my duty to secure them from destruction or even insult and therefore requested Capt. Fanshawe of his Majesty's sloop Speedwell to receive them on board until it should be necessary to remove them on shore for the execution of the Act. His ship was then heaving down at Hobcaw to careen and he thought it not safe to have them on board as he lay at a wharf; I then desired he would send his boats armed to take the packages of stamp papers out of the ship which brought them before night, at which time the populace vowed to execute their design. This he readily complied with, and I sent the papers down to Fort Johnson, and lest their madness should attempt to carry their scheme into execution, I reinforced the garrison with a detachment of a sergeant and 12 Royal Americans who happened to be in town, that the appearance of military troops joining the few provincials there might deter them from the rash undertaking; and I gave directions to Col. Howorth, who commands in that fort, to take every precaution against a surprise, and put it in the best posture of defence against an escalade. These measures happily prevented their making any attempt on the papers. Their fury was then directed towards striking a terror into the stamp officers if they persisted to perform their duty; which was done by night in great numbers, battering the house of Mr. Saxby, who was suspected to be arrived, though he then was not, and hunting after Mr. Caleb Lloyd, searching his lodgings, who prudently had withdrawn himself.

On the same day the information was given to me that the stamp papers were arrived, I summoned the Council, acquainting them therewith and what I had done thereon, and took my oath to use my utmost endeavours to carry the Act into execution, and as this commotion began on Saturday while the Court of General Sessions for the whole province was sitting in town, I thought proper to recommend to the chief justice to require all peace officers to exert themselves in suppressing such unlawful assemblies. But the infection was too generally spread to receive any check from his authority. On the Monday, being informed what had happened on Saturday and Sunday nights, I published a proclamation offering a reward from my own pocket of £50 sterling to any person who would discover the author of the outrage, and a pardon to any informer who was an accomplice, and commanded all judges, etc., to do their duty in preserving the public peace, but all this produced not the desired effect. And some insults having been committed on several persons' houses under pretext of searching for stamp papers, I ordered an advertisement to be published that they were by my order lodged in Fort Johnson. The commotions upon this in some measure subsided till the arrival of Mr. Saxby from London on the 27th when everything was again set in motion by a very great concourse of people threaten in everything against the persons and effects of Mr. Saxby and Mr. Lloyd to deter them or any other person from doing their duty under that Act. Mr. Saxby having been apprised of these dispositions by his friends on the first arrival of the ship, prudently declined coming up to town but went on shore at Fort Johnson, whither Mr. Lloyd had also retired for his safety, which was all the protection my power could afford them. The commotions still continued and all this during the sitting of the Court of Sessions which by law is vested with the powers of the King's Bench in criminal matters, till on Monday these two officers, prevailed upon by the importunate request of their friends, consented to decline acting until the sense of the Parliament of Great Britain should be known upon the joint petition of the colonies which is now on the anvil at New York. These two gentlemen wrote me a letter on the occasion of their declining to act, a copy whereof I have the honour to transmit to your lordships.

Although these very numerous assemblies of the people bore the appearance of common populace, yet there is great reason to apprehend they were animated and encouraged by some considerable men who stood behind the curtain. This contagion has spread through this whole country and many are alarmed by various false representations, not only of what this act enjoins, but with fears of what is to follow from future laws of the like nature.

As there are no stamp papers can be issued during this situation, a stop is now put to all business in every office where they are required, and notwithstanding the great inconveniences and detriments which it will occasion, the people at present seem determined to submit to them patiently all they see the fate of New England, which I presume they will follow, in returning to their duty in this matter, as soon as they know that province is brought to theirs.

The protest in images

Examine the following **images**. What do they add to the documentary evidence above?

1. Mob in Action in Boston.

What can you learn from this engraving about the composition and mood of the crowd?



2. Protestors Burn an Official's House in Boston.

Property damage was an occasional outgrowth of crowd actions and, for the most part, it was not sanctioned by the men who lead the protests. What would led the crowd to take this extraordinary action?



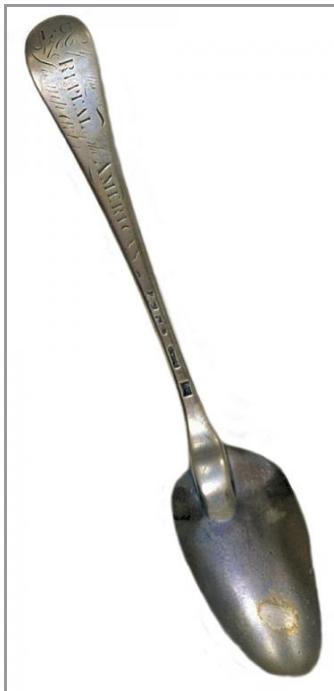
3. Stamp Agent Hanged in Effigy.

Dummies dressed to resemble stamp agents were hanged and/or burned during some of the protests. What purpose did this serve?



4. Stamp Act Spoon

Stamp Act Spoon made for Landon Carter (1710-1778)



Source: Virginia Historical Society

5. Stamp Act Tea Pot

This teapot from Staffordshire, England commemorates the repeal of the Stamp Act. English manufacturers created such home products to regain colonial customers who had boycotted their products.



Source: National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center

6. Affix Stamp Here

The skull and crossbones symbolized the death of the free press resulting from passage of the act



Source: Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser, (1765, Library of Congress.)

Writing Exercise

Use the discussion board for your response.

Create your own crowd action

1. Return to the short biographies
2. Pick a speaker, crowd leader, and crowd participant using what you have learned in the analytical exercise.
3. The speaker should be someone who was likely to have written one of the protests or resolutions listed under The Protest in Words.
4. The crowd leader should be someone who was in a position to recruit and lead the crowd.
5. The crowd participant should be someone who was willing and able to carry out the physical requirements of the protest.
6. Determine where your crowd would meet to plan the protest and what action they would agree to take.
7. **Post** your choices and provide a brief reason to support each one.
8. **Respond** to at least two other postings.

Activity 3: Investigating The Consequences

INTERROGATING SOURCES

History can be examined by recreating events in a realistic context. This exercise asks you to do your own recreation by drawing on what you have already learned from your examination and analysis of the evidence and by looking at models drawn from the period we are investigating.

Examine the following evidence and consider what they tell you about the British and patriot responses to the repeal or ending of the Stamp Act.

1. Images and the text that accompanies each of them:

- [Miss Americ Stamp: http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/cartoon/stampact.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/cartoon/stampact.html)
- [the Obelisk,
http://loc.harpweek.com/LCPoliticalCartoons/DisplayCartoonMedium.asp?MaxID=12&UniqueId=1&Year=1766&YearMark=17](http://loc.harpweek.com/LCPoliticalCartoons/DisplayCartoonMedium.asp?MaxID=12&UniqueId=1&Year=1766&YearMark=17)
- the Stamp Act Spoon (see "The protest in images" above)
- Tea Pot (see "The protest in images" above)

2. Text of King George III

- **Repeal of the Stamp Act**

WHEREAS an act was passed in the last session of parliament, intituled, An act for granting and applying certain stamp duties, and other duties, in the British colonies and plantations in America, towards further defraying the expences of defending, protecting, and securing the same; and for amending such parts of the several acts of parliament relating to the trade and revenues of the said colonies and plantations, as direct the manner of determining and recovering the penalties and forfeitures therein mentioned: and whereas the continuance of the said act would be attended with many inconveniences, and may be productive of consequences greatly detrimental to the commercial interests of these kingdoms; may it therefore please your most excellent Majesty, that it may be enacted; and be it enacted by the King's most excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the lords spiritual and temporal, and commons, in this present parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, that from and after the first day of May, one thousand seven hundred and sixty six, the above-mentioned act, and the several matters and things therein contained, shall be, and is and are hereby repealed and made void to all intents and purposes whatsoever.

- **The Declaratory Act**

[To the Rockingham ministry it became apparent that to attempt to enforce the Stamp Act would be politically dangerous, both in Britain and in the colonies. The nature of the situation may be understood in part from the motion to repeal the law, which stated that "the continuance of the said act would be attended with many inconveniences, and may be productive of consequences greatly detrimental to the commercial interests of these kingdoms." The debate in Parliament proved to be bitter and was climaxed by the cogent testimony of Benjamin Franklin on behalf of the colonists. On the same day that the House of Commons repealed the stamp duties it adopted the Declaratory Act, without a division -- i.e., without a recorded vote. However in the Lords, Pitt's friends attacked the measure strongly because it did not exclude internal taxation of the colonists from the scope of parliamentary supremacy. For the text of the law repealing the Stamp Act see 6 George III, c. 11, The Statutes at Large, p. 19.]



William Pitt 1708-1778

An Act for the Better Securing the Dependency of his Majesty's Dominions in America upon the Crown and Parliament of Great Britain

Whereas several of the houses of representatives in His Majesty's colonies and plantations in America have of late, against law, claimed to themselves, or to the general assemblies of the same, the sole and exclusive right of imposing duties and taxes upon His Majesty's subjects in the said colonies and plantations; and have, in pursuance of such claim, passed certain votes, resolutions, and orders derogatory to the legislative authority of Parliament, and inconsistent with the dependency of the said colonies and plantations upon the crown of Great Britain: may it therefore please Your Most Excellent Majesty that it may be declared, and be it declared by the king's Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, That the said colonies and plantations in America have been, are, and of right ought to be, subordinate unto, and dependent upon the imperial crown and Parliament of Great Britain; and that the king's Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, of Great Britain, in Parliament assembled, had, hath, and of right ought to have, full power and authority to make laws and statutes of sufficient force and validity to bind the colonies and people of America, subjects of the crown of Great Britain, in all cases whatsoever.

II. And be it further declared and enacted by the authority aforesaid, That all resolutions, votes, orders, and proceedings, in any of the said colonies or plantations, whereby the power and authority of the Parliament of Great Britain to make laws and statutes as aforesaid is denied, or drawn into question, are, and are hereby declared to be, utterly null and void to all intents and purposes whatsoever.

3. Read the quotation from William Pitt:

"Upon the whole, I will beg leave to tell the House what is really my opinion. It is, that the Stamp Act be repealed absolutely, totally, and immediately; that the reason for the repeal should be assigned, because it was founded on an erroneous principle. At the same time, let the sovereign authority of this country over the colonies be asserted in as strong terms as can be devised, and be made to extend every point of legislation whatsoever: that we may bind their trade, confine their manufactures, and exercise every power whatsoever - except that of taking money out of their pockets without their consent."

From William Pitt's Speech to Parliament on Repeal of the Stamp Act

Writing Exercise

Submit your response as directed by your instructor. But consider how you might construct and present your response to look as much like it would have in 1765.

- **Write** a brief editorial on the meaning of repeal from either the American or the British perspective (as assigned by your instructor).
- **Or create** a political cartoon from one of these perspectives that satirizes (makes political humor) the actions of the opposition.
- **Base** your editorial or cartoon on what you have learned from the combined exercises and from the material presented on the repeal of the Stamp Act.



Optional Viewing Activity

Reading an image?

"The Bostonians paying the excise-man, or tarring and feathering," Philip Dawe [?], 1774. This tinted engraving depicts the tarring and feathering of John Malcolm, a Commissioner of Customs, by the Sons of Liberty a little less than a decade after the Stamp Act protests. It also appeared in other versions

The image had multiple meanings for contemporaries. They read it as a larger message, but also took note of the specific symbols and phrases contained within the image. These symbols and phrases connected to ideas and events that took place during the protests that lead up to the moment of Malcolm's punishment.

How would 18th Century Americans read this image? Read the image yourself and look for the different meanings and ideas it contains. (Some key symbols and phrases contained within circles). Click on the icon below when you have finished your reading for additional information on the symbols and phrases contained in this image.

DETAILED IMAGE



1. The noose might be a general threat or a symbol that represented the popular use of effigies in protests.
2. The liberty tree,
<http://www.celebrateboston.com/sites/liberty-tree.htm>
3. Although it is unclear in this image, the poster, which hangs upside down, says "STAMP ACT." Hanging the sign upside down may indicate surrender on the part of the British, since there is a tradition that flags are hung upside down to signal surrender.
4. This outfit identifies the participant as a sailor. The leather apron on the man next to him identifies him as an artisan. Why were they involved?
5. The liquid used would be distasteful and likely to promote vomiting—possibly vinegar.
6. The official's costume is the result of Tarring and Feathering. It was a painful and dangerous practice that covered the subject with hot tar, rolled him in chicken feathers, and subjected him to public ridicule.
7. Boston tea party, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/essays/before-1800/boston-teaparty-cassandra-jansen.php>
8. Liberty cap on a pole, a symbol of the American Revolution and the Sons of Liberty.

A SECOND IMAGE



- Why is this identified as macorony(macaroni) making?
- Consider the British lyrics to YANKEE DOODLE, <http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/games/songs/patriotic/yankdoodmp3.htm>
- Read and listen to a second version. AN AMERICAN YANKEE DOODLE,
<http://www.contemplator.com/america/ydoodle.html>

Instructor's Annotations

The module as a whole requires more time than most instructors can allow for this particular topic. For this reason the module presents information, sources, questions and assignments as individual segments to be used by instructors as needed in their courses.

For example, you may choose to substitute on-line and in-class discussions for writing assignments, or assign writing where the module calls for discussion. You may also design your own assignments in conjunction with any segment or combination of segments presented in the module. A third alternative would be to have individuals or groups of students work on specific segments and offer their conclusions as class presentations.

The module also lends itself to a variety of additional assignments that ask students to complete additional research or to draw on their creative abilities. Some suggested examples include:

- Assign students to develop their own political cartoons on an event in the American Revolution or perhaps on a current political or social event.
- Use one or more segments of the module to develop discussions or assignments on political satire. An effective comparison can be made between satire in the Revolutionary period and political and social satire in later periods under consideration in the course. Also consider programming and formats that are popular with your students to draw comparisons with current satire.
- A more in depth exploration of the history and variations of the song "Yankee Doodle" would introduce students to the use of song and poetry as propaganda and satire. Students can also consider and present current popular music that contains social or political statements. Other music from the American Revolution can be found at:

<http://www.halcyondaysmusic.com/colonialmusic/index.htm>

<http://www.earlyamerica.com/music/>

<http://www.americanrevolution.org/warsongs.html>

- A possible assignment might ask students to write a stanza on some other aspect of the American Revolution that would fit the tune of "Yankee Doodle" or another tune from the period.
- Have students work in groups to develop skits or short plays that would present some aspect of the Stamp Act protests or related events. The presentations can be dramatic or satiric.
- The class can work as a whole or in groups to produce a Stamp Act documentary or to film their skits and plays.
- Assign students to research and write a biography on historical persons used in this module or on other men and women who lived through the American Revolution.
- Students can research the role various groups played in the protests or in the American Revolution as a whole. These might include women, African-Americans, Native Americans, Loyalists and Quakers.
- Assign students to research local history in the American Revolution, if it is applicable to your geographic area.
- Have students work in groups to present the British and Loyalist perspectives of the Stamp Act protest or the protests in general.

SUGGESTED READING AND RESOURCES

Books and Journals

- Adair, Douglass. "The Stamp Act in Contemporary English Cartoons." *The William and Mary Quarterly* (October 1953): 538-542.
- Bullion, John L. "British Ministers and American Resistance to the Stamp Act, October- December 1765." *The William and Mary Quarterly* > (January 1992): 89-107.
- Granger, Bruce Ingham. "The Stamp Act in Satire." *American Quarterly* (Winter, 1956): 368-384.
- Morgan, Edmund. *Prologue to Revolution: Sources and Documents on the Stamp Act Crisis, 1764-1766*. University of North Carolina Press, 1959.
- _____. *The Stamp Act Crisis*. University of North Carolina Press, 1953.
- Newcomb, Benjamin H. "Effects of the Stamp Act on Colonial Pennsylvania Politics." *The William and Mary Quarterly* (April 1966): 257-272.
- Ritcheson, Charles R. "The Preparation of the Stamp Act." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 10 (October 1953): 543-559.
- British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis: The First Phase of the American Revolution, 1763-1767*. Clarendon Press, 1975.
- Thompson "Massachusetts and New York Stamp Acts." *The William and Mary Quarterly* (April 1969): 253-258.
- Weslager, C. A. *The Stamp Act Congress: With an Exact Copy of the Complete Journal*. University of Delaware Press, 1976.

Documentaries

- Prelude to Revolution* [videorecording]. Produced by Charles Cahill and Associates; director, Pat Shields. AIMS Media, 1967.
- Taxation without Representation* [videorecording]. Produced by Charles Cahill and Associates. AIMS Media, 1985.
- Tea Party Etiquette* [videorecording]. American Social History Project of City University of New York. American Social History Film Library, 1987.

Websites

- PBS Liberty! The American Revolution* (<http://www.pbs.org/ktca/liberty/>)
- American Revolution.Org (<http://www.americanrevolution.org/>)
- Digital History (<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>)
- From Revolution to Reconstruction (<http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/>)
- Spy Letters of the American Revolution (<http://clements.umich.edu/exhibits/online/spies/index-main2.html>)
- Teaching American History.org (<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/>)
- The American Archives: Documents of the American Revolution (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/amerrev.asp)
- The American Revolution: National Discussions of Our Revolutionary Origins (<http://revolution.h-net.msu.edu/>)
- The Avalon Project: A Documentary History of the American Revolution (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/amerrev.asp)

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History (<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/>)

The National Archives: Images of the American Revolution (<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/revolution-images/>)

U.S. History.Org (<http://www.ushistory.org/>)