

What's happening in Boston?

Fighting the French and Indian War in America cost Great Britain millions of dollars. They wanted the colonists to help with the debt, so the Parliament passed several laws or acts to have the colonists pay taxes. The colonists believed the British government did not have the right to tax them because the colonists did not have a representative in the British government. The colonists believed laws were being passed without their consent. The King, who owned the colonies, did not believe he needed to have the permission of the colonists to pass laws.

A writ of assistance allowed an officer to enter a home and search wherever he liked. He could also remove objects from the home. The officer neither had to get permission from the court before conducting his search nor did he have to have a reason to search the premises. The only limitation is that the search had to be done during the daytime with another public official.

What do you think about this law?

What would you do about it?

The Sugar Act:

- Increased the number of American goods that could be shipped only to England or its territories.
- Required ships to unload their entire cargo, pay a tax on it, and reload. If items were acquired somewhere else, a tax had to be paid on those items too.
- Created a court to hear cases that violated the Sugar Act.
- If a merchant was accused of breaking the law, it was his responsibility to prove his innocence. Even if he was successful, the Sugar Act did not allow the arresting officer to be sued for damages or in other words, repay the owner for his losses.

What do you think about this law?

Lesson 3
Classwork

If you were a storekeeper in Boston, would you raise the cost of your goods to cover your extra expenses under the *Sugar Act*?

The *Stamp Act* required individuals to buy paper, already stamped with an official seal, for documents such as diplomas, marriage licenses, contracts, mortgages, bills of sales, pamphlets, and newspapers. The pre-stamped paper was brought over from England and all documents had to be printed on this paper to be official. The courts in the colonies had to use the stamped paper in order for the court proceedings to be official.

What do you think about this law? Are you for it or against it? Explain.

What would happen if people were against this law? Would you want the courts to close in protest? Explain.

What is the response of John Adams?

The people of Boston refused to buy the stamped paper required by the Stamp Act. Colonists also attacked the homes of Andrew Oliver, a stamp distributor, and Thomas Hutchinson, the assistant governor.

The Massachusetts court system had to use the stamped paper because without it, nothing was considered official. When the courts ran out of the paper, British authorities decided to close the courts until the paper arrived. It was 3,000 miles between Boston and London and the trip across the Atlantic took four to six weeks. John Adams, along with two other lawyers, was asked to go to the judges of the Superior Court and argue that the courts should be opened and should be allowed to use un-stamped paper. The courts, however, were closed for a number of months.

This is what John Adams said to the judges:

“The Stamp-Act was made where we are in no Sense represented, therefore, no more binding upon us, than an Act which should oblige us to destroy One Half of our Specie. . . A Parliament of Great Britain can have no more Right to tax the Colonies than a Parliament of Paris.”

[in Hiller B. Zobel, *The Boston Massacre* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970), 44.]

What does Adams mean by this statement? What example(s) is he using to make his point?

Does John Adams’s argument make sense? Why shouldn’t the colonists pay for the stamped paper?

John Adams's Diaries: What do they tell about what he believed?

Tuesday, December 31st, 1765

“The national Attention is fixed upon the Colonies. The Religion, Administration of Justice, Geography, Numbers, &c. of the Colonies are a fashionable Study. But what wretched Blunders do they make in attempting to regulate them. They know not the Character of Americans.”

L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), 282.

1. What does John Adams mean when he writes “the Administration of Justice?”

2. What does he mean by “what wretched blunders do they make in attempting to regulate them?”

3. What does John Adams mean by “they know not the character of Americans?”

Wednesday, January 1, 1766

“We are now upon the Beginning of a Year of greater Expectation than any, that has passed before it. This Year brings Ruin or Salvation to the British Colonies. The Eyes of all America, are fixed on the British Parliament. In short Britain and America are staring at each other.— And they will probably stare more and more for sometime.”

(*Diary of John Adams*, 1:282)

Thursday, January 2, 1766

“At Phyladelphia, the Heart and Hand fire Company has expelled Mr. Hewes [Hughes] the Stamp Man for that Colony. The Freeman of Talbot County in Maryland have erected a Jibbet before the Door of the Court House 20 feet High, and have hanged on it, the Effigies of a Stamp Informer in Chains, in Terrorem, till the Stamp Act shall be repealed, and have

resolved unanimously to hold in Utter Contempt and Abhorrence every Stamp Officer, and every Favourer of the Stamp Act, and to have no Communication with any such Person, not even to speak to him, unless to upbraid him with his Baseness.— So triumphant is the Spirit of Liberty everywhere.— Such an Union was never before known in America. In the Wars that have been with the french and Indians, a Union could never be effected.—I pity my unhappy fellow Subjects in Quebeck and Hallifax for the great Misfortune that has befallen them [...] Hallifax consists of a sett of Fugitives and Vagabonds, who are also kept in fear by a Fleet and an Army. But can no Punishment be devised for Barbadoes and Port Royal in Jamaica? For their base Desertion of the Cause of Liberty? Their tame Surrender of the Rights of Britons? Their mean, timid Resignation to slavery? [. . .] They deserve to be made Slaves to their own Negroes. But they live under the scortching Sun, which melts them, dissipates their Spirits and relaxes their Nerves. Yet their Negroes seem to have more of the Spirit of Liberty, than they. I think we sometimes read of Insurrections among their Negroes.”

(Diary of John Adams 1:284-285)

1. How many colonies are mentioned in this diary entry and what kinds of things are happening?

2. After reading the January 1st and January 2nd entry, what do you think is the mood of people living in the colonies at this time?

3. What does Adams mean by the “Spirit of Liberty”? He mentions it more than once in this entry for January 2nd.

4. What do these diary entries reveal about John Adams’s personal beliefs? Write at least three ideas.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____