

1765—The Stamp Act

The reorganization of the British Empire begun in 1763 called for raising additional money in the American colonies. The Stamp Act was designed to raise an additional £60,000.

... Be it enacted . . . , that from and after [November 1, 1765] there shall be raised, levied, collected, and paid unto his Majesty, his heirs, and successors, throughout the colonies and plantations in America which now are, or hereafter may be, under the dominion of his Majesty, his heirs and successors,

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

For every advertisement to be contained in any gazette, newspaper, or other paper, or any pamphlet . . . , a duty of two shillings.

And be it further enacted . . . That no matter or thing whatsoever, by this act charged with the payment of a duty, shall be pleaded or given in evidence, or admitted in any court within the said colonies and plantations, to be good, useful, or available in law or equity, unless the same shall be marked or stamped, in pursuance of this act, with the respective duty hereby charged thereon, or with an higher duty. . . . [The Stamp Act, March 22, 1765]

—Questions—

1. Based on the excerpt quoted here, what do you think was the general purpose of the Stamp Act?
2. The Stamp Act wasn't the first Act of Parliament that the colonists found oppressive. The Molasses Act of Parliament placed high duties on sugar and molasses imported from the non-British West Indies. The Woolens Act of 1699 forbade the shipment of woolen goods, even to neighboring colonies. The Hat Act of 1732 prohibited the sale of hats and felts outside of the colony in which they were made. The colonists resented these restrictions. Why do you think the British might have imposed them?
3. Although the earlier acts were resented, they did not arouse such an active response as the Stamp Act. Why did the Stamp Act cause such discord?
4. Section LVII of the Stamp Act specified that offenses against any acts relating to trade could be prosecuted in the admiralty courts. These courts were presided over by a single judge, and did not require a jury. Why do you think this clause might have been resented by the Americans?
5. If you had been alive in 1765, would you have opposed the Stamp Act? If so, how would you have expressed your opposition?

GLOSSARY **demurrer**—legal statement
dominion—domain, territory
gazette—newspaper
levy—impose, collect
parchment—writing material made of skin
plantation—colony, settlement

pleading—legal statement
pursuance—carrying out, putting into effect
rejoinder—legal statement; answer
replication—legal statement; reply
thereon—on it
vellum—writing material made of skin

