

The House of Commons passes the Stamp Act, 1765

On this day in history, February 17, 1765, the House of Commons passes the Stamp Act. **The Stamp Act would be one of the primary points of contention between the American colonists and Parliament in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War.**

The Act placed a small tax on 54 separate items, all things made of paper, such as contracts, wills, playing cards, newspapers, almanacs, etc. The Act was part of Prime Minister George Grenville's plan to reduce the massive debt incurred by the British treasury during the French and Indian War. All the money raised by the Act was to be used within the colonies to pay for the expenses of British soldiers stationed there after the end of the war.

The colonists did not object to paying taxes. They did, however, have a strong opinion about who could tax them. English law provided that people could only be taxed by their elected representatives. Since the colonies had no representatives in Parliament, Parliament could not legally tax them. Instead, they believed the proper bodies to lay taxes on them were their own elected colonial legislatures.

Parliament did not respond to the formal protests from the colonial governments, so the citizens began to take things into their own hands. Newspapers and citizens published anti-Stamp Act letters and pamphlets and mob violence broke out in numerous places against government officials involved with implementing the Act. **The violence became so severe that by**

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November 1, 1765, the intended start date of the Act, not a single stamp distributor was left in the colonies. Every single one had resigned, except for the one from Georgia and that was because he did not arrive until January. When he did arrive, he resigned the next day.

Many localities in the colonies then passed non-importation agreements, refusing to import British goods until the Act was repealed. This put an enormous amount of pressure on British merchants who began to suffer and lay people off because they could not pay their debts. These merchants began to pressure Parliament to repeal the bill. A change in administration made Lord Rockingham Prime Minister and he immediately began pushing for a repeal. **The Stamp Act was finally repealed on March 18, 1766, causing rejoicing and celebrations both in England and in the colonies.**