

CHAPTER 4

Primary Source Reading

THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION

The Colonists React to the Stamp Act



In December 1765, John Adams recorded his thoughts about the events of the tumultuous year just past. Writing in his journal, he called the year 1765 "the most remarkable year of my life" as he watched the colonists rise up against the Stamp Act.

As you read, think about:

1. How did the Stamp Act affect the colonists' spirit?
2. What effect did the Stamp Act have on colonial business?

★★★

... The year 1765 has been the most remarkable year of my life. That enormous engine, fabricated [made] by the British Parliament for battering down the rights and liberties of America, I mean the Stamp Act, has raised and spread throughout the entire continent a spirit that will be recorded to our honor with all future generations. In every colony, from Georgia to New Hampshire... the stamp distributors and inspectors have been compelled [forced] by the unconquerable rage of the people to [leave] their offices... So universal has been the resentment of the people that every man who has dared to speak in favor of the stamps or to soften the hatred in which they are held, however great his abilities and virtues... has been seen to sink into universal contempt and ignominy [disgrace].

Innumerable have been the monuments of wit, humor, sense, learning, spirit, patriotism, and heroism erected in the several colonies and provinces in the course of this year. Our presses have groaned, our

pulpits have thundered, our legislatures have resolved, [and] our towns have voted. The crown officers have everywhere trembled, and all their little tools and their creatures [have] been afraid to speak and ashamed to be seen.

The spirit, however, has not yet been sufficient to banish from persons in authority that timidity which they have shown from the beginning. The... courts have not yet dared to [declare] the Stamp Act void or to proceed with business as usual... The stamps are in the castle [fort]. The governor has no authority to distribute or even to unpack the bales, [since] the act has never been [officially announced or read publicly]... Yet... the custom house is shut, the courts of justice are shut, and business seems at a halt. Yesterday and the day before, the two last days of services for the January term, only one man asked me for a writ, and he was soon [convinced] to waive [give up] his request. I have not drawn a writ since 1st November.

Source: *The Works of John Adams, Vol. I. Edited by Charles Francis Adams. Boston, 1851.*

Analyzing the Reading

1. As a result of the protests, what happened to stamp distributors and other supporters of the Stamp Act?

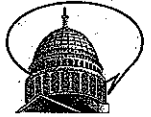
2. How does Adams characterize the officers of the British Crown as cowards?

★★★ CRITICAL THINKING ★★★

3. Analyzing Information How does Adams feel about those who protested against the Stamp Act?

ACTIVITY 6

Interpreting Political Cartoons



Two British Views of the Stamp Act

Colonial opposition to the Stamp Act and other strict British laws stirred mixed feelings among the British. Most British leaders believed that the laws were necessary to protect Britain and that Britain must react with force to any attempt to defy the laws. However, many people in Britain were troubled by the laws. They agreed with the complaint that the colonists were entitled to have a say in laws that taxed them. British critics feared that the dispute would end with the colonists leaving the British Empire.

On this page are two British cartoons representing opposite sides of the issue. Study the two cartoons, then answer the questions that follow.



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of W. L. Hildburg, 1923



Courtesy of John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

Analyzing the Cartoons

1. What law do both cartoons deal with? How does each cartoon tell you this?

2. Which cartoon is against the Stamp Act and which is for it? How can you tell?

3. How does each cartoonist use facial expressions to make his point?

*** CRITICAL THINKING ***

4. **Analyzing Information** Cartoons often use symbols to make their points. For example, a dove is a symbol of peace. To best understand the cartoon, you must know what its symbols mean. Several symbols are used in each of these cartoons. In the chart below, list each symbol and tell what it stands for.

Top Cartoon	
Symbol	What It Stands For

Bottom Cartoon	
Symbol	What It Stands For