

A report on reaction to the Stamp Act, 1765

Introduction

On March 22, 1765, the British Parliament passed the “Stamp Act” to help pay for British troops stationed in the colonies during the Seven Years’ War. It required the colonists to pay a tax, represented by a stamp, on various papers, documents, and playing cards. It was a direct tax imposed by the British government without the approval of the colonial legislatures and was payable in hard-to-obtain British sterling, rather than colonial currency. Further, those accused of violating the Stamp Act could be prosecuted in Vice-Admiralty Courts, which had no juries and could be held anywhere in the British Empire.

Adverse colonial reaction to the Stamp Act ranged from boycotts of British goods to riots and attacks on the tax collectors. In this letter, Archibald Hinshelwood, merchant and rising politician from Nova Scotia, described his impressions of the Stamp Act and of the resulting colonial unrest: “There is a violent spirit of opposition raised on the Continent against the execution of the Stamp Act, the mob in Boston have carried it very high against Mr. Oliver the Secry (a Town born child) for his acceptance of an office in consequence of that act. They have even proceeded to some violence, and burnt him in effigy &c.” Despite the evidence of hostility in the colonies to the south, Hinshelwood was hoping to be appointed a tax collector in Halifax. Although the Stamp Act occurred eleven years before the Declaration of Independence, it defined the central issue that provoked the American Revolution: no taxation without representation.

Excerpt

There is a violent spirit of opposition raised on the Continent against the execution of the Stamp Act, the mob in Boston have carried it very high against Mr. Oliver the Secry (a Town born child) for his acceptance of an office in consequence of that act. They have even proceeded to some violence, and burnt him in Effigy &c. They threaten to pull down & burn the Stamp Office now building, and that they will hold every man as Infamous that shall presume to carry the Stamp Act into Execution; so that it is thought M^r. Oliver will resign. I don’t find any such turbulent spirit to prevail among us, if it should, the means are in our Hands to prevent any tumults or Insults; what the consequences may be in the Colonies who have no military force to keep the rabble in order, I cannot pretend to say.

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Questions for Discussion

Read the introduction, view the image of the letter, and read the transcript. Then apply your knowledge of American history as well as the content of the document to answer the following questions:

1. Why did the English government impose the Stamp Act?
2. What job did Archibald Hinshelwood hope to obtain?
3. How did Mr. Hinshelwood expect the reaction to the English taxes by colonists in Halifax, Nova Scotia, would differ from the reaction of colonists in Boston, Massachusetts?
4. Why did many American colonists strongly object to the Stamp Act?
5. According to the events described by Mr. Hinshelwood, how did the Bostonians react to the imposition of the Stamp Act?

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Images

Halifax 19th August 1765 #61

Dear Sir,

I had the pleasure to receive your Letter by Troup, and am greatly obliged to you for your kind remembrance of me, and the pains you have taken to get me appointed for the disposal of the Stamps in this Province; altho I have had no advice of your success, yet I observe my name stands for that Office in the Boston News Paper, with several more who are to act in the other Provinces, some of whom are, I hear, already arrived upon the Continent.

Some time ago I wrote to you by the way of New York under Major Genl Gage's Cover, which I hope you have received, and that something may have been attempted to continue my office as Secy to the Commanding Officer, I wrote at the same time

Joshua Mauger Esq^r No

Archibald Hinshelwood to Joshua Mauger, August 19, 1765, page 1. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC03902.61)

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To my old friend General Monckton, and to Colonel Wm
 Amherst, upon the same Subject; what these may
 produce I cannot tell, but I assure you Major Hamilton
 who commanded here till relieved, has recommended
 me in the warmest and most friendly manner to
 Major General Gage to be continued as Secretary in the
 Military Department, and has backed it with the
 strongest Reasons that can possibly be, viz: the frequent
 change of commanding officers, and their being
 unacquainted with the many Transactions to be
 gone through in that Department, untill duly
 informed by a person thoroughly acquainted with, and
 versant in ^{the} former management of Affairs. If
 Gen. Gage should be of Major Hamilton's opinion, and
 recommend it to the Lords of the Treasury, I flatter myself,
 that it will be of great weight with their Lordships.

There is a violent spirit of opposition
 raised on the Continent against the execution of the
 Stamp Act, the mob in Boston have carried it very
 high

Archibald Hinshelwood to Joshua Mauer, August 19, 1765, page 2. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC03902.61)

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It gave me the highest concern to see by some of the news papers, that the former members son had carried the Election for prole in opposition to you, altho' by a very small majority; I hope none of your friends deserted you upon that occasion; — Disappointments of this sort are common, and very often things take new Turns; for as peoples views differ their humours & inclinations will lead them

Archibald Hinshelwood to Joshua Mager, August 19, 1765, page 3. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC03902.61)

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 calculated for affairs of that sort than you could well
 conceive.

I beg my best respects to good Mr. Mauger
 and to my friendly & punctual Correspondent Mr. Danvers
 (to whom I cannot write by this conveyance, being
 extremely hurried dispatching the business of the 19th Regt
 now imbarking) and that you will accept of the same
 from him who is at all times, in your service

Dear Sir

Your most obliged and
 most grateful Servant
 Arch Hinshelwood

Archibald Hinshelwood
 19th Regt
 19th Aug 1765
 30th St. 30th St. 30th St.

Archibald Hinshelwood to Joshua Mauger, August 19, 1765, page 4. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC03902.61)

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Transcript

Archibald Hinshelwood to Joshua Mauger, August 19, 1765 (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC03902.61)

Halifax 19th August 1765

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Some time ago I wrote to you by the way of New York under Major Genl Gage's Cover, which I hope you have received, and that something may have been attempted to continue my office as Secr^y. to the Commanding Officer, I wrote at the same time [2] to my old friend General Monckton, and to Colonel W^m. Amherst, upon the same subject; what these may produce I cannot tell, but I assure you Major Hamilton who commanded here till relieved, has recommended me in the warmest and most friendly manner to Major General Gage to be continued as Secretary in the Military department, and has backed it with the Strongest Reasons that can possibly be, viz^t. the frequent change of Commanding Officers, and their being unacquainted with the many Transactions to be gone through in that department, untill dully informed by a person thoroughly acquainted with, and versant in [*inserted*: the] former management of affairs. If Gen^l. Gage should be of Major Hamilton's opinion, and recommend it to the Lords of the Treasury, I flatter myself that it will be of great weight with their Lordships.

There is a violent spirit of opposition raised on the Continent against the execution of the Stamp Act, the mob in Boston have carried it very [3] high against Mr. Oliver the Secry (a Town born child) for his acceptance of an office in consequence of that act. They have even proceeded to some violence, and burnt him in Effigy &c. They threaten to pull down & burn the Stamp Office now building, and that they will hold every man as Infamous that shall presume to carry the Stamp Act into Execution; so that it is thought M^r. Oliver will resign. I don't find any such turbulent spirit to prevail among us, if it should, the means are in our Hands to prevent any

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I beg my best respects to you M^{rs}. Mauger and to my friendly & punctual Correspondent M^{r[s]}. D'auvigne, (to whom I cannot write by this conveyance [*text loss*] extremely hurried dispatching the business of the [10th] Regt. now Embarking) and that you will accept of the same from him who is at all times

Dear Sir

You most obliged and

most grateful hble Servant

Arch^d Hinshelwood

[*docket*]

Archib^d. Hinshelwood

Halifax 19th Aug^t. 1765.

Rec^d the 30th Sep^f follog