Colonial Reaction To The Stamp Act

Directions: Read page below and answer the following questions.

A Summary of the 1765 Stamp Act (Questions 1-5)

Eleven years before the Declaration of Independence, a crisis took place that defined the issue that would help provoke the American Revolution: taxation without representation. The Seven Years War (French and Indian War) ended in 1763, with the French defeated. Now the English could turn their attention to tightening control over the American colonies. Money was needed to pay for the huge debt of the war, and the defense and protection of the American frontier near the Appalachian Mountains (10,000 British troops were to be stationed on the American frontier for this purpose). With the French out of the way, the colonial leadership was less in need of English protection. At the same time, the English were now more in need of the colonies’ wealth. So the elements were there for conflict.

The Stamp Act was passed by the British Parliament on March 22, 1765, one year after the Sugar Act of 1764. The new tax was imposed because the Sugar Act did not generate enough tax money to cover the cost of defending the colonies. It required them to pay a tax on every piece of printed paper they used. Ship's papers, legal documents, licenses, newspapers, stamps, diplomas, other publications, and even playing cards were taxed. Upon payment of the tax, the item would be stamped—hence the name of the tax. The actual cost of the Stamp Act was relatively small. What made the law so offensive to some colonists was not its immediate cost. In the past, taxes and duties on colonial trade had always been viewed as measures to regulate commerce/business, not to raise money. The Stamp Act, however, was viewed as a direct attempt by England to raise money in the colonies without the approval of the colonial legislatures. If this new tax were allowed to pass without resistance, the colonists reasoned, the door would be open for far more troublesome taxation in the future (slippery slope). Violations of the Stamp Act would be tried in special courts without a jury. Thus the Stamp Act also appeared to threaten the right to trial by jury. The Colonists reacted immediately, asserting that the Stamp Act was an attempt to raise money in the colonies without the approval of colonial legislatures. Resistance to the act was demonstrated through debates in the colonial legislatures, written documents (including legislative resolves, art), mob/crowd actions such as tarring and feathering tax collectors, and boycotts of British goods.

Time Line 1765

- Parliament imposes the Stamp Act for taxing the American colonies.
- Patrick Henry introduces the Stamp Act Resolves in the Virginia House of Burgesses. These resolves challenge Great Britain's right to impose the tax. Governor Fauquier dissolves the General Assembly.
- At the Stamp Act Congress in New York, delegates draw up a Declaration of Rights and Grievances.
- On the day before the stamp tax was to go into effect, George Mercer, the collector, arrives in Williamsburg, Virginia, with the stamps. Governor Fauquier has to intervene to protect Mercer from a mob of angry people.
- Virginians intimidate stamp distributor George Mercer into resigning his position.

1. After the French and Indian War why was conflict between the colonial delegates and the King of England and Parliament not surprising?

2. For what 2 costs did England impose the Stamp tax on the 13 colonies?

3. On what types of items were colonists required to pay taxes? Why was it called the “Stamp Tax?”

4. England had imposed taxes on trade in the colonies before this Stamp Act. Why were they not controversial and why was this tax a concern for some colonists? (2 reasons)

5. Why did Governor Fauquier (the Royal Governor of Virginia) dissolve the General Assembly of Virginia?

6. What document did the Stamp Act in Congress publish in protest of the Stamp Act?

7. Why did George Mercer resign his position?
Activity 1: Read the following resolutions. After each resolution, you will briefly answer the following questions.

Virginia Stamp Act Resolutions (1765): Patrick Henry, at a meeting of the Virginia House of Burgesses, proposed seven resolutions against the Stamp Act. The first four resolutions were adopted and passed by the House of Burgesses.

The following were the 1st three resolves, in abridged form, as adopted by the House of Burgesses on May 30, 1765:

Resolved, that the first … settlers of His Majesty's colony and … Virginia brought with them … all the liberties, privileges, franchises, and immunities that have at any time been held, enjoyed, and possessed by the people of Great Britain.

1. What does this resolution mean?
2. Would Parliament (England) agree with what the resolutions propose? Why or why not?

Resolved, that by two royal charters, granted by King James I, the colonists … are declared entitled to all liberties, privileges, and immunities of … natural subjects to all intents and purposes as if they had been abiding and born within the Realm of England.

1. What does this resolution mean?
2. Would Parliament (England) agree with what the resolutions propose? Why or why not?

Resolved, that the taxation of the people by themselves, or by persons chosen by themselves to represent them, who can only know what taxes the people are able to bear (afford), or the easiest method of raising them, and must themselves be affected by every tax laid on the people, is the only security against a burdensome taxation, and the distinguishing characteristic of British freedom, without which the ancient constitution cannot exist.

1. What does this resolution mean?
2. Would Parliament (England) agree with what the resolutions propose? Why or why not?

The following version of the much-debated fifth resolution (which was not adopted) was found with Patrick Henry's will:

Resolved, therefore that the General Assembly of this Colony have the only and exclusive Right and Power to lay Taxes … upon the inhabitants of this Colony and that every Attempt … [by] any person or persons whatsoever other than the General Assembly … has a … Tendency to destroy British as well as American Freedom.

1. What does this resolution mean?
2. Why do you think it was not passed by the Virginia House of Burgesses?
Activity 2: Read the following resolutions. After each resolution, you will briefly answer the following questions.

In October 1765, delegates from nine (of the 13) colonies met in New York City and prepared a statement protesting the Stamp Act. The Stamp Act Congress, which was the first united action by the colonies against a British policy, argued that while Britain had the right to legislate certain colonial activities, it did not have the authority to levy taxes on the colonists. They published 13 resolutions; we will analyze 6 of them. The resolutions were largely written by John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, who argued very strongly for the colonial cause, but as a Quaker [i.e. pacifist], also argued against war as a delegate in the Continental Congress.

Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress: Declarations of Rights and Grievances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution #</th>
<th>Text of Resolution</th>
<th>Analysis Question</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>That His Majesty's subjects in these colonies owe the same allegiance to the Crown of Great-Britain, that is ... from his subjects born within ... Great Britain.</td>
<td>What does the wording of this resolution and its overall tone say about the delegates' attitude towards revolution at this time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>That it is ... essential to the freedom of a people, and the undoubted right of Englishmen, that no taxes be imposed on them, but with their own consent, given personally, or by their representatives.</td>
<td>What is this resolution claiming?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>That the people of these colonies are not ... represented in the House of Commons (Parliament) in Great-Britain.</td>
<td>What is this resolution claiming? Why would the colonists include this in their list of rights?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>That the only representatives of the people of these colonies, are persons chosen ... by themselves ...</td>
<td>In other words, who cannot be representatives of the colonists (with regard to taxation)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>That trial by jury is the inherent and invaluable right of every British subject in these colonies.</td>
<td>What is this resolution claiming?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>That the restrictions imposed by ... [the Stamp Act], on the trade of these colonies, will render them unable to purchase the manufactures of Great-Britain.</td>
<td>According to this resolution, how does this tax hurt British trade?</td>
</tr>
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Under pressure from London merchants, whose wallets were shrinking because of a colonial merchant boycott of British goods, Parliament abolished the Stamp Act in 1766. But on the same day passed the Declaratory Act, which stated that the King and Parliament had full legislative authority over the colonies in all matters.
The Repeal, Or The Funeral Of Miss Ame-Stamp

Maker: Benjamin Wilson

Date: March 18, 1766

One of the most famous and popular of the political satires commenting on the Stamp Act, this print actually celebrates the end of the tax. An instant success, the print became one of the most copied satirical prints of the period.

The print depicts a funeral procession composed of supporters of the act carrying a small coffin containing the remains of the bill toward an open vault. The vault has been prepared for the burial of all unjust acts that would alienate Englishmen (i.e. the colonists).

By setting the action on a dock, Wilson is able to show the large unshipped cargoes destined for America that accumulated during the period when the act was in force. Ships labeled "Conway," "Rockingham," and "Grafton" that represent the English Parliamentary leaders responsible for the repeal of the bill now stand ready to carry the goods to America. Stamps just returned from America are also stacked on the wharf.