

The Virginia Resolves

By 1765, American colonists had been mostly independent of direct British power for almost 150 years. They elected their own legislatures, passed their own local laws, and paid taxes for their own governments and militias. They were taxed by the British only indirectly. For instance, shippers and merchants paid taxes on imported goods.

Then, suddenly, the British decided to exert more direct control--and extract more money--and the colonies turned against their distant rulers.

Boston, August 14, 1765. The city erupted into protests when Great Britain attempted to tax the colonies without their consent.

THEY WANT TO PUT STAMPS ON EVERYTHING WE BUY! AND TAX THE STAMPS!

DOWN WITH THE STAMP TAX!

DEATH TO TAX COLLECTORS!

A.D. THE STAMP MAN

Expenses from the nine-year French and Indian War had left Britain with enormous bills, and 8,000 British soldiers had been left in North America to defend the frontier. They would have to be paid somehow.

AMERICANS SHOULD PAY FOR THEIR OWN DEFENSE!

Prime Minister George Grenville proposed a solution.

I AGREE, YOUR MAJESTY. I PROPOSE A STAMP TAX ON ALL COLONIAL DOCUMENTS.

DEBT

Grenville's stamp tax would apply to items used by merchants, lawyers, farmers, and sailors--ultimately, by every man and woman in the colonies.



House of Burgesses, Virginia, May 29, 1765. It took six weeks, by ship, for the news of the stamp tax to arrive. Then the colonies reacted. The young firebrand Patrick Henry was one of the first to protest the act.

Patrick Henry

SILENCE!
SIT DOWN,
SIR!

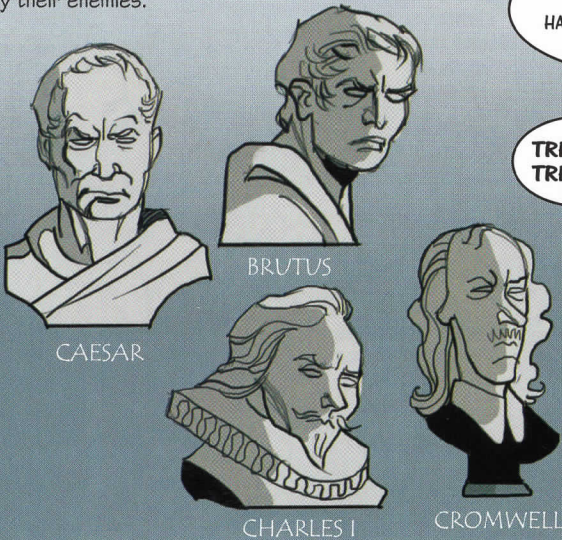
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THIS COLONY HAS THE ONLY RIGHT AND POWER TO LAY TAXES ON THE INHABITANTS...

Henry dared to compare George III to Julius Caesar and Charles I, who were both overthrown and killed by their enemies.

CAESAR HAD HIS BRUTUS; CHARLES I HAD HIS CROMWELL; AND GEORGE III ...

... MAY PROFIT BY THEIR EXAMPLE. IF THIS BE TREASON, MAKE THE MOST OF IT!

TREASON!
TREASON!



Patrick Henry's Virginia Resolves were published in newspapers throughout the colonies. Fury over the Stamp Act exploded.

IF PARLIAMENT WANTS TO TAX VIRGINIA, IT MUST INCLUDE REPRESENTATIVES FROM VIRGINIA!

YES-- REPRESENTATIVES OF OUR OWN CHOOSING. OTHERWISE, WE'LL NOT USE THE STAMPS OR PAY THE TAX!

In Boston, mobs attacked the mansions of wealthy tax collectors and officeholders including the governor, Thomas Hutchinson.

NO TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION!

Violent protests spread to other cities as well. Colonists everywhere were in agreement--the stamp tax had to go.

Newport, Rhode Island

New York City

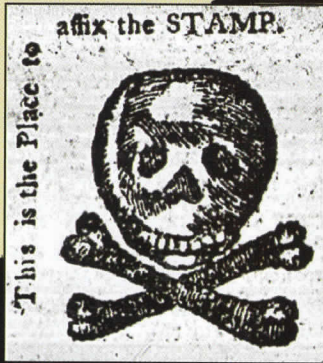
Maryland

New York City, October 1765. Delegates from nine colonies met in what is known as the Stamp Act Congress. For the first time, the American colonies acted together to petition King George III and Parliament.

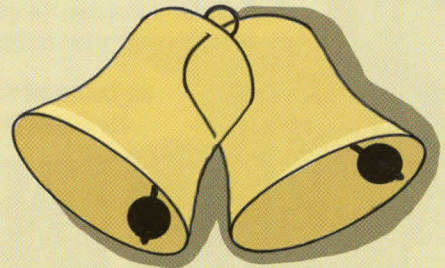


Parliament ignored the petitions. In protest, the colonists declared that *liberty was dead* and stopped buying British goods . . .

January 1766. Reluctantly, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act. Bells rang in celebration on both sides of the Atlantic.



Desperate British merchants begged Parliament to reconsider.



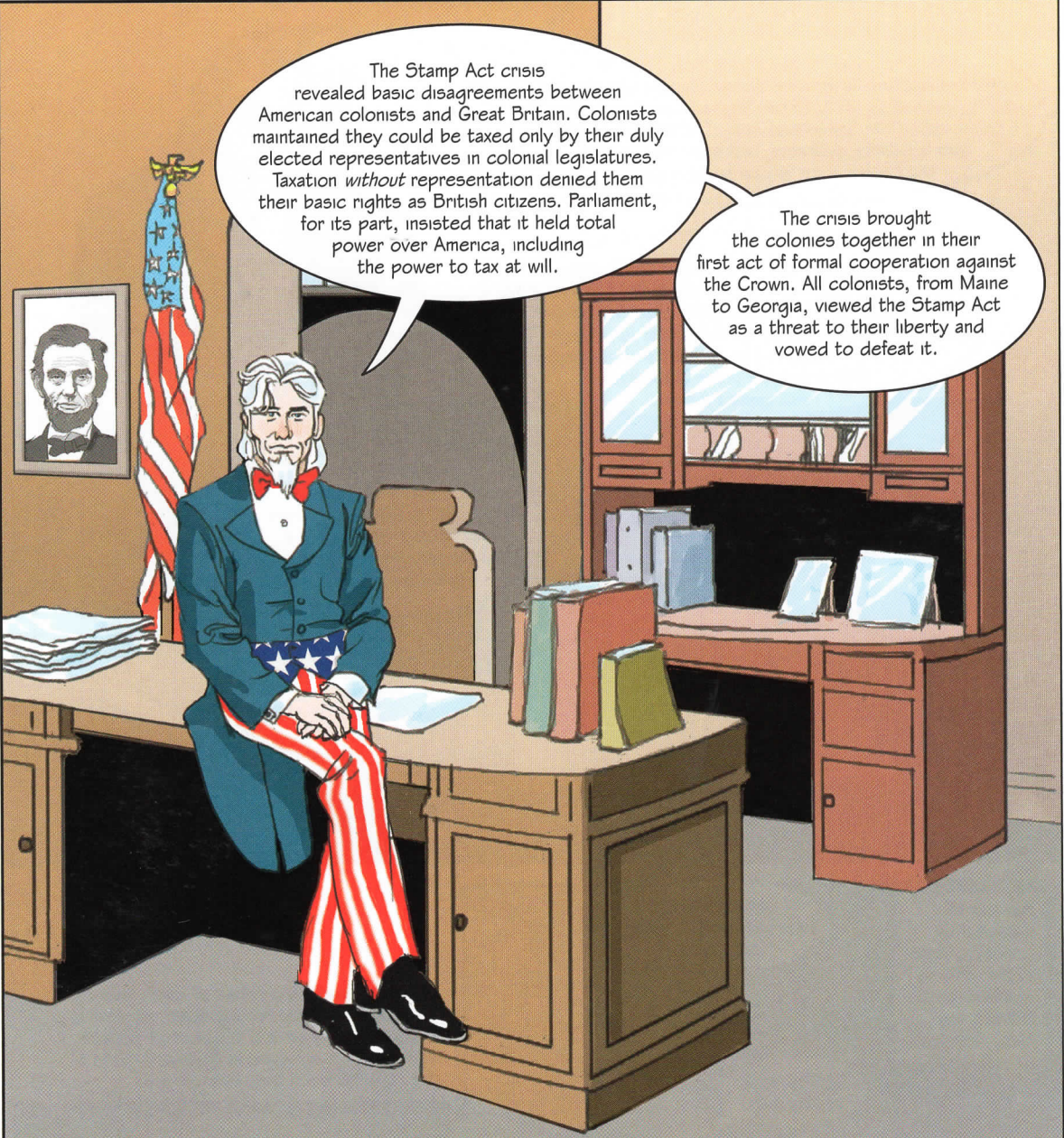
Barely noticed was passage of another act declaring the absolute authority of the British government over the American colonies.

COLONISTS ARE BRITISH CITIZENS WITH THE DUTIES OF BRITISH CITIZENS, INCLUDING THE DUTY TO PAY TAXES.

COLONISTS ARE BRITISH CITIZENS WITH THE RIGHTS OF BRITISH CITIZENS, INCLUDING THE RIGHT NOT TO BE TAXED WITHOUT OUR CONSENT.

Future conflict seemed inevitable.





The Stamp Act crisis revealed basic disagreements between American colonists and Great Britain. Colonists maintained they could be taxed only by their duly elected representatives in colonial legislatures.

Taxation *without* representation denied them their basic rights as British citizens. Parliament, for its part, insisted that it held total power over America, including the power to tax at will.

The crisis brought the colonies together in their first act of formal cooperation against the Crown. All colonists, from Maine to Georgia, viewed the Stamp Act as a threat to their liberty and vowed to defeat it.

EXCERPTS FROM THE VIRGINIA RESOLVES

"That the first adventurers and settlers of His Majesty's colony and dominion of Virginia brought with them . . . all the liberties . . . possessed by the people of Great Britain . . .

"That the taxation of the people by themselves, or by persons chosen by themselves to represent them . . . is the only security against a burdensome taxation, and the distinguishing characteristic of British freedom . . .

"Therefore that the General Assembly of this Colony have the only and exclusive Right and Power to lay Taxes and Impositions upon the inhabitants of this Colony and that every attempt to vest such Power in any person or persons whatsoever other than the General Assembly . . . has a manifest Tendency to destroy British as well as American Freedom."