**The Stamp Act. 1765**

Something was dreadfully wrong in the American colonies ........

All of sudden after over a century)· and a half of permitting relative self-rule (salutary neglect), Britain was exercising direct influence over colonial life. In addition to restricting westward movement (Proclamation of 1763), the parent country was actually enforcing its trade laws (Mercantilism and the Navigation Acts).

When Parliament passed the Stamp Act in March 1765 (went into effect in November ), things changed. It was the first direct tax on the American colonies. Every legal document had to be written on specially stamped paper, showing proof of payment Deeds, -wills, marriage licenses -contracts of any sort- were not recognized as legal in a court of law unless they were prepared on this paper. In addition, newspaper, dice, and playing cards also had to bear proof of tax payment American activists sprang into action.

"No taxation without representation!" was tile Cl)'. The colonists were not merely griping about the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act They intended to place actions behind their words. One thing was clear- no colony acting alone could effectively convey a message to the king and Parlian1ent. The appeals to Parliament by the individual legislatures had been ignored It was James Otis who suggested an intercolonial conference to agree on a united course of action. With that, tl1e Stamp Act Congress convened in New York in October 1765.

The Congress seemed at first to be an abject failure. In the first place, only nine of the colonies sent delegates. Georgia, North Carolina, New Hampshire, and the all-important Virginia were not present. The Congress became quickly divided between radicals .and moderates. The moderates would hold sway at this time. Only an extreme few believed in stronger measures against Britain than articulating the principle of no taxation without representation. This became the spirit of the Stamp Act Resolves. The Congress humbly acknowledged Parliament's right to make laws in the colonies. Only the issue of taxation was disputed.

Colonial and personal differences already began to surface. A representative from New Jersey stormed out during the proceedings. The president of the Congress, William Ruggles of Massachusetts, refused to sign the Stamp Act Resolves. In the end, however, the spirit of the Congress prevailed. Every colonial legislature except one approved the Stamp Act Resolves.

In the end, the widespread boycotts enacted by individual colonists surely did more to secure the repeal of the Stamp Act than did the Congress itself. But the gesture was significant. For the first time, against all odds, respected delegates from differing colonies sat with each other and engaged in spirited debate. They discovered that in many ways they had more in common than they originally had thought. This is a tentative but essential step toward the unity that would be necessary to declare boldly their independence from mother England

The passage of the Stan1p Act in 1765 outraged American colonists and fueled discontent with British rule that led to the outbreak of the American Revolution.

#### **Why were the colonists so upset about the Stamp Act, and why was a rather small tax so fiercely resented?**

Analyze documents A, B, and C by applying "what historians do..,

1. Contextualize
2. Investigate
3. Determine Significance

4. Identify and use evidence

*5.* Interpret

1. Corroborate

\*provide a minimum of three conclusions, inferences, *etc.* for each document

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READING LIKE A HIST RIAN

# Document A (Modified)

*Boston-Gazette, October 7, 1765*

## My Dear Countrymen,

AWAKE! Awake, my Countrymen and defeat those who want to enslave us. Do not be cowards. You were born in Britain, the Land of Light, and you were raised in America, the Land of Liberty. It is your duty to fight this tax. Future generations will bless your efforts and honor the memory of the saviors of their country.

I urge you to tell your representatives that you do not support this terrible and burdensome law. Let them know what you think. They should act as guardians of the liberty of their country.

I look forward to congratulating you on delivering us from the enemies of truth and liberty.

*Source: This letter appeared in the Boston-Gazette newspaper on October 7, 1765.*

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READING LIKE A HIST "RIAt

**Document B (Modified)**

## Boston-Gazette Supplement, 27 January 1766 From a late London Paper.

The riotous behavior of the people in Boston is remarkable. I would have been less surprised by their behavior if we had taxed their beer, because everyone drinks beer. But the Stamp Act is a tax on none of the necessities of life.

It does not affect the poor. And even a poor person can afford this little amount of money. The tax on newspapers only affects the rich­

common people do not purchase newspapers. Isn't it surprising, then, that the mob in Boston has begun to riot against this tax even before it has officially gone into effect?

*Source: This letter was written in* a *London newspaper and then published in the* Boston Gazette Supplement *two months after the Stamp Act went into effect.*

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READING LIKE A HIST RIAN

**Document C (Modified)**

Philadelphia January 13th 1766. My Lords,

The colonists have been insulting His Majesty, saying that the Stamp Act was unconstitutional, and oppressive.

It is apparent to many people here that the Presbyterians are at the head of these riots. They are opposed to Kings and some cry out- 'No King but King Jesus.' The leaders fill every newspaper with inflammatory pieces, so that the minds of the common people are kept in a continual ferment. ..No one dares write anything that would calm the people down. Doing so would put the writer’s life and fortune in danger.

I am convinced the Presbyterians intend nothing less than the throwing off their allegiance and obedience to his Majesty, and forming a Republican Empire, in America, and being Lords and Masters themselves.

I am daily threatened by verbal messages and anonymous letters, with a mob of several thousand people, from the Jerseys, New York, and New England.

I conclude with praying, that the Almighty may secure the allegiance of America to the Crown of Britain, by destroying the seeds of rebellion, and by punishing the ringleaders of these riots.

I am, My Lords, Your most Obedient & Most Humble Servant, John Hughes

Vocabulary:

Presbyterians: A religion that gained popularity during the Great Awakening Inflammatory: Arousing angry or violent feelings

Ferment: Agitation or excitement, typically leading to violence Allegiance: loyalty

*Source: The letter above* was *written by John Hughes, Stamp Distributor* in *Philadelphia, to his* bosses *in London. His job* was *to collect the tax on stamps.*

Corroborate: According to your prior knowledge, the background essay, and all three documents.

* 1. Why were the colonists upset about the Stamp Act?
1. Was the Stamp Act an unreasonable and unfair tax?
2. Were the colonists treated like slaves?
3. Were the British violating colonists' rights?
4. How were the colonists behaving in response to the Stamp Act?
5. Some historians have argued that the American Revolution happened because a few rich leaders riled up all the poor people. Do these documents provide evidence for the argument? Is that evidence believable?