

# This Day in History... October 7, 1765

## Stamp Act Congress Meets To Protest Unfair Taxation

In response to Parliament's Stamp Act of 1765, American colonists assembled in New York City on October 7 to organize a unified protest.

Since the end of the French and Indian War, the British Parliament had been looking for new ways to increase its revenues from overseas colonies. Among the steps they took was the passage of the Stamp Act of 1765, which placed direct taxation on the colonies for the first time. It forced colonists to buy a British tax stamp for every official document they obtained.

Under this act, all types of printed material required a stamp showing that a tax had been paid. Items requiring these stamps included newspapers, books, court documents, land deeds, almanacs, and playing cards.

Many of the colonists were outraged and protested against taxation by Parliament, because they had no one to represent them. In response British goods were boycotted, customhouses were vandalized, and tax collectors were attacked. In England, merchants whose products were boycotted pressured Parliament to repeal the act. The "Sons of Liberty" secret society was formed within the colonies to coordinate protests. Effigies were burned under the "Liberty Tree" in Boston, and fear kept many tax distributors from selling the stamps. In New York, the Stamp Act was printed with a skull and cross bones (instead of the royal coat of arms) and paraded through the streets as "England's Folly and America's Ruin."



*Stamp pictures Federal Hall and Trinity Church in NYC.*



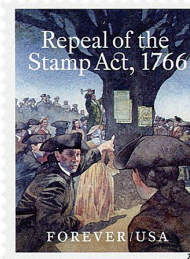
*1765 4 pence British Revenue for Use in America Stamp Proof*

That June, the Massachusetts Assembly sent a letter to the various colonies (including portions of present-day Canada, which was then known as the British West India islands) to arrange a meeting to discuss the situation. Nine colonies (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and South Carolina) ultimately selected delegates to attend the congress. Among the delegates were some familiar names: Robert R. Livingston and Caesar Rodney. Delegates traveled to New York City in late September and held their first meeting on October 7 at Federal Hall. The sessions continued for 14 days and were held behind closed doors and the journal of the congress deliberately kept the details to a minimum. But it is known that they extensively debated the Stamp Act and the differences between direct internal taxation and external taxation from Britain. In the end, they largely agreed that taxation should remain within the colonies.

The delegates worked together to produce a statement of rights to send to the king and Parliament. Known as the Declaration of Rights and Grievances, it included 14 points. These included a proclamation of loyalty to the crown, the belief that the colonists should be able to choose representatives to levy taxes, that all colonists had the right to trial by jury, and the economic consequences of the act (that the colonists would reduce trade with Britain).

Many in England refused to recognize the document and considered it inappropriate and unconstitutional. However, the threat of lost trade led some to rally for the repeal of the act. British Parliament ultimately voted 276-168 to repeal the Stamp Act on March 18, 1766. But they also passed the Declaratory Act, which claimed its authority to legislate the colonies no matter what. The decision slowed calls for independence, though it did not stop the march toward the American Revolution. The die had been cast. Flush with victory, colonists would soon use their Stamp Act protest tactics to push for true independence.

The Stamp Act Congress is often considered one of the first organized political actions of the American Revolution. Though the colonists weren't interested in independence from Britain at the time, further British Acts in the next decade would incite revolution. The American Revolution was on the horizon.



*Stamp commemorates the repeal of the Stamp Act.*



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*1865 Centennial Expo reproduction of a 1765 British Revenue for Use in America*

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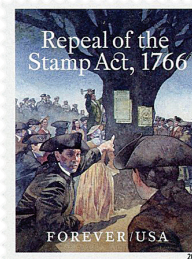
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