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Ryan L. Wagner

State University of New York, Buffalo State College, ryan.wagner@mac.com

Advisor

David A. Carson, Ph.D.

First Reader

David A. Carson, Ph.D.

Second Reader

Andrew D. Nicholls, Ph.D.

Third Reader

Kevin J. Miller, Ed.D.

Department Chair

Andrew D. Nicholls, Ph.D., Professor of History

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Ryan L. Wagner, B.A.

ABSTRACT

Prior to the first battles of the American Revolution, the British Parliament imposed several duties on the American colonies to fund the expenses of the French and Indian War, continued attacks on the American frontier, taxed American colonists to assist with British finances, and garrisoned troops throughout America. One of these duties, the American Stamp Act, was passed and enacted in early 1765 throughout the North American British colonies. The correlation between battles, campaigns, and acts such as imposed duties, are all interrelated. Many historians traditionally view the colonial reaction to the Stamp Act as one singular political event or overshadowed by the battles fought in the war for American independence.¹

This thesis has been written to examine the social and economic impact of the American Stamp Act of 1765, and to investigate the enforcement practices and reactions of those affected by the act, specifically in the colony of New York, and its impact on the subsequent war for American independence. The materials utilized in this study include both primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources aim to ensure a rounded understanding of the Stamp Act and pre-Revolutionary thought, while primary sources have been examined to understand specific localities as issues surrounding the Stamp Act unraveled.

In this study, a more in-depth examination into the authority that enforced the Act, the relationship, and interactions between those affected and those who collected the levy, the various motives of opposition, and the eventual formation of organized resistance and action within New York in the broader context of colonial America are explored.

¹ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: The Kelnap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 22-23.

State University of New York
College at Buffalo
Department of History and Social Studies Education

The Stamp Act: Revolutionary Resistance in New York

A Thesis in
History

by

Ryan L. Wagner, B.A.

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts
May 2018

Approved by:

David A. Carson, Ph.D.
Distinguished Service Professor
Chairperson of the Committee/Thesis Advisor

Andrew D. Nicholls, Ph.D.
Department Chair and Professor

Kevin J. Miller, Ed.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research and writing of this thesis have proved both challenging and rewarding. Without the patience, coaching, and guidance of my advisor, Dr. David Carson, this undertaking would never have been completed. The short time I attended the State University of New York: College at Buffalo was a personal and professional growing experience, and I owe a tremendous amount of gratitude to the members of its History and Social Studies Education Department.

I would also like to thank Dr. Timothy Westcott of Park University. His passion for history proved contagious and I attribute my interest of the past, and much of my academic foundation, to him. The many conferences, presentations, and club meetings we attended together will forever be some of my fondest memories of my collegiate experience.

Finally, my wife Charlene, children Taylor and Amelia, and my parents have been my constant motivation. When I had thoughts I may never finish or to give up, they were my reminders as to why I simply had to keep pushing. Collectively, they have maintained a level of patience I hope to one day achieve and a display of love I will forever be undeserving of.

INTRODUCTION

“It cannot be good to tax the Americans... You will lose more than you gain.”

-Thomas Hutchinson, 1765

The British Parliament passed the American Stamp Act on March 22nd, 1765 and decreed its implementation would take effect on November 1st of the same year in British North America.¹ From passage to repeal, it was law for just short of one calendar year, being repealed March 18, 1766. The British government, however, could not have foreseen the impact it would have on its relationship with the American colonies. This act would be the charge that would call individuals not typically associated with revolution into various forms of resistance. In response, American colonists began to use violence as a legitimate political tool and forced British Parliament into a radical restructuring of the methods used in levied taxation and organized civil authority.

Following its victory over France in the Seven Years War, Great Britain encountered massive debts and deficiencies in its ground and naval forces. However, it no longer concerned itself with the French threat in North America. The Treaty of Paris of 1763 afforded the British with the opportunity to examine its assets abroad to better raise revenue and expand its global presence and military might. Additionally, Parliament passed the first measure to ensure the continued enforcement of the Navigation Acts the same year. This Act placed stricter guidelines on those officials enforcing the act and threatened the dismissal of customs officials who did not follow protocol.²

¹ Edmund Morgan and Helen Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 54.

² *Ibid.*, 23.

North America also witnessed other changes during this period. Following the stricter enforcement of the Navigation Acts, European goods sent to British ports encountered significant tax increases with the Revenue Act.³ This affected not only luxury items like wine, but textiles and coffee as well.⁴ Further straining the British Empire's citizens, French wine was restricted due to the post-war relationship between the two nations.⁵ Rum imported from French colonies was not exempt from the Revenue Act either.⁶ The act of removing colonists' abilities to obtain and enjoy luxuries such as wine and rum, while simultaneously imposing and increasing taxes, was not well received in the colonies and the relationships between Britain and North Americans suffered.⁷ Finally, with the passage of such an act, an expansion of the British customs service garrisoned in North America was necessary for the collection of duties owed.⁸

To protect interests in North America, Great Britain implemented an updated policy of maintaining a sizable military presence following the Seven Years' War. In 1764, George Grenville, Chancellor of the Exchequer, began pursuing a stamp tax to cover this expense. The influx of British soldiers brought mixed emotions from Americans, but little colonial input was sought. Grenville commissioned a stamp bill to be drafted, and those duties collected through the enforcement of said bill would be utilized to offset those garrisons.⁹

Duties on stamps, legal documents, shipping papers, printed newspapers, and

³ Oliver Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution* (New York: Octagon Books, 1978), 190.

⁴ Edward Countryman, *The American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 40.

⁵ Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts*, 192.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 51.

⁸ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 23.

⁹ Ibid., 24.

pamphlets were not a new concept in British America.¹⁰ In the 1750's, many colonies imposed internal duties to provide financial assistance to government functions.¹¹ Newspaper editors in New York City were outspoken opponents of early stamp taxes but not to the point of being moved to rebellion. Some may have viewed a tax imposed by colonial governments acceptable. Often, these duties were short-lived and sometimes localized. Because of the large audience found in New York City, staff members and writers could reach a sizeable number of readers, and some authors and editors would later take prominent roles in the movement against the Act.¹²

The American Stamp Act was different from previous legislation.¹³ Unlike those in the past, the Stamp Act affected the collective colonies in British America.¹⁴ Local British agents were to enforce collection policies, and for the remainder of 1765 and into 1766, Americans witnessed a wide array of collection practices.¹⁵ During Grenville's propositions to the House of Commons, his intentions were clear: to burden the American colonies by taxing them into submission through required English overhead of their commerce and consumption.¹⁶

At the direction of British Parliament, the duties were to be delivered directly to England, collected in sterling money, and levied against most printed documents to include maritime and customs related documents, newspapers, pamphlets, and an array of

¹⁰ Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 41.

¹¹ New York, *Journal of the Votes and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Colony of New York, From 1766 to 1776, Inclusive* (Albany: J. Buel, 1820), 521.

¹² Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 187.

¹³ Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 41-43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

¹⁵ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 13-14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

legal papers.¹⁷ Early opponents contended that if the money collected was to fund garrisons within the colonies, monies should remain in America.¹⁸ British Parliament resolved this argument by changing details of the tax to include the stipulation the collected duties would remain within the colonies to pay for supplies and salaries of British troops.¹⁹

Many colonies, including New York, had begun producing paper currency but the British government would not accept it as payment due to the sterling requirement.²⁰ In port cities such as New York, Americans used sterling as it carried its value across other colonies and the Atlantic. However, utilizing colonial paper notes was growing in popularity and had begun circulating throughout the colonies but lacked continuity. By removing the sterling from the colonies through taxation, it severely hampered trade and currency negotiations beyond colonial borders and many feared its long-term impact.²¹ While the British government enforced these policies, various American industries had two choices: pay the duties or become creative in their business models by participating in the economy illicitly. It is no surprise riots took place, customs officers were burned out of their homes, newspapers closed their doors, mariners took up arms, and the stage set for the eventual American Revolution took place due to the American Stamp Act.²²

¹⁷ Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 41.

¹⁸ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 34.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Throughout The Stamp Act's implementation on the products to be taxed and by how much, it is explicit in stating the levy would be collected in "sterling money."

²¹ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 66-71.

²² Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 47-49.

CHAPTER ONE: ENACTMENT

“The Stamp Act imposed on the colonies by the Parliament of Great Britain is an ill-judged measure. Parliament has no right to put its hands into our pockets without our consent.”

-George Washington, 1765

Post-War Problems

The victory over the French in the Seven Years' War virtually set in place the events that would lead to the passage of the American Stamp Act.¹ However, this military campaign was not exclusively the rationale in the British pursued tax on the American colonies.² British Parliament had attempted several other duties in the past; some short-lived while others, to some degree, proved successful. The American response was dependent on the implementation process, collection practices, types of goods and services taxed, and amounts levied.³

One of the first examples of colonial cooperation in an attempt to both raise internal taxes and train a colonial militia occurred in Albany, NY in June of 1754.⁴ Seven colonies sent representatives to meet with Iroquois Chiefs to secure an ally against the French, particularly on the colonial frontier.⁵ Additionally, these colonies had hoped to form a more secure alliance between colonial governments. The delegates departed with plans of cooperation between other colonies but faced difficulty maneuvering the

¹ The North American campaign of the Seven Years War is often referred to as The French and Indian War, 1754- 1763, fought between Great Britain and France.

² Gary Nash, *Unknown American Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 44-45.

³ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁴ Mack Thompson, “Massachusetts and New York Stamp Acts,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Apr., 1969), 253-254.

⁵ Beverly McAnear, “Personal Accounts of the Albany Congress of 1754,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Oct., 1947), 727.

bureaucracies forming throughout the different regions of each colony.⁶ These obstacles proved problematic in ratifying even an unofficial alliance. Although well before the American Revolution, halting moves toward self-governance, internal taxation, and even foreign policy was set into motion.⁷

The American campaign of the Seven Years' War ended in 1760, and most American colonists were pleased with their relationship with Britain. The Royal Navy had a firm grip on the high seas, and the British Parliamentary system ensured English manufacturing utilized goods and resources from the colonies, adding to colonial prosperity. American industry continued to grow under the English flag. British banks offered funds and guidance to the growing American economy. Virtually no separatist movement existed.⁸

It was a glorious time in the American colonies. They were separated from England by several thousand miles with room to grow out of their infancy to nearly sufficient entities, loosely separated by colonial borders and the Atlantic. Their economies grew, at times seeming to pass those in Great Britain. By the end of the Seven Years' War, the British Empire was the most powerful and prosperous and its subjects the freest in the western world.⁹ Because of this level of prosperity, the American-British relationship was unclear; what now were the colonists to Great Britain and how did they fit into the Empire?

Britons did not share the same feelings as those in the colonies and felt the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Thompson, "Massachusetts and New York Stamp Acts," 254.

⁸ Samuel Morison, *Sources, and Documents Illustrating the American Revolution 1764-1788 and the Formation of the Federal Constitution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), xi.

⁹ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 5.

American colonies had not contributed to the war and their security.¹⁰ The colonists strongly disagreed, felt they had in fact contributed, and the entirety of the British Empire should share the benefits of successful past conflict. The American colonies were only a small fragment of the British Empire but had begun to demonstrate self-governance ability. By garrisoning troops in North America, British troops offered security to colonial America not only from the Native American threat to European interests but also to contain any ideas of independence from European rule.¹¹

The Spanish and Portuguese entered the war in 1762, further complicating European relations. The conflict forced Great Britain to concentrate even further on the European campaigns and less on the American Colonies. The cost of supplies, troops, and security of Britain's interests had become a reality and Parliament struggled to find ways to finance it. The Empire now had colonies in every corner of the world, and although many of these colonies were self-sufficient, an Empire at war required an immense amount of money for sustainability.¹² Campaigns existed in not only North America and Europe, but also the Caribbean, India, Philippines, and parts of the African coast. The war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, and Britain desired to recover what had been lost or spent during the war.¹³

Following the war, the American colonies did encounter some geographic changes.¹⁴ To the south, East and West Florida were added to the British Empire, as was

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts*, 10-16.

¹³ Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 433.

¹⁴ The Treaty of Paris effectively removed the French military threat to the British in the American colonies.

Quebec to the north. The French also conceded their claims east of the Mississippi, including the Ohio Valley.¹⁵ Colonists were anxious to begin to settle Indian lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. King George III intended to preserve peace in North America, and established the Proclamation of 1763, prohibiting the settling of these lands.¹⁶ The British government was nearly bankrupt, could not afford another war, and hoped to appease not only the Native population but also its new French-Canadian subjects and French and Spanish sympathizers.¹⁷

The British government began laying out ideas to generate revenue to rebuild its Army, Navy, and replenish the treasury. With the addition of new land in North America, Great Britain was confronted with an additional liability. Great Britain had spent a large sum of money fighting a war and acquiring new lands but now had to ensure it proved profitable enough to justify British protection and continued contributions to the success of the Empire. With the additional claims in Canada, Florida, and the Mississippi Valley, the Empire acquired new costs. These lands proved to be a great addition to the Empire but a long-term investment, part of which, the British felt lay upon the shoulders of those living in the American Colonies.¹⁸

In the Americas, there were dated laws in place that were intended to collect taxes, but most were not enforced. Some were outdated while others were littered with loopholes. Prior to the American Stamp Act, collecting duties in America had proved less than fruitful, and the colonies continued to operate without British trade regulation

¹⁵ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 432.

¹⁶ Extract of King George III's Proclamation of 1763.

¹⁷ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 433.

¹⁸ Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 55.

oversight.¹⁹ Earlier in the eighteenth century, the British had enacted some regulations, such as the Molasses Act of 1733, to protect interests and not necessarily to raise revenue.²⁰ By taxing molasses imported into the Americas from non-British colonies, it effectively made British goods cheaper, which in turn encouraged their sale over non-British molasses. Americans primarily ignored or avoided the act through bribes or intimidation to customs officials.²¹

There is a definite correlation between taxation and regulation which the British government failed to capitalize on due to their inability to manage trade in North America for the thirty years following the Molasses Act. Due to British regulations, American smugglers went out of their way to transport molasses from the French and Dutch West Indies to avoid empirical overhead. American justification for smuggling was due to the growing industries found in North America.²² Distilleries in New York and New England required molasses in the production of rum and avoiding regulation proved more lucrative. New York farming demanded constant deliveries of grain to feed cattle, while lumber, barrel staves, horses, and other American produced products could not rely solely on the British West Indies markets. Simply, regulation was not realistic with what the British Empire was producing, and for American industry growth to continue, colonists pursued trade with non-British ports in the Caribbean, primarily in exchange for molasses. As Robert Middlekauff ties it to conflict, “War usually warps normal

¹⁹ Ibid., 59.

²⁰ Albert Southwick, “The Molasses Act,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Jul., 1951), 389-391.

²¹ Ibid., 394.

²² Ibid.

standards and practices, and so far as trade was concerned, normality entailed breaking the law.”²³

British officials knew the Molasses Act was mostly ineffective but were willing to revisit it once again. Parliament wrote and passed the Sugar Act of 1764 borrowing upon the previously failed Molasses Act. Initially, six pence per gallon duty was required, but in an apparent move to avoid highlighting the Act, the British levied only half the previous amount. However, duties were to be charged on all molasses and sugar, regardless of origin, and strictly enforced. The Sugar Act also included a tax on coffee, cloth, and silk.²⁴ British officials took the collection of this tax much more seriously, and with it, significant expansions of the customs service were required. At last, a tax in place to raise revenue was levied on America.²⁵ It was with this Act that provoked the real question of taxation without representation.

In addition, Parliament passed the Currency Act of 1764 prohibiting the colonies from printing and utilizing paper money. Americans were to pay British taxes and inter-colonial commerce by approved means and not colonial issued paper notes.²⁶ Because much of what the American colonies produced was exported from the continent, there was a constant fluctuation of legitimate British coinage and credit, further challenging transactions with British currency. Inflation was a legitimate concern as the colonial money lacked backing from a government body or precious metals such as gold or silver.²⁷

²³ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 59.

²⁴ Spencer Tucker, James Arnold, and Roberta Wiener, *The Encyclopedia of North American Colonial Conflicts to 1775*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 691-692.

²⁵ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 27.

²⁶ Jack Greene, “The Currency Act of 1764 in Metropolitan Imperial-Colonial Relations 1764-1776,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Oct., 1961), 429-463.

²⁷ Morgan, *The Stamp Act*, 31.

Not only was there a tax on luxuries such as sugar and molasses, coffee, cloth, and silk, but colonial printed currency was no longer viewed as a legitimate form of payment. Fears of returning to a barter system within the colonies frightened many merchants. According to revolutionary historian Gordon Wood, “No American attempted to argue that the demands of the internal market alone were capable of upholding the value of paper money.” Wood continues, “It would take the Revolutionary War and further experience with the issue of paper money before Americans would begin to see the significance of their domestic market and its dependence on paper currency.”²⁸

America possessed a strong argument for repeal of the Currency Act. The colonies’ most important criticisms were rooted in the fact that the American market supported a large part of English industry, while trade conducted inside the colonies made the utilization of British currency very difficult. If the American system were to fail, the British economy would suffer a significant blow. The Sugar and Currency Acts were officially to be regulations of trade, not revenue measures. However, the American colonies viewed them as both.²⁹ They restricted the types of commodities that Americans could purchase, levied a tax on those items, and forced them to be paid with a currency that was often not available. Why they did not have the impact the American Stamp Act did is unknown, but the unrest these two Acts provoked is apparent.

Taxation with virtual representation and colonial rights were, at this point, on the minds of many of those living in North America and the political effects of these acts are

²⁸ Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 141-142.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

important, leading up to the Stamp Act crisis.³⁰ Imperial revenue was gradually transformed into a constitutional issue, and during the 1760's, Americans could not raise money without elevating a host of issues, namely economic, legal, and political.³¹ Colonial legislatures had begun to voice their concerns to British Parliament while demanding a voice for their economic well-being. As the lines between politics, taxation, and constitutional rights blurred, the probability a peaceful resolution became less likely.³² These acts further illustrate failed British attempts to understand and act with colonial interests in mind.³³

The American Stamp Act

In the spring of 1763, George Grenville assumed the post of British Prime Minister. The British government had incurred a significant amount of debt during the Seven Years War, and upon acceptance of his post, Grenville's most pressing charge was to analyze and repair British finances.³⁴ Grenville appeared willing to entertain objections or alternatives to the American Stamp Act for the colonies. However, he refused outright colonial grievances against Britain's right to levy taxes.³⁵ The act was written and ready for British implementation, but after the rise in tension the Sugar Act placed on the relationship between the colonies and Great Britain, its execution was slow. Massachusetts and Virginia even wrote to their agents across the Atlantic that it appeared

³⁰ Greene, *The Currency Act*, 463.

³¹ William Willcox and Walter Arnstein, *The Age of Aristocracy: 1688 to 1830* (Lexington, MA: Heath and Company, 1992), 162.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Greene, *The Currency Act*, 463.

³⁴ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 23.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

the colonies might have the opportunity to levy their version of taxes, so long as Britain received proper compensation for their North American garrisons and post-war contributions.³⁶ The colonies offered no alternatives to Grenville's proposal.

From 1680 through the later part of the 18th century, most of the King's ministers cared little about America and relied upon the expertise of others. In fact, until 1768, no single member of the Colonial Office was charged with American affairs.³⁷ Thomas Whately, a subordinate of Grenville and loyal to his office, drafted the stamp bill.³⁸ Viewed as a close aide to Grenville, Whately was marginally qualified to draft such legislation and called upon the assistance of other offices within British parliamentary system. In an attempt to keep tensions low, he was proactive about notifying colonists about the intention to pass a stamp bill and wrote many within the colonies.³⁹ One of these individuals was Jared Ingersoll, a loyalist to the crown living in Connecticut.⁴⁰ Ingersoll's response was not what Grenville and Whately expected. Ingersoll wrote in July 1764, the minds of the Americans "are filled with the most dreadful apprehensions from such steps taking place, from whence I leave you to guess how easily a tax of that kind would be Collected; tis difficult to say how many ways could be invented to avoid the payment of a tax laid upon a County without the Consent of the Legislature of that Country and in opinion of most of the people Contrary to the foundation principles of their natural and Constitutional rights and Liberties."⁴¹

³⁶ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 71.

³⁷ Willcox and Arnstein, *The Age of Aristocracy*, 160.

³⁸ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 64.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁰ Ingersoll would later assume the post of head distributor for the colony of Connecticut.

⁴¹ Ingersoll, *Mr. Ingersoll's Letters Relating to the Stamp Act*, 2-3, 5.

Whatley was a firm proponent of virtual representation. He believed although the colonist had no voting representatives in parliament present, Americans were afforded representation due to their affiliation with the British Empire.⁴² To further his argument, most British males were not technically represented due to the requirement to own property made even them represented by proxy to the Empire.⁴³ Virtual representation expanded to every place the British flag was flown, and many Englishmen shared Whately's opinion. Whatley wrote to Ingersoll in Connecticut with concerns on the consequences of such an enforced bill. "If the King should fix the proportion of our Duty, we all say we will do our parts in the Common Cause, but if the Parliament once interpose and Lay a tax, tho; it may be a very moderate one... what Consequences may, or rather may not, follow?"⁴⁴

Regardless of affiliation or motivation, Americans continually warned British drafting agents that they would likely reject such legislation and a stamp tax would not be well received.⁴⁵ Most eighteenth-century Americans did not have an issue with supporting the growing British Empire. After all, they were British. They were willing to pay taxes, but the sampling of corresponding agents repeated a simple fact: Americans preferred to levy and collect taxes with methods they had established without Parliamentary intervention.⁴⁶

By examining the number of continental stamps assigned to different American colonies, the New York trade and shipping industry was a significant focus of the Stamp

⁴² Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 81.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ingersoll to Whately, July 6, 1764.

⁴⁵ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 83.

⁴⁶ Unknown Author, *Considerations Upon the Rights of the Colonists to the Privileges of British Subjects*.

Act.⁴⁷ In a sworn statement published in 1772, the names of all distributors, the value of the stamped paper consigned to each, and the returns received are available.⁴⁸ The most significant consignments of stamped paper went to the colonies with the most active shipping ports with the expectations they yield the highest returns. The continent stamps were consigned as follows: New York, £12,934; Massachusetts, £12,413; Pennsylvania, £11,852; South Carolina, £10,818; and Virginia, £9,684, a total of £57,701, or 47.5 percent of the value of all stamped paper consigned to the continental colonies.⁴⁹ The shipping industry was directly targeted and the colony of New York the most encumbered.

Once approved by the King, the American Stamp Act was to be enacted. During the beginning of April, news of the Stamp Act had arrived on the shores of the Americas, through boroughs of New York, and trickled upstate and into the Niagara Frontier, but ignored for some time. Its implementation and American response were slow, in part due to the lack of press it received, but its process and tactics were something unseen in the Americas before.⁵⁰

Implementation and Collection

The implementation of the Stamp Act was not an overnight process. In fact, how the tax would be instituted and collected were questions even Grenville could not answer in Parliament.⁵¹ As King George III's first minister and head of the treasury, George

⁴⁷ Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts*, 192.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 37-40.

⁵¹ Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, 115-117.

Grenville was responsible for assisting the crown in establishing a post Seven Years War financial plan while maintaining its empirical status as the most powerful nation in the world.⁵²

The year before its passage, Grenville began to consider such an Act and assigned two aids to begin writing such legislation. Several proposals were drafted and presented to him in September and October of 1763 but were found to be unsatisfactory.⁵³

Grenville sought to ensure whatever proposal he presented to Parliament would be accepted. No doubt, this would not be a popular enactment in the Americas. Members of Parliament were anxious to author such legislation due to the possible backlash in America and feared it likely very unpopular with their colonial subordinates.⁵⁴

There was a certain way around this, however. If Parliament were to assert its authority to collect a stamp duty through a resolution, its expansion of the right to levy would not be limited to parcels of paper and legal documents. Grenville put forth this resolution for Parliamentary consideration and asked for blanket approval to tax the colonies anyway they saw fit. With this blanket approval, Grenville would see little opposition, as it was virtually what set into the place the authority for Parliament to tax the colonies through multiple different means, even after the Stamp Act's repeal.⁵⁵

Americans did have some support in Parliament due primarily to their heavy dealings with the British economy. English merchants trading to America voiced their uneasiness regarding the conflict and shared these concerns with their agents both in

⁵² Ibid., 53, 70-72.

⁵³ Morgan, 54.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

America and the British government.⁵⁶ However, Grenville thought if he could place blame on the colonies and convince the voting members of Congress America had failed to come to the assistance of the British Empire during a time of financial need and fund their defense. Once he received an approved resolution, Grenville was able to author the Stamp Act while receiving little British opposition from those concerned with the Parliamentary-colonial relationship due to the unpopular colonial opposition over taxation.⁵⁷

As mentioned previously, the American Colonies had the prerogative to levy taxes, as they needed in the past. Some colonies had collected their own taxes to be utilized internally, within the colonies, while others had not. Grenville sought to protect collection practices and implementation by placing these tasks into British hands while avoiding reliance on its American agents. This added an additional layer of his Stamp Act worthy of analysis. Had members of Parliament understood the full extent of just how Britain would levy this tax, it may have concerned even more of them.

There are no official accounts from Grenville on his intentions or reasoning behind the Stamp Act's postponement.⁵⁸ There are, however, accounts written just after Grenville's Parliamentary proposals and some years later. According to historian Edmund S. Morgan, some of the later accounts were written to mislead anyone who wished to understand Grenville's motives purposely.⁵⁹ Those later accounts were in some cases from America's agents who reportedly supported such an act but felt they might be

⁵⁶ Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, 73.

⁵⁷ Bernhard Knollenberg, *Origin of the American Revolution* (New York: Free Press, 1960), 223.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 55-59

⁵⁹ Morgan, "The Postponement of the Stamp Act," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Jul., 1950), 355.

viewed negatively by their constituents in America.⁶⁰

Other accounts called for the delay of the Stamp Act as Grenville had previously offered. The unknown factor is Grenville's intentions. Was it to afford the American colonies the opportunity to offer their own resolutions on the best means of collecting a tax to support its military protection and the post-war British Empire? The other opinion that historians often claim is that Grenville did not have enough information to draft and commission the tax Parliament had employed his office to write.⁶¹

New York and Massachusetts had attempted to collect taxes through similar means in the past, and the American agents in Britain felt even the talk of a Stamp Act would be met with opposition. In 1755, six months after Massachusetts had passed its stamp duty, New York followed its lead. In an effort to raise money to fund defense, New York introduced various proposals, including a poll tax on each slave, an excise tax on tea, and a stamp duty. Lieutenant Governor of New York, James De Lancey, sensed British Parliament would later impose a stamp duty that would not impact one social group primarily, but all of New York.⁶² In a preemptive attempt to beat the British to such a duty, New York placed the levy into law in 1756.⁶³ Those associated with the newspaper industry viewed the tax negatively and a burden on business as it was much more difficult to compete with those in neighboring colonies.⁶⁴ The colonial tax was law just four years in New York and not renewed.

Before this time, the colonies collected taxes, except those used to regulate trade,

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 358.

⁶² Thompson, "Massachusetts and New York Stamp Acts," 253-258.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 178-179.

and then paid to the British treasury.⁶⁵ With this new proposal, the colonists would now pay duties directly to the treasury. It should be clear; Grenville was not explicitly committed to a Stamp Act, but more concerned with effective means to raising revenue.⁶⁶

The Revenue Act of 1764, commonly termed the Sugar Act, did not have the response the British treasury had intended. It did lower the amount it collected in comparison to its earlier version but still failed to reimburse the British Army for the 10,000 troops garrisoned within the colonies. After consideration from Grenville, his agents, and even representatives of the colonies in England, he felt a stamp duty offered several advantages over other duties that had been attempted or considered.⁶⁷

According to an account by an individual present during Grenville's offering of the Stamp Act legislation to British Parliament, it "required the fewest [customs] officers, and was attended with the least Expense in the Collecting of it." The unnamed individual continues in writing to his brother in Massachusetts saying, "That therefore, tho he doubted not but that the Colonies would wish rather have no tax at all; yet as the necessities of Government rendered it an indispensable duty, he should certainly bring such a Bill. In the meantime, he should leave it to each province to signify their Assent to such a Bill in General; or their requests about any particular modification of it as they should think fit."⁶⁸

Another account from William Knox, agent for Georgia, also echoed what other agents had written. Knox wrote that Grenville had appeared to be in no rush to hurry legislation without offering the colonies the opportunity to counter proposals. Knox

⁶⁵ Morgan, "The Postponement of the Stamp Act," 358.

⁶⁶ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 23-24.

⁶⁷ Morgan, "The Postponement of the Stamp Act," 358.

⁶⁸ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 27.

stated in his 1765 pamphlet, *The Claim to the Colonies to an Exemption from Internal Taxes by Act of Parliament Considered*, “He [Grenville] told them further, that if the colonies thought any other mode of taxation more convenient to them, and made any proposition which should carry the appearance of equal efficacy with a stamp duty, he [Grenville] would give it all due consideration.”⁶⁹

These accounts were taken in May of 1764, nearly a year before a stamp duty was to be implemented. They appeared to show Grenville's willingness to work with colonial representatives, but as they drew closer to implementation, productive correspondence began to disintegrate.⁷⁰ For colonial legislatures, the option to implement duties in place of an established levy from the British government was nearly impossible. To compound the problem, after the Seven Years War, British North America had changed dramatically, and there were few official channels for Grenville or even the British government to work through to communicate with all colonial assemblies on a large scale. Colonial governments were set up, and beyond trade, many worked autonomously from one another. Managing the segmented parts of the continent proved difficult for official correspondence by the British government difficult to both communicate and implement official matters. In all likelihood, the British government felt it much easier to offer the Americas a role in participating in legislation that directly affected them, but only to save face, and gave their considerations little thought.⁷¹

Several more times in 1764, Grenville presented a Stamp Act to British Parliament for future consideration while various drafts were being written and details

⁶⁹ William Knox, *The Claim of the Colonies* (London: W. Johnston, 1765), 31-33.

⁷⁰ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 61-67.

⁷¹ Ibid.

worked out in regards to execution, collection, and allocation. New York and six other colonies sent messages to their agents in England, and later four of those seven (including New York) petitioned the King and Parliament in regards to the impending stamp duty.⁷² However, no inter-colonial messages or petitions were dispatched. For such a message to be drafted and delivered, a colonial body would have to have been formed. Had this occurred, such a body would need to be sanctioned by the British government.⁷³ Would the British government even approve such a body, knowing the possible consequences it may have on its control over its American subordinates? New York and Massachusetts, amongst others, formed regional relationships over their mutual concerns and intercolonial interests. By the end of 1764, the lower houses of eight other colonies had approved resolutions denouncing the Stamp Act and rejecting Parliament's right to tax the Americans for revenue. Not until the Stamp Act Congress, composed of nine colonies, had convened had there been an official colonial body formed in response to the controversy surrounding the Stamp Act to discuss its repercussions.⁷⁴

Morgan assessed the overall mood shared throughout the colonies by analyzing correspondence between Grenville, his office, British Parliament, and the King. "These messages and petitions varied considerably in tone: some emphasized the economic distress of the colonies, some the willingness of the colonies to contribute to the British Treasury if requested to do so in a regular constitutional manner, but none admitted that Parliament had a right to levy the proposed tax and most of them vigorously asserted that Parliament had no such right."⁷⁵

⁷² Morgan, "The Postponement of the Stamp Act," 370.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 373.

⁷⁴ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 83.

⁷⁵ Morgan, "The Postponement of the Stamp Act," 373.

As 1764 passed, relations between the colonies and Parliament worsened under the threat of impending legislation. With petitions and apparent disagreement over the right to tax the colonies, talk within Parliament of passing the Stamp Act existed merely to demonstrate its power and ability. Even in his offerings for the colonies to collect their own taxes to support the British Armed Forces in America, Grenville never indicated the amount each colony would be responsible for raising.⁷⁶

In the early days of February 1765, the passage of the Stamp Act began to move very quickly while Parliament had begun to refuse American petitions due to the contrary and anti-British undertones. By mid-month after two presentations to Parliament, Great Britain passed the American Stamp Act, which was later confirmed by the King on March 22nd, 1765.⁷⁷ Its implementation and impact would have an unforeseeable impact on relations between the American colonies and the Imperial government in the coming years.⁷⁸

Several things should be asserted about Grenville's apparent intentions in his offerings to the colonies. Grenville appeared to have concerns regarding the colonial input and gave them first the option to propose their own legislation in a Parliamentary address in 1764.⁷⁹ Additionally, he alluded to offering colonial empowerment to collect the proposed levy through their assemblies. After this offering, he began to prepare his Stamp Act with no colonial input. Grenville's agent, Thomas Whately, was entrusted with preparing his Stamp Act and contacting colonial representatives, knowing

⁷⁶ Ibid., 369.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 76.

⁷⁹ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 56-57.

Americans would likely not propose a tax themselves.⁸⁰

Of course, different colonial assemblies confronted Grenville and Whately with opposition. However, petitions affording colonial representatives the opportunity to present the American argument when conferring the Stamp Act from a resolution to law was not offered.⁸¹ This action further showed Grenville's lack of interest in genuinely considering the colonial positions and their lack of participation in raising revenue for the British treasury and support for the troops garrisoned in North America.⁸²

At a time when Great Britain stood victorious after years of war but encumbered with a striking amount of debt, how would it ensure the colonies shouldered the burden of their defense?⁸³ Was the Crown justified forcing the American participation into a shared financial burden over its protection and the further expansion of the British Empire? With the Stamp Act, colonists found themselves facing legislation that would tax them without consent for revenue to fund their defense.⁸⁴

Grenville and his administration were unsure the best practice to implement the Currency Act in North America and the distribution of the tax. In addition, because of its negative press in the Americas, the treasury and excise divisions would not receive positive input or suggestion on the most advantageous methods of collection.⁸⁵ "The Stamp Act crisis represent[ed] an important episode in tax history. It highlights the difficulties in imposing an imperial tax across the globe at a time when communication

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 73.

⁸² Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 73.

⁸³ Ibid., 54.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 73.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

mechanisms meant significant delays in relaying information between the center in Britain and the periphery in the colonies.”⁸⁶ Stamp duties were something the citizens of Great Britain had seen since the late 17th century, and it was not unrealistic to consider it might be successful abroad to support the Empire. However, to implement the Stamp Act in the colonies, a reorganization of how Great Britain viewed and collected duties in the colonies required examination.⁸⁷

Previously, laws concerning trade were relatively lax. American colonists had taken advantage of their proximity to the Caribbean and traded with Britain’s enemies for many years without censure. Merchants forged maritime documents and avoided the British Navy virtually unencumbered to conduct business while avoiding taxes altogether.⁸⁸ The colonial shipping industries conducted business primarily on credit requiring paper documentation to protect both the merchants and creditors.⁸⁹ Every such paper would require a stamp. The British felt stricter trade enforcement would secure its holdings in the Americas while also providing revenue simultaneously.⁹⁰ The proposed Stamp Act would not only do these things but also streamline the process of documentation throughout the inter-colonial network and international trade.⁹¹

To maximize revenue through the internal tax, requirements for enhanced record keeping would necessitate implementation.⁹² In doing this, the Empire ensured a much closer eye on its North American subordinates. In addition, the Act funded British troops

⁸⁶ Lynne Oats and Pauline Sadler, “Accounting for the Stamp Act Crisis,” *The Accounting Historians Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2008), 106.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts*, 193.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Oats and Sadler, “Accounting for the Stamp Act Crisis,” 106.

that would enforce parliamentary policies under the assumption they were garrisoned for colonial protection.⁹³ If implemented and enforced correctly, the Currency Act was a brilliant idea, but the logistics of such an Act proved difficult.

A Stamp Duty is significant in that its effect would not be limited to one group but spread through all castes of society. Passports, liquor licenses, playing cards, ships' papers, insurance policies, almanacs, newspapers, and pamphlets were all required to bear a stamp.⁹⁴ It required cooperation not only from mariners, merchants, and lawyers, but any individual who did work with these individuals. Additionally, this made implementation and collection practices difficult. To some, it appeared more attractive as “the individual burden was... lower than the more targeted forms of tax aimed at the wealthy alone, such as land tax[es] in Britain and slave taxes in the colonies.”⁹⁵ To avoid the Stamp Act was nearly impossible unless an individual was utterly self-sufficient.

During a time when self-governance was at the forefront of the colonial mindset, imperial involvement perplexed many English lawmakers.⁹⁶ The practices the British crown used in the implementation of the American Stamp Act were likely the most significant contributor to its failure. To enforce collection practices across the vast Atlantic through eighteenth-century communication lines would have proved challenging for any empire. Although the Act was short-lived, its impact was long felt and had a major impact on the English-American relationship.⁹⁷

The cost of implementation was extremely complicated. The paper and stamps

⁹³ Christopher Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels* (London: Grafton Books, 1990), xx.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, xix.

⁹⁵ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 76.

⁹⁶ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 294.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Britain would tax were, at least initially, to be manufactured in London and shipped to the colonies for distribution.⁹⁸ The various types of paper and stamps, in combination with the dyes and royal stamps representing different amounts proved difficult. The British government viewed America as a single entity and appeared ignorant of the very different economic statuses of the various regions and colonies.⁹⁹ Would parchment be sent to one area of the colonies primarily while paper blanks and printing paper to another? Was there to be an inventory on hand or might it be produced as needed in the colonies? Did the crown need to establish warehouses both in London and the colonies to provide the colonies with the necessary materials and how would the logistical cost be absorbed through the levy?¹⁰⁰

In Europe, a stamp duty had been in place for quite some time, and most countries had the ability to support it.¹⁰¹ This may have been one of many motivating factors in working towards instituting a stamp duty in North America, as the British had seen it work throughout Europe. The sale of stamps for legal paper, bonds, playing cards, and other items had been implemented in England during William III and proved seamless.¹⁰² In the Americas, however, only three colonies had previously instituted stamp duties on their own, and thus, had the equipment to support the production of such paper.¹⁰³ One colony was New York. Without this equipment, England would force not only an unwanted tax on its subordinate colonies but would also require the taxed to absorb the procurement cost of such equipment. By keeping the production and warehousing of

⁹⁸ Oats and Sadler, "Accounting for the Stamp Act Crisis," 125.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 73-76.

¹⁰¹ Oats and Sadler, "Accounting for the Stamp Act Crisis," 108.

¹⁰² Charles Ritcheson, "Preparation of the Stamp Act," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 4, (Oct., 1953), 546.

¹⁰³ Thompson, "Massachusetts and New York Stamp Acts," 253-258.

taxed paper materials internal to England, it would also employ English workers, which further heightened animosities with colonists. Had the colonies been able to serve in the production, storage, and paid employment of a stamp duty, it may have been better received.¹⁰⁴

For collection practices, Great Britain divided the colonies into nine districts, and the American Stamp Office was established under five commissioners in London.¹⁰⁵ The districts were then subdivided into smaller sub-districts and assigned a stamp distributor. Eighteenth-century New York was an extremely busy place. Printing production was big business within New York City, its harbor a constant entry and departure of mariners, and manufacturing throughout the colony was consistently witnessing growth.¹⁰⁶

Great Britain assigned James McEvers to the colonial capital of New York as the excise service distributor.¹⁰⁷ Of the twenty-three smaller districts, New York was a close second in size only to Jamaica. The British Empire relied heavily on the Caribbean market both in shipping and production of molasses, rum, and slaves.¹⁰⁸ Parliament entrusted McEvers with the storage and distribution of stamped paper, levying and enforcing the tax, and dispatching the collected funds to the Exchequer in Great Britain. This British commission proved no small feat in the busiest colonial district in regards to all things stamp related.¹⁰⁹

With his cooperation, the British government compensated McEvers eight percent

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ P.D.G. Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 100.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Also known as James McIvers in some texts.

¹⁰⁸ Oats and Sadler, "Accounting for the Stamp Act Crisis," 123.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

commission of duties collected as well as expenses related to postage and official travel. Having been responsible for the Hudson Valley, McEvers certainly had the opportunity to do very well for himself if he had procured collections as legislation prescribed.¹¹⁰ His true loyalty to the Exchequer and British crown at the time of assuming his post is unclear, however. In eighteenth-century America, men accepted various posts to promote their name and position within society. Many men sought an opportunity to serve as distributors, which further shows the issues that rose from the Stamp Act crisis had not been accurately forecasted. McEvers was no different from these other men, yet later found his position was much more dangerous than envisioned upon its acceptance.¹¹¹

As mentioned previously, remittance was to be made in the form of sterling. However, whether the sterling was to be kept internal to fund the British Army within the colonies or shipped back to the British Exchequer and then distributed accordingly was to be decided. Draining the already low stock of sterling was a serious concern of the colonies and its economic impact and social reaction to the American Stamp Act.¹¹²

The British representatives responsible for the collection of the tax put complicated accounting mechanisms into place. After some debate, Parliament made the decision the collected sterling would remain within the colonies and be paid directly to the deputy paymaster of the army in America.¹¹³ Additionally, they were responsible for decisions regarding what accounts to British forces stationed in North America were paid and its distribution methods. Allocations of the tax puzzled colonists, and although the duties claimed to support the British Army, Americans felt Parliament appropriated the

¹¹⁰ Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, 94-95.

¹¹¹ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 157-158.

¹¹² Oats and Sadler, "Accounting for the Stamp Act Crisis," 124.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

funds however it deemed fit. If it were to fund British troops in North America, why would it leave the continent? Once established that it would remain in North America, did the British government intend to shift other resources to fool Americans? There remained a significant distrust of British intentions surrounding the Act. Whether to fund other aspects of the British government, pay for colonial defense, or to even entice rebellion were the question many Americans began to ask of the duty.¹¹⁴

Stamp duties had served as an effective collection strategy in England in the past, but as tensions between colonials and the British Army continued to be strained, the thought of funding their salaries and garrisons was difficult for Americans. Having undergone the strain of the Sugar Act of 1764 which levied taxes on wines, sugar, and coffee, the Currency Act of 1764 which had a significant impact on American currency, and the Quartering Act of 175 which required food, lodging, and aid be provided to British soldiers, the Stamp Act was, in colonial eyes, Britain's attempt to undermine their growing economy, independence, and while funding the British Army.

Grenville, the Office of the Exchequer, British Parliament, and the Crown all had their various rationales in support of a stamp duty as a fiscal instrument to opinions on the methods of revenue collection from those living in the Americas. How Great Britain would implement the duty and enforce collection practices was simply not a seamless process. The accounting techniques used had previously worked in Europe, but the dynamics seen in America were unlike anything Europeans had encountered.¹¹⁵ The enforcement and maintenance due to colonial pressure were turbulent, disorderly, and

¹¹⁴ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: The Kelnap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 101.

¹¹⁵ Oats and Sadler, "Accounting for the Stamp Act Crisis," 108-109.

chaotic. What stemmed from the Stamp Act catapulted America from relative social order into near anarchy and set into motion its vehicle for independence.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins*, 101-102.

CHAPTER TWO: RESISTANCE THROUGH VIOLENCE

“Caesar had his Brutus, Charles the first had his Cromwell, and George the Third- may profit from their example. If this be treason, make the most of it.”

-Patrick Henry, Speech in the House of Burgesses, May 29th, 1765

Violence as a Political Tool

The first protests against the Stamp Act took the form of pamphlets. Circulated pamphlets had typically been the most popular way to object to legislation, parliament, colonial government, or the British crown. They were published against and in defense of the American Stamp Act, but these words did little for those impacted the most by the tax. Affluent colonists educated in the arts, law, and philosophy, were the primary authors of these pamphlets. Those pamphlets were typically adequate to generate a variety of feelings and opinions simply, but little more. Communicating through appropriate channels and writing pamphlets had worked in the past, but the Stamp Act produced a new version of diplomacy: the mob.¹

Using violence as a political tool was not a new concept to American colonists.² Riots and mobs have served as important political tools throughout American history, both before the 1760's and the years following its independence. The first North American settlements experienced violent uprisings, laborers, farmers, and slaves have revolted against their masters and destroyed property, while most major cities witnessed unrest.³ All facets of American society have been subjected to violence as a political

¹ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 76-77.

² Gordon Wood, “A Note on Mobs in the American Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 4, (Oct., 1966), 635.

³ *Ibid.*

tool, and it should not be surprising mob action would serve as a “necessary ingredient” of revolutionary thought.⁴

Having felt unrepresented and with the inception of the Stamp Act and its corresponding duties authorized, lay people felt they had few options.⁵ It was apparent the British government would not entertain colonial interests and hold the empire’s bottom line as its primary concern. Mobs during the Stamp Act crisis varied in intensity, makeup, and intent regardless of size. However, what Americans shared was their disdain toward the Act and explicit targeting of the customs officers who participated in its collection.⁶

Great Britain had spent much of the eighteenth century at war in multiple theatres, but bloodshed between colonists and the British Army had been relatively absent. The American colonies remained loosely affiliated and – except for trade – cooperation between them had not been present.⁷ To challenge the might of the greatest military power on earth, by most accounts, would have been ill-advised. Instead, Americans enjoyed the protection of the British government and had hoped to maintain their arrangement. However, the duties collected through the Stamp Act would ensure Americans would now participate in funding their protection.

Mass violence and mob activities, however, are the first examples of armed resistance specific to the fight for American independence.⁸ Gatherings of individuals that exploded into violent mobs played a dominant role early on, years before the

⁴ Arthur Schlesinger, “Political Mobs and the American Revolution, 1765-1776,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 99, No. 4 (Aug., 1955), 244.

⁵ Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 91.

⁶ Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, 310.

⁷ Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 65.

⁸ Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic: 1763-1789* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), 20-21.

Continental Army marched onto the battlefield. "Mobs terrified the stamp agents into resigning and forced a repeal of the tax. Mobs obstructed the execution of the Townshend Revenue Act and backed up the boycotts of British trade. Mobs triggered the Boston Massacre and later the famous Tea Party."⁹ As seen in America, violence was now the by-product of failed diplomacy.

Mobs began to scheme and gather once word of the Stamp Act reached American port cities. Some were choreographed and others unrehearsed, but both kinds shared intensity. Rural areas were not immune from organized resistance either, but most occurred in urban areas. Cables of communication were slow outside cultural centers such as Boston and New York City, but collection occurred in all areas of the colonies.¹⁰

Mobs during both the Stamp Act crisis and in the greater context of the American Revolution were important for several reasons. First, mobs conveyed what written words simply could not, and highlighted the two-sided position that surrounded the ideas of virtual representation and the rights of taxation. Second, mobs established a certain level of fear among those who supported and defended Parliament's actions and the agents within American in support roles. Mobs made loyalists uneasy, and the once sought-after position of an excise officer extremely dangerous. Last, it provided the opportunity for any individual to become a hero and a name to be rallied around.¹¹ Often those individuals lost their lives in mob-assisted opposition but brought the resistance to the sailors, merchants, farmers, and the general person who suffered the clutch of the Stamp Act.

⁹ Schlesinger, "Political Mobs," 244.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

The eighteenth-century colony of New York was unique due to its size and makeup. New York City had become a major center of commerce, shipping, printing, and manufacturing. Hundreds of miles to the west lay the Niagara frontier and in between, production of textiles and raw materials, farming, mining, and trade expanded. Although New York's economy spanned across various industries, the colony shared the burden of the Stamp tax.¹² New York had experimented with its own Stamp Act two decades prior, but the temperature of its citizens regarding the now imposed British Act was much different.¹³

Organized Resistance in Upstate New York

Opposition to the Stamp Act in New York was not seen only in New York City. The municipality, because of its size and importance, often overshadowed the rest of the colony. However, in viewing the colony during the Stamp Act crisis, upstate New York provides essential insight into the rural perception of the collection practices, mob mentality, and impact on those living outside major cities.

Much of what happened in places such as Albany and western New York had occurred in New York City already. Not only was New York City the center of New York's commerce, but also the capital city in 1765. The initial response from the Stamp Act upstate was quiet until assemblymen returned to their constituency following its passing by British Parliament.¹⁴ Non-importation agreements were signed and both

¹² Thompson, "Massachusetts and New York Stamp Acts," 253.

¹³ New York had passed its Stamp Act in 1756 in order to raise revenue internally.

¹⁴ Beverly McAnear, "Albany Stamp Acts," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 4, No. 4, (Oct., 1947), 486.

political parties within New York refused to support the Stamp Act.¹⁵ Opposition in western New York was not entirely unanimous but in locations like Albany, pockets of dissent existed.¹⁶

To rise from the depths of society and achieve greater status and notoriety, many men sought a commission as an excise officer. In Albany, seven men had applied for the position. When colonial politicians had returned to Albany and distributed information on the now very unpopular Stamp Act, the applicants' tone changed dramatically. "Four [of the applicants], John Macaomb, William Gamble, John Stevenson and Philip Cuyler, admitted applying for the position but promised never to serve in it. The other three, a Mr. Hansen, Jacob Vanderheyden and Henry Van Schaack, denied ever having applied."¹⁷ The fear of reprisal for accepting such a post was a harsh reality these applicants faced. The Sons of Liberty had a dominant presence in Albany and demanded the men sign agreements to refuse these posts if appointed.

The British Army had garrisoned troops throughout the colony of New York, including Albany. If garrisons in Albany proved inadequate to afford protection to stamp collectors, troops in New York City were within marching distance. Even with the availability and under the protection of the British Army, constant harassment of customs officials occurred across the colony. Prior to the November 1st, 1765 enactment date, aggression towards collectors and supporters continued. "Illegal actions of the Son of Liberty and the negligent conduct of the authorities demonstrated the unity of the opposition to the Stamp Act, both as to purpose and as to methods."¹⁸

¹⁵ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 37-38.

¹⁶ McAnear, "Albany Stamp Acts," 486.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 489.

Mob actions across the colonies were typical in execution. Of these, burning down the homes or properties of collectors often took place. Van Schaack wrote to the law officers appointed by the British crown and the provincial attorney general detailing individuals appearing to have been the instigators of the mob that torched his home. By his account, Albany County representatives were responsible for organizing the mob, naming 36 individuals having been involved in the torching of his home.¹⁹ Whether Van Schaack's account is entirely accurate is debatable, but it indeed questions upstate representatives and their participation with the mobs and Sons of Liberty.

Due to the nature of the Stamp Act and what it taxed, Albany and New York City reacted differently than the rest of the colony for several reasons. Those living in rural areas conducted most of its business through a barter system and in luxuries not typically associated with items affected by the Stamp Act.²⁰ Troops garrisoned on the frontier were much different from those in New York City as well. They wore the same British uniform but occupied their posts due to the Indian threat and post-war relations with French Canadians. Their secondary objective was the enforcement of commercial and legislative matters.²¹ The British troops garrisoned in western New York required different operating procedures due to the distance from the primary colonial garrisons in New York City.

Because of the differences, neither Albany nor New York garnered much support from their rural neighbors.²² According to historian Gary Nash, "... the backcountry

¹⁹ Ibid., 488.

²⁰ Eugene Fingerhut and Joseph Tiedemann, *The Other New York: The American Revolution Beyond New York City, 1763-1787* (New York: SUNY Press, 2005), 7.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

farmers believe[d] that those same charges applied to corrupt and exploitative fellow colonists in their midst who controlled the courts, credit networks, and distribution of land.”²³ Much of the land in New York was owned by a select group of aristocrats and those who worked the land were tenant farmers, more concerned with their lease to continue crop production than problems of politics seemingly affecting a higher caste of society.²⁴

As Stamp Act hostilities grew in urban areas, British troops shifted from the western part of the colony to the eastern seaboard. Before the Stamp Act, the British Army had posted most of their New York garrisons in western New York to defend against Native Americans while protecting British interests from uprisings of tenant farmers.²⁵ Tensions in New York continued to rise as the British Army and General Gage, commander of British forces in America, struggled to enforce the terms of the Quartering Act (enacted in 1765) and a shift in forces required British forces to move out of the Hudson Valley and into New York City.²⁶

Without a doubt, lawyers were involved in lease agreements between landowners and tenants, and with that, legal documents generated would require to be stamped in accordance with Parliamentary law but not in numbers seen throughout major cities during the 1760’s. Although instrumental later in the War for American Independence, upstate New York saw limited action directly related to the Stamp Act. However, the Sons of Liberty had strong roots in the Hudson Valley, from Westchester County to

²³ Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, 73.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 144.

²⁶ Ibid.

Albany, due to the imposition of Stamp Act, and these will be addressed later in this study.²⁷

Organized Resistance in New York City

The clear majority of Stamp Act related hostilities within the colony of New York took place within the greater New York City area.²⁸ The city was growing rapidly and due to its location between greater New England, the western frontier, and the middle and southern states, it was an ideal location for nearly all types of trades and industries. Because of the nature of the Stamp Act and the variety of individuals it affected, it was not well-received and political parties, labor unions, skilled and unskilled workers, and merchants all showed some degree of pushback once its implementation was enforced.²⁹ New York, in comparison to other metropolitan areas in New England, did maintain a group of Tory loyalists but had become progressively more dangerous for an outspoken supporter of royal policy.³⁰

The port in New York City had grown to be one of the busiest commerce centers in North America during the late 18th century.³¹ The growing volume of commerce exchanged in New York City would now be regulated through stamp legislation and had a sizable impact on the shipping, manufacturing, and maritime industries. Many New York merchants banded together in economic opposition to the Stamp Act, primarily

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ McAnear, "The Albany Stamp Act Riots," 486.

²⁹ Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 42.

³⁰ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 168.

³¹ Virginia Harrington, "The Place of the Merchant in New York Colonial Life," *New York History*, Vol. 13, No. 4, (Oct., 1932), 378.

through measures that did not harm or curb their business ventures.³²

As tensions in New York City rose, prominent merchants led and created non-importation associations and committees of correspondence.³³ Most merchants saw little harm in organized opposition to the stamp duty but as tensions became violent, many neutral merchants pulled their support for fear they might lose their livelihood.³⁴ New York City experienced a division of support in the 1760s when organized demonstrations became mobs resulting in a division into conservative and radical parties.³⁵ Early twentieth century historian Virginia Harrington describes the decision some New Yorkers were forced to make with their support, “Many merchants, it is true, continued to stand with the radicals— those who saw more clearly the danger to trade from British tax action than the danger to private property from violence—but the majority stood with the conservatives, opposing the acts of Parliament as specific measures, but even more opposed to violent methods of all kinds and somewhat jealous also of the presumption of the unenfranchised classes.”³⁶

Shipping during this period was the most profitable and sensible option to transport goods, not only throughout the Atlantic World but also through other ports in North America. Once the goods passed through colonial harbors, inland merchants and shippers distributed the goods over land. No major road system or railroads existed yet and seafarers were responsible for ensuring goods produced both in New England and abroad reached their destinations across the world. Because of the amount of business

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Knollenberg, *Growth of the American Revolution*, 200.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Harrington, “The Place of the Merchant,” 378.

and commerce located in New York City, captains and seaman often found themselves in the port of New York.³⁷

The Royal Navy had a tradition of impressment— that is the kidnapping of sailors and forcing them to serve in the British Navy or aboard ships flying the King's flag.³⁸ This study is not focused on issues of impressment, but it should be noted sailors and merchant marines had a particular distrust for the English and continued cynicism was seen throughout the majority of the eighteenth century. Whether the Royal Navy or those civilian agencies that cooperated with it directly or indirectly victimized American sailors, colonists suffered from a deep-rooted distrust of the British crown and its Naval Forces.³⁹ The New York Stamp Act riots, in and around the city, were organized and orchestrated, in many instances, by sailors.⁴⁰ Port cities, such as New York, were filled with idle sailors who had now found themselves unemployed. Many had served as privateers during the war with France, and due to British regulation, now were out of work and blamed new legislation and the Stamp Act specifically.⁴¹ According to Morgan, "Idle sailors were a problem in every port, but the bigger the port, the bigger the problem."⁴²

The Stamp Act states clearance papers issued after November 1st would bear a stamp, and in anticipation, sailors and merchants in New York City were on high alert in October anticipating how customs officers would enforce it. If the customs officers chose to comply with the law, and as royal officials, it was expected they would comply,

³⁷ Jesse Lemisch, *Jack Tar vs. John Bull: The Role of New York's Seamen in Precipitating the Revolution* (New York: Yale University, 1997), 51.

³⁸ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 100.

³⁹ Lemisch, *Jack Tar vs. John Bull*, 26-30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

⁴² Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 168.

what action did layman or even the colonial assemblies take? "The duties of customs officers did not fall within their jurisdictions, and royal governors would certainly have vetoed any orders from the assemblies which attempted to regulate matters beyond their authority."⁴³

In October of 1765, merchants, sailors, and printers in opposition to the impending Act began to post warnings and placards throughout the city collectively. On October 24th, the stamps arrived by ship into the New York Harbor and were met with placards warning, "The First Man that either distributes or makes use of Stamp Paper let him take Care of his House, Person, and Effects. We dare. VOX POPULI. [Latin phrase meaning *voice of the people*]"⁴⁴ Further study into various forms of print will be later covered, but this is simply one example in the efforts individuals took as a collective to ensure their voices were heard and how they intended to single out those who encouraged the implementation, collection, or support of the quickly approaching enforceable legislation.

On October 31st, the day prior to the Stamp Act effective date, undertones of sorrow and rage were felt throughout New York City.⁴⁵ Many merchants agreed they would avoid the importation of any English goods until Parliament repealed the Stamp Act.⁴⁶ However, there were those loyal to the British crown or afraid to avoid the tax and a unanimous movement was not present. A collection of merchants gathered at Burns'

⁴³ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁴ F. L. Engleman, "Cadwallader Colden and the New York Stamp Act Crisis," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 4, (Oct., 1953), 568.

⁴⁵ Mercantile Library, *New York During the American Revolution* (New York: Mercantile Library Association, 1861), 6.

⁴⁶ Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, 54.

City Arms Tavern and resolved to import no more goods from the mother country while the Stamp Act remained in force.⁴⁷

Even with the non-importation agreement between New York merchants, critics were not satisfied. The city erupted into chaos when two thousand individuals from the lower classes filled the streets and threatened the homes of British policy sympathizers. In one of the most famous early examples of the mob's actions during the war, the crowd descended on Governor Cadwallader Colden's estate.⁴⁸ The tactics these gangs used varied. In this instance, they ransacked his house, marched an effigy in the likeness of the Governor through the streets, and set his carriage ablaze. The mob moved as one through New York City for four days, which was later called the "General Terror of November 1-4."⁴⁹ The middle-class Sons of Liberty orchestrated these four days of protests and in some cases, incited violence on collectors, comptrollers, excise officers, and even royal sympathizers.⁵⁰

The mariners living in or transiting through the city also had an opportunity to organize. "The Sons of Neptune" as they called themselves posted flyers throughout the city urging individuals to join their resistance movement, and on November 1st, 1765, New York's seaman left their ships at the docks and descended into Manhattan.⁵¹ These sailors hung placards throughout the city encouraging participation in the picketing and storming of the city's British garrison, Fort George. The mob shouted to Cadwallader

⁴⁷ Mercantile Library, "New York During the American Revolution," 6.

⁴⁸ Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, 54-55.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ George Bancroft, *History of the United States of America* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 161.

through the walls of the barracks calling him, “The Chief Murderer of their Rights and Privileges” and “taunted the guards to fire, hurled bricks, stones, and garbage, paraded an effigy of the governor in his actual coach, which they had seized from his carriage house, and finally convinced the governor to hand over bundles of the hated stamps.”⁵²

Throughout the remainder of the month, contending groups continued to harass those willing to risk their property, reputation, or even lives in royal services associated with collecting or distributing stamps in the different boroughs of New York City. During November of 1765, the *New York Gazette* reported, “a crowd surround[ed] the home of a suspected stamp distributor and defac[ed] his house, destroy[ed] some furniture in it, and draw[ed] his winter carriages thro’ the streets in flames.”⁵³ By the end of November, the mobs had flushed out nearly all officers commissioned to distribute stamps in New York City.⁵⁴

Britain had achieved something it had not intended in 1765 with the passage of the Stamp Act: the unintentional creation of a loose network of colonies and people that shared a common enemy and were forced to become closer than they ever had in the past.⁵⁵ In the coming years, there were evident growing pains due to America’s unique geography, developing economies, melting pot like diversities, and social differences. However, Americans shared the economic implications of the Stamp Act across all social lines. New Yorkers, whether city dwellers or rural farmers, shouldered a shared burden

⁵² Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 55.

⁵³ Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York: 1760-1790* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1981), 39.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁵ Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 59.

and American colonists had begun to view themselves as American citizens.⁵⁶ Americans who had not previously been heard now had a voice, and by the conclusion of 1765, those who took to the streets had stunned, intimidated, and terrified those who continued to remain loyal to British Parliament and Crown.⁵⁷

Colonial grievances had finally culminated into an articulated response, what they believed, as Great Britain's attempt to undermined their economic strength and independence. New York City remained one of the pillars of organized resistance during both the Stamp Act crisis and the American Revolution. Other colonies looked to colonial leaders in New York City for the best methods of opposition and organization. The Committee of Correspondence, formed on October 31st, 1765 at Burns' City Arms Tavern, days before the Stamp Act's implementation, offered passion, guidance, and energy to other cities and colonies on resistance to the Act and the way forward for America.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Morgan, "Colonial Ideas of Parliamentary Power, 1764-1766," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Jul., 1948), 318-326.

⁵⁷ Clarence Carter, *Thomas Gage to Henry Conway*, 23 September 1765, 67.

⁵⁸ Mercantile Library Association, *New York City*, 41-42.

CHAPTER THREE: RESISTANCE THROUGH PRINT

“The records of thirteen legislatures, the pamphlets, newspapers in all the colonies, ought to be consulted during that period to ascertain the steps by which the public opinion was enlightened and informed concerning the authority of Parliament over the colonies.”

-John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 1815

Pamphlets

The written word has been used to counter arguments throughout history and the revolutionary period in American continued this tradition. Both Americans and Europeans utilized every medium possible to state their opinions and with the proliferation of the printing press, their audience was nearly unlimited. One of the most effective mediums of the eighteenth century was the pamphlet.¹ “These small, loosely stitched and unbound booklets contained some of the most important and characteristic writings during the American Revolutionary period.”²

The pamphlets have always maintained obvious differences from colonial newspapers. Typically, they reflected one individual’s thoughts and may express discontent. They did not need to appeal to the masses like newspapers must and could allow either a single edition or a series of offerings. Because of these properties and the tendencies to be very passionate in their message, pamphlets functioned as the perfect mouthpiece for dissatisfaction throughout colonial America.

According to Bailyn, pamphlets were “highly flexible, easy to manufacture,

¹ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 2.

² *Ibid.*

cheap, [and] were printed in the American colonies wherever there were printing presses, intellectual ambitions, and political concerns.”³ It is difficult to determine how many pamphlets Americans produced before and during the American Revolution, but estimates range from 530 to 1,500.⁴ However, the Stamp Act set into motion the first wave of pamphlets North America witnessed in the eighteenth century.

Until the invention of the radio, print was the typical vehicle to spread propaganda and the press became very effective in its use. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, the pamphlet was the chief instrument to carry one's ideas to the public. The pamphlet, forerunner of the newspaper, was adapted into many forms and uses and due to its small size, cheap cost, and portability, it could reach "a larger audience than the orator in the House of Commons."⁵ Even after the mass production and later acceptance of the newspaper, pamphlet style writing was published in editorials but carried its grassroots message.

American political thought shares roots with these short works. Often pamphlets would be written and distributed only to inspire a response, rebuttal, or counter-argument pamphlet.⁶ To author a pamphlet or broadside, one did not need to come from the elite class, practice law, or make a living by writing. Early American pamphleteers were the original American historians, originating from all societal castes and occupations, and collectively shared an impact on constitutional thought on the eve of American Independence.

³ Ibid., 4.

⁴ Ibid., 9; Homer Calkin, "Pamphlets and Public Opinion During the American Revolution," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 64, No. 1, (Jan., 1940), 23.

⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁶ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 4-5.

Americans were not the only authors of pamphlets concerning the subject of taxation. The citizens and government of Great Britain also participated in producing a small number of pamphlets related to issues over the opposition and defense of their stamp duty.⁷ However, most of the pamphlets originating during this period emanated from the colonies. Following the Stamp Act crisis until late 1774 and early 1775, British loyalists had dismissed the tax opposition movement as unimportant while viewing their protests and constitutional disputes as not worthy of the effort of refutation.⁸

Many pamphleteers did not claim authorship of their work. In fact, many Americans believed Grenville himself either published or commissioned the writing of a pro-tax pamphlet entitled *The Regulations Lately Made concerning the Colonies and the Taxes Imposed upon Them, considered*.⁹ Authors would either assume pseudonyms or claim the works they had commissioned. Thomas Whately, the author of the Stamp Act, was likely the author of the pro-tax pamphlet and was written to represent Grenville's views on the matter in an effort to curb American opinion.¹⁰

The opinions on the Stamp Act in New York City were as diverse as the makeup of its inhabitants. Some of these citizens seized the opportunity to publish their opinions in pamphlets of their opinions of Grenville, the right for Parliament to impose an external tax while they did not possess physical representation in England, and the practices of officers within the British customs office. New York elites also utilized pseudonyms and published works by printers and booksellers and the pamphlets represented the lifeblood

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Robert Parkinson, "Print, the Press, and the American Revolution," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History* (2015), 3.

⁹ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 79.

¹⁰ Ibid.

of American public opinion and resistance during the American Revolution.¹¹

Early American pamphlets played a substantial impact during the decade before the Declaration of Independence due to the unpopular actions of the British government.¹² The numbers of produced and manufactured pamphlets had substantially risen indicating both their popularity and effectiveness. Although the numbers are not as extraordinary as they would become later such as Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (100,000 copies sold in the first three months, and about 500,000 altogether), their importance is worthy of discussion.¹³ Without the early revolutionary thought-provoking events surrounding the Stamp Act, pamphleteering may have proven less effective when its results were much more important during the later years of the 1760's and 1770's.

Placards and Broadsides

Placards and broadsides also served an essential role in the printed opposition of the Stamp Act. Similar to pamphlets, broadsides or placards had been used for many years as an effective way to broadcast an opinion on a subject matter that would reach the masses. Many of these placards have likely been lost, destroyed, or simply did not survive the test of time and are difficult to analyze. Both pamphlets and placards were significant as they highlighted the expansion of intellectual and political thought in America while also exhibiting the evolution of revolutionary philosophy before and during the American Revolution.¹⁴

¹¹ Parkinson, "Print, the Press," 1.

¹² Calkin, "Pamphlets and Public Opinion," 27.

¹³ Moncure Conway, *The Life of Thomas Paine with a History of His Literary, Political, and Religious Career in America, France, and England* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1892), 69.

¹⁴ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 21.

The one-sheet broadsides that appeared in 18th century American cities were the most important communication avenue to keep colonists informed of local events and in some cases, hundreds of miles away.¹⁵ Because they were inexpensive to produce and distribution methods were simple, placards quickly became the most effective way to quickly educate the masses on distrust and discontent surrounding the Stamp Act and British government. The reaction time colonist required to write, produce, and distribute placards following the events of their subject matter was also impressive.

The Stamp Act Congress, meeting from Oct 7th to Oct 24th, 1765, encouraged the citizens of New York City to act. The initial reaction from the American body was temperate and respectful.¹⁶ However, the subsequent response to the impending implementation of the Stamp Act on Nov 1st was one that began to simmer. On Oct 22nd, the Stamps arrived in New York City Harbor on the *HMS Edward* and escorted by the frigates *Coventry* and *Garland*.¹⁷ As the British ships settled into the harbor to unload British approved stamps, placards appeared throughout New York City announcing the popular determination to reject the duty and threatened violence against any of those who attempted to distribute or enforce the stamps.¹⁸

The use of placards and broadsides is an important point of liberal thought in American history, both within the colony of New York and elsewhere. As colonists began to think and write as Americans, placards and broadsides were their mouthpieces. Those opinions unquestionably had an impact in the future of American philosophy as they became the easiest and most cost-effective way to not only share opinions but

¹⁵ Parkinson, "Print, the Press," 1.

¹⁶ Engelman, "Cadwallader Colden," 568.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

developed into the preferred method to inform citizens of time-sensitive events that required anonymous reporting.

Anti-stamp act rhetoric was not the only use of these single page reports. As print became more acceptable and affordable, so did the diversity of opinions Americans wrote and distributed. Additionally, there were three dozen newspaper printers in the American mainland colonies at the start of the Revolution, each producing a four-page issue every week.¹⁹ These weekly papers, or one-sheet broadsides that appeared in American cities even more frequently, were the most important communication avenue to keep colonists informed of events occurring hundreds of miles away.²⁰

Placards and broadsides continued to grow in popularity for another reason; distribution methods did not require costly overhead and the evasion of stamp duties was much more simplistic. Newspapers reached a wide range of individuals but the distribution methods required for a successful title necessitated the confrontation of excise officials. Affordable print became increasingly popular as technology improved and while European governments taxed newspapers and other publications, America had remained relatively immune until the Stamp Act.²¹ In fact, according to Princeton University Professor Dr. Paul Starr, “the Stamp Act crisis during the Revolutionary era left behind a distinct bias against any special taxes on the press,” and future attempts to enforce a duty on printed material would prove unsuccessful.²²

The Sons of Liberty later used placards, newspapers and posted broadsides

¹⁹ Parkinson, “Print, the Press,” 1.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 125.

²² Ibid.

extensively to communicate their agenda and anti-British sentiment developed by their Committees of Correspondence. It was not unusual following a Sons of Liberty gathering to observe a meeting notice or proposed, referred, or passed resolutions in taverns, meeting places, or city centers throughout America.

The Stamp Act crisis was not the first-time Americans utilized placards or broadsides, but it is important to point out their use during this time. During the mid-1760's, Americans had observed the importance of distributing a rapid and easy method to communicate. These placards and broadsides provided a network of communications with one another through cities, colonies and occasionally, throughout the entirety of North America.²³ Due to the volatile and delicate nature of the thirteen American colonies and the British government, pamphlets, placards, and broadsides formed the connection required to frame a continental communication network.²⁴

Newspapers

Before 1765, newspapers were relatively unimportant as agencies for molding and reporting public opinion.²⁵ However, as the printing press became more accessible, so did the range of opinions it printed. The popularity of the newspaper continued to grow during the 1760's, through the 1770's, and by 1775, there were thirty-eight newspapers in the mainland colonies.²⁶ These new publications became crowded with columns of arguments and counter-arguments appearing as letters, official documents, extracts of

²³ Parkinson, "Print, the Press," 1.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Oats and Sadler, "Accounting for the Stamp Act Crisis," 127.

²⁶ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 1.

speeches, and sermons.²⁷

The writing style and content found in the colonial press was much different than what is published in modern newspapers. Due to the structure of the newspaper business in the 18th century, the material that appeared in each paper was “exchanged” from other papers in different cities, creating a uniform effect similar to a modern newswire.²⁸ The exchange system allowed the same story to appear across North America and provided the Revolutionaries with a method to shore up a fragile sense of unity. It is difficult to imagine American independence—as a popular idea, let alone an impact on policy decisions—without understanding the importance of print and its effect on colonial America in the mid-18th century.²⁹ The eighteenth-century newspaper effectively bridged gaps in geography, assisted in the spread of information, and contributed to an independence movement network.

In establishing American independence, the pen and press had merit equal to that of the sword.³⁰ In the 1760’s, print became a contested cause of imperial reform. Parliament focused its attention on the printed word as the center of the constitutional debate over the colonies’ place in the empire and their responsibility in sharing tax burdens.³¹ If Britain asserted its authority on American print, the Excise Service required a focus on New York City as publishing efforts continued to grow with the city’s industry and population.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Parkinson, “Print, the Press,” 1.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution, Vol. 2* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1789), 319.

³¹ Parkinson, “Print, the Press,” 2.

In an attempt to avoid the use of stamps, several newspapers suspended publication after the Nov 1st implementation of the Stamp Act, while most printers continued business as usual and ignored the requirement that news sheets be stamped.³² The Sons of Liberty also played an essential role in the printing of newspapers by threatening violence upon any editor that would stop printing or refused to publish their pieces. John Holt, printer of the *New York Gazette*, received a warning on October 31st stating, "should you at this critical time shut up the press, and basely desert us, depend upon it, your house, person and effects, will be in imminent danger. We shall, therefore, expect your paper on Thursday as usual..."³³ Newspapers throughout America continued to spout rhetoric focused on not only the Stamp Act but also stamp distributors and pro-British officials including Governor Bernard, Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson of Massachusetts, and even George Grenville.³⁴

The Stamp Act and colonial resistance politicized print and printers in new ways. For the remainder of the imperial crisis, print remained at the center of the colonial resistance movement, connecting disparate resistance groups to one another, and providing the most reliable communications network across the Atlantic world.³⁵ Newspapers, pamphlets, and broadsides were, indeed, the lifeblood of American resistance. Because of the unstable and fragile notions of unity among the thirteen mainland American colonies, print acted as a binding agent that mitigated the chances

³² Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 196.

³³ Isaac Leake, *Memoir of the Life and Times of General John Lamb* (Albany: J. Munsell, 1850), 13-14.

³⁴ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 197.

³⁵ Parkinson, "Print, the Press," 2.

that the colonies would not support one another when war with Britain broke out in 1775.³⁶

The response from newspapers to the Stamp Act varied as much as the opinions of those reading their publications. The *New York Gazette* temporarily suspended its periodicals after June 10th, 1765 and resumed regular production on November 25th, having published three unplanned issues during the period.³⁷ Publications in Albany, Hudson, Poughkeepsie, and Schenectady, NY were all slow to produce periodicals until after the American Revolutionary period.³⁸ The Niagara Frontier showed little progress in generating newspapers until the 19th century.

Imposing a tax on newspapers also had an anticipated effect on Americans to conduct business and obtain property. Eighteenth-century newspapers were a vehicle to reach the broadest audience possible. Colonists in both rural and urban areas relied heavily upon print to market goods and insurance and to announce auctions and foreclosures.³⁹ By statute, court-sponsored foreclosures of debtor's assets such as land and slaves were required to be advertised in newspapers.⁴⁰ Broadsides and posters found throughout eighteenth-century cities were a frequent sight, but the audience the newspaper attracted was difficult to surpass. The importance of the newspaper shared a direct impact on colonial markets due to the number of subscribers and the merchants and auction houses who utilized them for advertisement.⁴¹

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Library of Congress, "Eighteenth-Century American Newspapers in the Library of Congress, New York, New York" last modified July 19, 2010. <https://www.loc.gov/rr/news/18th/430.html>

³⁸ Library of Congress, "Eighteenth-Century American Newspapers in the Library of Congress, Albany New York" last modified July 19, 2010. <https://www.loc.gov/rr/news/18th/newyork.html#434>

³⁹ Claire Priest and Justin duRivage, "The Stamp Act and American Institutional and Economic History," *Yale Law School* (2014), 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 11-12.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Additionally, the levy would also challenge the ability to petition local, colonial, and parliamentary government officials, thus making written opposition less common. By slowing colonial appeals while simultaneously funding the British Army in North America the Stamp Act was designed to fund, it served as the vehicle for radical change and British imposition into colonial public opinion, business, and life.

Providence, Philadelphia, Charleston, Boston and New York City all joined the cause in various ways, either by becoming members of the Sons of Liberty, opening their print shops for political meetings, or publishing a wide array of stories, essays, and items that supported revolutionary thought.⁴² Anonymity was vital in authoring anti-British sentiment during the revolutionary era, and many writers assumed pseudonym to avoid being targeted by authorities. John Holt, one of New York's most prominent publishers was responsible for authoring, and printing, pro-revolutionary newspapers that found their way throughout New York.⁴³

New York was, however, home to many British loyalist and newspapers found a way to market to them as well. Hugh Gaine's *New York Gazette & Weekly Mercury* and James Rivington's *New York Gazette* were both known to be the leading Tory prints within the colonies. Like many eighteenth-century printers, their financial interests dominated whom they would market their writings to. Gaines, who had been printing a newspaper in New York since 1752, soiled his name with revolutionaries when he began to publish pro-British periodicals that found their way throughout North America during the Stamp Act crisis and well into the later part of the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ Newspapers

⁴² Parkinson, "Print, the Press," 5-6.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

and pamphlets had their most significant impact on American history during the years of 1765-1766, 1768-1769, and 1774-1776.⁴⁵ These years mark major events leading up to and including the American Revolution while written arguments and the actions of others influence both American and British citizens.

Historian Bernard Bailyn writes, "The opponents of the Revolution... were as convinced as were the leaders of the Revolutionary movement that they were themselves the victims of conspirational designs. Officials in the colonies and their superiors in England were persuaded as the crisis deepened that they were confronted by an active conspiracy of intriguing men whose professions masked their true intentions."⁴⁶ The Stamp Act had larger implications and motivations than merely raising revenue for Great Britain. By levying an additional tax on pamphlets, newspapers, legal documents, and even the advertisements that publishers profited from, the Stamp Act made it much more difficult for anti-government public opinion to reach a broad audience and curb dissent among colonial Americans.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Homer Calkin, "Pamphlets and Public Opinion During the American Revolution," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 64, No. 1, (Jan., 1940), 27.

⁴⁶ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 150-151.

⁴⁷ Priest and duRivage, "The Stamp Act," 23.

CHAPTER FOUR: NEW YORK'S IMPACT

“Planted by your care? No! Your oppression planted them in America... Nourished by your indulgence? They grew by your neglect of them... As soon as you began to care about them that care was exercised in sending person to rule over them... Men whose behavior on many occasions has caused the blood of those sons of liberty to recoil within them.”

-Colonel Isaac Barre, British Member of Parliament, February 6th, 1765

Sons of Liberty

During the early stages of the Stamp Act disturbances, ordinary people, chiefly mechanics and artisans from many different crafts, united together to call for the boycotting of British goods in several colonial ports in 1765 and formed a network of revolutionaries referred to as the Sons of Liberty.¹ The Sons of Liberty executed their resistance measures through a wide range of methods including written and verbal messages, organized gatherings, and even violent actions targeted toward British supporters and officials.

The Sons of Liberty maintained a presence from South Carolina to New Hampshire and derived their name from a well-publicized speech that American sympathizer, Colonel Isaac Barre presented to the British Parliament.² Barre, both British Army Officer and member of Parliament, felt the Stamp Act would have significant repercussions on the relationship between the American colonies and Great Britain. Many of the same arguments Barre made to Parliament were the same opinions the Sons of Liberty shared. In Barre's powerful speech to his fellow members, he points to

¹ Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 244.

² Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 91.

Parliament as negligent in the care of the colonies. An American battle anthem of sorts, his words point to the British as oppressive to Americans and that they had left Britain for good cause. The Stamp Act would only further divide the two and it would likely end in their separation.³

It was in New York City that these radicals involved in resistance claimed the name as their own while encouraging other like-minded groups throughout the colonies to utilize as well. Smaller factions throughout North America looked upon the Sons of Liberty in New York and Boston as a beacon of liberty and revolutionary example worthy of following.

Crowd action during the pre-revolutionary period varied in intensity. These gatherings were sometimes orchestrated and other times impromptu in response to actions taken by colonial governors or British troops. According to historian Edward Countryman, “Disguises, effigies, tarring and feathering, bonfires, even tearing down houses were all well understood in the eighteenth-century world, and colonials turned to them because they were familiar acts.”⁴ Britons and Americans viewed these actions in New York as intense, full of passion and rooted in the colonial argument against the Stamp Act during this period and through the revolution.

The rationale and justification of these actions by the Sons of Liberty were simple. They had discovered a method to prevent the collection of taxes through the intimidation of tax collectors while simultaneously utilizing violence as a political tool. Although from different backgrounds and tradecraft, artisans and intercontinental

³ John Reid, “In Our Contracted Sphere: The Constitutional Contract, The Stamp Act Crisis, and the Coming of the American Revolution,” *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 76, No. 1, (Jan., 1976), 31-32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

merchants in New York City had a great deal in common as they faced the imperial crisis.⁵ Their primary focus was to produce a robust American economy while simultaneously ensuring the British government would not compromise colonial rights and privileges.

Preparations for the reception of the stamps in New York led to Lt Governor Colden requesting General Thomas Gage garrison additional troops at Fort George, in Manhattan, to protect British interests and serve as a repository for the inbound stamps.⁶ There was no armed resistance by the Sons of Liberty until October 23rd, 1765, just weeks prior to Britain's implementation, when a ship carrying the stamped papers arrived in the New York harbor. New York, one of America's busiest ports, typically had idle, patriotic, often drunken, sailors present. Two thousand colonists, led by the Sons of Liberty, met the ship at the pier and although agitated and ready for confrontation, remained non-violent.

However, on October 31st, a large mob formed in the streets near Fort George breaking lamps and windows and threatening British supporters and politicians that they would "pull down their houses," if the Act were to be enforced.⁷ Ignoring the Sons' claims, Captain Archibald Kennedy of the *HMS Coventry* reported 2,000 angry colonists had assembled at Fort George and had hung the effigy of Lt Governor Colden.⁸ The crowd continued as they dragged the effigy throughout New York City firing pistols and making a loud disturbance throughout the streets.⁹ Returning to Fort George, the mob

⁵ Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 92.

⁶ Donna Spindel, *The Stamp Act Riots* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 1975) 119.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Stevens, "The Port of New York," 360.

banged at the gate and began to throw bricks and stones at the British regulars and fort.¹⁰

British historian Christopher Hibbert writes about the following day, “In New York on Nov 1st, 1765, when the Stamp Act was about to take effect and flags were flown at half-mast in mourning for the death of American liberty, a large crowd, [composed of Sons of Liberty members and supporters] gathered to watch the burning of an effigy of the Lieutenant Governor, Cadwallader Colden, as unpopular a figure as Thomas Hutchinson of Boston and burned an effigy with Colden’s carriages, which they had dragged out of his coach-house.”¹¹

Following the gathering at Colden’s home, the Sons of Liberty sponsored mob marched to the home of Major Thomas James, Commander of Fort George, and burned “all of his Household Furniture, Wearing Apparel of himself & family, Cellar, Library of three hundred choice Books, a great many of His Majesty’s Papers & Plans, besides all his Manuscripts & Curiosities of Antiquity.”¹² The mob did not stop with these attacks, continued throughout the night, and destroyed several other British supporters’ residences.¹³

The threats to set fire to Fort George were now a realistic possibility if the stamps and legal papers were not relocated elsewhere. Local officials ordered Captain Kennedy of the *Coventry* to remove the stamped paper and store them aboard his ship. Kennedy refused over concerns it may appear to the Sons he supported the Stamp Act and the several properties that he owned in the vicinity would likely fall victim to the mob.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels*, 9.

¹² James to Colden, November 6th, 1765. *Letters and Papers of Colden*, 89-90.

¹³ Spindel, *Stamp Act Riots*, 122.

Kennedy's refusal to accept the Stamps served as the last objection to Colden and forced the Lt Governor to surrender to the will of the people.¹⁴ The Sons of Liberty became empowered as they witnessed the effect their actions had and the utilization of violence as a political tool.

These events in New York City on the eve of the Stamp Act's implementation proved extremely important for the morale of the colonist and its effect on the British government for a number of reasons. Once the British government learned of these and similar riots in the other American towns by the Sons of Liberty, the British were obliged to conclude that, while it was simple enough to pass a Stamp Act through the House of Commons, it was impossible to enforce in America so long as officials were prevented from collecting the dues."¹⁵ Additionally, New York City served as the headquarters of the British Army in North America and the inability to maintain a capable military presence was a major victory for Americans.¹⁶

The Fort George instance could have also marked the beginning of the American Revolution had Colden not shown the restraint he did. Understanding the ramifications, Colden later wrote had British regulars fired upon the mob, it would have likely produced much more than bloodshed.¹⁷ He felt many innocent colonists may have been killed or would have retreated only to return with arms and storm the fort. Several decisions, both British and American, nearly marked November 1st, 1766 as the beginning of the American Revolution at Fort George, New York City. The Sons of Liberty in New York

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels*, 9-10.

¹⁶ Spindel, *Stamp Act Riots*, 123.

¹⁷ O'Callaghan, Colden to Conway, Feb 21st, 1766, *Documents Relative to Colonial History of the State of NY*, 812.

City exposed one of the most substantial flaws in Britain's Stamp Act; if there was no British will or way to support the Act, its implementation and ability to collect revenue upon the colonists was impossible.

Stamp Act Congress

The Virginia House of Burgesses prepared the first formal American protest against the Stamp Act in May of 1765.¹⁸ Patrick Henry, a newly elected Virginian, urged the members of the House to establish sanctioned opposition against the stamp law.¹⁹ The Burgesses contended that the government of Virginia possessed the sole authority to tax Virginians for revenue, and their resolutions denouncing the Stamp Act circulated through the colonies.²⁰

Newspapers throughout the colonies reported on the event, exaggerating them to some degree, and word spread rallying Americans behind the opposition. This formal resistance from a colonial body laid the groundwork for others to follow suit. On June 8th, 1765, the General Court of Massachusetts went one step further by proposing an inter-colonial meeting on the Stamp Act in New York City.²¹ Of the thirteen colonies, twenty-three delegates from nine colonies attended the Stamp Act Congress between October 7th and 24th, 1765.²² New Hampshire declined but later approved the proceedings while Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia's assemblies would not convene to elect

¹⁸ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 82-83.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁰ Spindel, *Stamp Act Riots*, 12.

²¹ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 108.

²² Spindel, *Stamp Act Riots*, 12.

delegates to be sent.²³ By the end of 1765, eight other colonies had voted and approved resolutions denouncing the Stamp Act and rejecting Great Britain's right to tax the American colonies for revenue.²⁴

The British Stamp Act elicited yet another unintended consequence. It brought official colonial bodies together to achieve their common goal; promotion of colonial self-interest as a principal priority. None of those eight legislatures had passed resolutions before the fall of 1765 and Virginia's example undoubtedly assisted them in the production of declarations against the Act. By the beginning of 1766, politics in most of the colonies had assumed a shape somewhat different from that of March 1765 when the Stamp Act was passed.²⁵

Members of the Congress came together for twelve days, excluding Sunday, to argue the "rights and privileges of the British American Colonists."²⁶ But why did it take twelve days to draft a slightly shorter document arguing Britain's right to tax them? All members of the Congress accepted the authority of Parliament to regulate trade throughout the empire they had created but felt it imprudent to acknowledge such authority in its official statement.²⁷ The ability to wordsmith a declaration that recognized British authority to regulate trade but rejected its right to tax them internally for purposes of revenue proved extremely difficult.

Constitutional rights as Englishman was also a topic of discussion at the New York sponsored Stamp Act Congress. The distinction between legislation and taxation

²³ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 108.

²⁴ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 83.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 110.

²⁷ Ibid., 113.

was presented: Parliament had the authority to levy taxes as well as make laws in Great Britain, but for the colonies, it could only make laws. Additionally, the British constitution guaranteed the right to be taxed only by consent, which, the American colonists did not provide.²⁸

Following the colonial resolutions, the well respect Benjamin Franklin visited the British House of Commons to discuss the colonial argument. Franklin also echoed colonial denial that Parliament had the right to levy duties for revenue on colonial imports and exports.²⁹ However, he further explained the differences, and that “an internal tax [such as a stamp tax or a tax on property] is forced from the people without their consent, if not laid by their own representatives,” whereas a duty on exports “is added to the first cost and other charges on the commodity, and when it is offered to sale, makes a part of the price. If the people do not like it at that price, they... are not obliged to pay it.”³⁰ Franklin’s testimony did receive some colonial criticism as it confirmed what the Stamp Act Congress’s resolutions did not: Britain’s authority over the American colonial population and the relationship it had with the empire.

The British Parliament simply did not want to understand or embrace the colonial opinion that it was not to tax Americans for revenue purposes. Parliament’s opinion was that if an act were passed within its chambers, it would be obeyed by the subjects of Great Britain, and the right of Parliament to make laws for the American colonies was indisputable.³¹ Negotiations over its right to rule would simply not be entertained, at this point, by the British government. The relationship between mother and child continued

²⁸ Ibid., 117-118.

²⁹ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 3.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 106.

to become strained and steps were being taken, on both sides of the Atlantic, to enforce or reject laws, by power if required, while written diplomacy was on the verge of no longer remaining an option.

CHAPTER FIVE: REPEAL AND CONSEQUENCES

“This [trade revenue] is the price that America pays you for her protection... It is, that the Stamp Act be repealed absolutely; totally and immediately.”

-William Pitt, Address to House of Commons, January 14th, 1766

Repeal

On the eve of the repeal of the Stamp Act, the discussion of internal versus external taxation was prevalent in both America and England. Colonists maintained their opinion that British Parliament could not tax Americans “for the single purpose of revenue” based upon English constitutional law and their inherent God-given rights.¹ As tensions continued to rise in America over the issue, the House of Commons began to entertain other methods to tax British citizens in colonial America.

Following the intercolonial Stamp Act Congress at New York, William Pitt, member of Parliament and colonial sympathizer, begged the English Ministry to accept America’s petition and repeal the Stamp Act. The Ministry and House of Commons offered no opportunity for the Stamp Act Congress to be heard, and the American petition was not reviewed or received.² October 1765 through February 1766, the position of British taxation and its place in colonial interest continued to be discussed in Parliament.³ British merchants involved in international trade also appealed to Parliament through a petition in December 1765, concerned by the fear of a loss of trade, if a colonial boycott were to take place.⁴ English merchants felt an embargo possible due to the increase in restrictions on intercolonial commerce and the illegal opportunity for

¹ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 212. (Derived from Dulany’s *Pamphlets*)

² Knollenberg, *Growth of the American Revolution*, 21.

³ *Ibid*, 22.

⁴ *Ibid*.

colonial businesses to source non-British products. Additionally, the fear that Americans might default on their credit owed to British merchants while selling American produced raw materials to competitors was a primary concern.⁵ The ingenuity and resourcefulness of Americans threatened the entire British Empire as they became more creative in the products they purchased and their utilization. Petitions from British merchants flooded the House of Commons and the Stamp Act was no longer merely an American issue but threatened the livelihood of British merchants and the English economy.

Benjamin Franklin was afforded the opportunity to speak to Parliament regarding the issue in February 1766. In a three-hour testimony, Franklin dissected Parliament's "unconstitutional and unjust" distinction between their right to levy internal and external taxes on Americans while they had no representation in Great Britain's official body.⁶ He could not deny Parliament's right to tax America entirely but was very explicit in the division between internal and external taxation and colonial opinion on the matter.

The relationship between King George III and George Grenville had become strained over legislation that would not afford the King's mother authority in the event of the incapacitation of the King.⁷ King George removed Grenville from his post as Prime Minister and replaced him with Charles Watson-Wentworth, Second Marquis of Rockingham.⁸ The new Rockingham Ministry's agenda, commissioned by King George, was to assert the British government's place in colonial America in the wake of Stamp Act riots and tame the general unrest over the legislation. During the early months of 1766 and prior to the repeal of the Stamp Act on March 18th, 1766, Parliament introduced

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 214.

⁷ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 271-272.

⁸ Knollenberg, *Growth of the American Revolution*, 21-22.

three pieces of legislation that made the British repeal of the Stamp Act possible.

The first of three pieces of legislation presented to Parliament were components of the Declaratory Act, approved the same day the Stamp Act's repeal was to be enacted. This act asserted the complete and absolute power over the colonies and reinforced Parliament's control and authority to establish laws without limit.⁹ Because the discussion of taxes, both internal and external had remained such a focus, Rockingham refrained from any mention in this declaration. Rather, the declaration was merely focused on laws, statues, and the relationship between the Crown and those who fell subordinate to it.¹⁰ By omitting taxes, it also removed any possibility of conversation on the Act shifting its focus on taxes and offered a clear distinction of British authority through legislation.

The second approved legislation was economic in nature. It branded the Stamp Act economically unfavorable to British interests.¹¹ This declaration showed favor with British merchants while indicating support from the government as the American colonies had begun to resort to smuggling from the French and Spanish. Industries across the British economy, including the West Indies trade of natural resources, had continued to decline as American colonists were forced to become more creative in sourcing the products and commodities they required. The act, designed to generate revenue and protect English interests, actually presented negative effects to those it was

⁹ Roy Allen Billington, *The Reinterpretation of Early American History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1968), 107.

¹⁰ Knollenberg, *Growth of the American Revolution*, 21-22.

¹¹ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 287-288.

designed to protect while Americans witnessed contrary results from its intended purpose.¹²

The third burden the British bestowed upon the colonies was the Townshend Revenue Act. The act targeted molasses, glass, lead, paint, tea, and paper- imports from both foreign and British territories and was, in a sense, the reissue of the Sugar Act.¹³

The American argument that they were willing to accept external taxes from government was the focus of this act in 1767. By increasing the cost of molasses from three pence to one penny per gallon, the Revenue Act was able to generate more revenue than any previously imposed duty.¹⁴ Reception was varied from the colonies over this external tax and British merchants were poised to regain their place in the American economy once again. The Revenue Act is significant as it set a precedent for the years leading up to the American Revolution and the method by which Parliament might approach the taxation issue in Colonial America.

The British appeared to have progressed past the Stamp Act with the termination of all penalties incurred from violations of the act while simultaneously validating any document that had required a stamp.¹⁵ Although repeal of the Stamp Act restored order in the colonies, adoption of the Declaratory Act paved the way for a future stamp tax or additional taxes Parliament may see fit to impose. Parliament had attempted to stretch its authority over colonial affairs and the Stamp Act crisis laid out the distinction between internal and external taxes for both parties.¹⁶ Englishmen and Americans had avoided

¹² Ibid., 273-274.

¹³ Ray Raphael, *A People's History of the American Revolution* (New York: The New Press, 2001), 39.

¹⁴ Knollenberg, *Growth of the American Revolution*, 25.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 292.

large-scale armed conflict and civil war up until 1766. However, the Stamp Act repeal did not restore the relationship America and Great Britain had maintained and their connection was severely strained. In the years to come, the the United Kingdom would take desperate actions to retain its authority over Colonial America. Their relationship would become increasingly strained and eventually Americans would have little choice but to meet with armed resistance projecting British America into the inevitable revolution.

The Impending Revolution

Following the repeal of the Stamp Act, Great Britain focused its attention on asserting its authority in the Americas with a number of legislative acts. While the immediate threat of rebellion and civil war had been avoided between the two, Parliament insisted upon reinforcing its authority at the expense of the rights of Englishman in America. Americans continued to feel as if their rights and position in the British Empire were less significant than those of their counterparts in England in the years to follow the Stamp Act repeal.

When British Parliament began to discuss repeal of the Stamp Act, it showed concerns that it may empower the American position and energize any separatist movement.¹⁷ Merchant correspondents and committees in England communicated to the colonial counterparts that violence against English officials only prolonged and nearly prevented repeal completely.¹⁸ However, Americans were now inspired and more sympathetic to the revolutionary cause than ever before. Merely asserting British power to "make laws and statutes... to bind the colonies and power of America... in all cases

¹⁷ Ibid., 293.

¹⁸ Ibid.

whatsoever" with the Declaratory Act challenged the very ideas governing American objection to the Stamp Act.¹⁹

At the same time when Parliament had passed the Stamp Act, the Mutiny Act was ratified, which required Americans to provide care and quarters for British troops stationed in North America.²⁰ The colonial assembly of New York had refused to approve the Act until Parliament forbade the assembly to act in any official capacity, forcing compliance. This further strained American-British relations as citizens all over America witnessed British reign over the New York Restraining Act.²¹ In 1767, colonials continued to share major objections to the Quartering Act as New York City received an influx of British troops that were afforded accommodations at the expense of Americans.

One of the significant colonial objections to the Stamp Act had been Britain's right to impose an internal tax. With the repeal of the Stamp Act and the need to continue a steady flow of imperial revenue, Charles Townshend, now the Chancellor of the Exchequer (the position the architect of the Stamp Act, George Grenville had once held) proposed a new solution. In 1767, Parliament received and approved an act taxing the importation of glass, lead, painters' colors, and tea.²² Once again, Parliament's attempts to shift focus from internal to external taxation of the American colonies failed.²³ The colonial opposition took the form of nonimportation against the taxed articles and between 1767-1770 the importation of glass and painters' colors was reduced by half,

¹⁹ Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 44.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 45.

²² Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts*, 198.

²³ Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 46.

each year.²⁴ The concentration of imports in America were primarily between Boston and New York City (55.7%), and the continual threat of mob action against customs officials proved just as successful now as it did during the Stamp Act crisis.²⁵

Parliament had little choice but to repeal the failed Townshend Act and in another attempt to maintain the image of authority, maintained the tea provision.²⁶ Meanwhile, the British based East India Company continued to market its tea to the international market but had begun to struggle and called upon the English government for assistance.²⁷ Tea was a staple in the 18th century and not delegated to a small percentage of the population or a social class. It was abundant in the far east and extremely important to the British economy and the future of the Empire in India. As the East India Company struggled to return investment to shareholders, Parliament came to its rescue at the expense of colonial Americans, resulting in the 1773 passage of the Tea Act.²⁸

The Tea Act is significant for a number of reasons, not only because it displayed Britain's favoritism of a homegrown corporation over colonial opinions as a whole, but it represented an outright assault on American industry. The act afforded the East India Company two substantial benefits. First, it allowed tea to be marketed directly to colonials using its internal agents in America.²⁹ The markets and colonial wholesalers previously involved in the sale of tea were removed from the transaction and it was sold directly to the consumer.³⁰ Second, the company was exempt from the duty on tea that it

²⁴ Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts*, 198.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels*, 18.

²⁷ Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 46.

²⁸ Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 89.

²⁹ Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 47.

³⁰ Morgan, *Birth of the Republic*, 59.

imported to Britain and then reshipped to America.³¹ This would undercut the tea that had been traded legitimately or smuggled in by American merchants (often the same merchant).³² Colonial vendors that dealt in the most sought after commodity of the 18th century had no chance of survival when competing with the British government backed East India Company. The colonies banded together and refused to accept many of the shipments. Under the mask of night on December 16th, 1773 in the Boston, colonials went as far as to board an East India Company vessel and unload its contents, primarily tea, into the harbor.³³

The legislative acts imposed by the British in the colonies are what banded Americans together in opposition under the veil of print, riots, non-importation, and eventual armed resistance. British agents urged their American counterparts to refrain from inciting violence against stamp agents or officials as it would only strengthen Parliament's resolve and enforcement practices.³⁴ As early as 1773, newspapers began to carry articles openly speculating on the timing of an American declaration of independence.³⁵ The Sugar Act, Stamp Act, Townshend taxes, and Tea Act represented the major mileposts along the road to imperial crisis.³⁶ As each act failed and was repealed, a common British theme and principal argument existed; the colonies would interpret it as a sign of weakness.³⁷

By September 1774, the first Continental Congress had met in Philadelphia and

³¹ Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 47.

³² Ibid.

³³ Morgan, *Birth of the Republic*, 60.

³⁴ Morgan, *The Stamp Act*, 293.

³⁵ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 214.

³⁶ Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 47.

³⁷ Morgan, *The Stamp Act*, 293.

began working in a more official capacity than a committee of correspondence.³⁸ One year later and for over a decade, the largest and most powerful military and naval power would wage war against the Continental Army while colonial merchants, lawyers, and smugglers would be placed into positions which required them to become architects of a new nation. The British government had acquired a tremendous amount of debt defending both the Empire and its colonies in North America and was confronted with difficult decisions. The decision to tax British America through legislation such as the Stamp Act was simple; Great Britain had just defended its citizens from French advancement and required means to generate revenue for their defense.

³⁸ Morgan, *Birth of the Republic*, 61.

CONCLUSION

“The distinction between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I am Not A Virginian But An American!”

-Patrick Henry, Address to First Continental Congress, October 14th, 1774

The 1760's proved to be a pivotal time in American history. The intellectual growth colonial Americans underwent was truly amazing and the American experiment was unlike any other. Eighteenth-century social lines were well established, even in America, but colonial desire to be independent was contagious. Scholarship is divided on the issue as to where overall support lay throughout British America, but the American army always relied on popular support.¹ The revolution was a people's war, and the British government was faced with much more than a war on the battlefield. The colony of New York, particularly in New York City, maintained a loyalist presence through much of the early years of the American war for independence. However, had the British defeated the American Army, maintaining the overall support of the colony would have proven difficult.

America, even before its independence, had become a different entity than England. North America had become a melting pot of cultural diversity as Europeans viewed it as a land of opportunity well before such a phrase was coined “American.” Its proximity to the Caribbean and other major trade routes offered a strategic and economic advantage and its unmolested land flourished with natural resources. It should be no surprise the importance colonial America occupied within the British Empire.

¹ Morgan, *Birth of the Republic*, 79.

The American Stamp Act served as one of several Acts during the imperial crisis that defined the relationship between Great Britain and its North American colonies. King George III and England demonstrated power and authority over their subordinates while Americans contemplated British cause, reasoning, and motivations in their methods of affection. The idea of relieving British burdens by taxing colonies had often been suggested but prior to the 1760's, viewed as an unwise gesture.² However, the combination of events would set America on a trajectory to self-governance and independence.

Some Americans buried themselves in intellectual and scholarly thought on how they may shape their new nation while others strived to nurture their seasonal harvests. Their connections may have been loose but America's failing relationship with Great Britain fostered the progress of intercolonial relationships. Every medium of written expression was utilized to educate and inform their fellow citizens.³ Newspapers were filled with arguments and counterarguments, letters, speeches, sermons, broadsides, placards, booklets, and pamphlets, and all carried equal importance in opposition to the Stamp Act and others. Conventional and unconventional American thought share their roots during this crucial stage in history.

It may have been Britain's endeavors that overextended its reach in America in an attempt to enforce its authority, protect its interests, and finance troops garrisoned in the thirteen colonies which ultimately laid the groundwork for American independence. Had its actions been anticipated, Great Britain would have likely taken a different approach to imperial administrative policies in North America. To focus on just the American

² Ibid., 14.

³ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 1.

patriotic movement frankly glosses over the complexity of the relationship between Britain and the colonies. France and Great Britain continued to protect their interests from one another while competing as the dominant powers at sea, and in other areas.

As a colony and eventual state, New York represented an accurate portrayal of the greater population within North America. It offered tremendous social, political, and economic diversity spanning from New York City to the Niagara Frontier.

Revolutionaries who found themselves within the ranks of the Sons of Liberty, publishing newspapers, pamphlets, and placards leading up to and surrounding themselves in the Stamp Act had a major impact on the direction America found itself during 1765 and years to come. Producing leaders from unlikely places and professions was simply what New York became great at. Ultimately, the Stamp Act had a very profound effect on the American experiment: it hurled the American colonies into a whirlwind of social, political, and economic changes and self-discovery that would be explored for years to come. This piece of legislation can be credited for causing enough discontent within British America that eventually led to the American patriot movement, the war for independence, and an example of revolutionary thought and demonstration to others in the coming years.

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