

Primary Sources: Ben Franklin Speaks About the Stamp Act in Britain, 1766

By Benjamin Franklin, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.03.17

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TOP: A Burning of the Stamp Act postcard from 1903. BOTTOM: Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) portrait by David Martin in 1766-67. While in London, Franklin's portrait was commissioned by his friend, Edinburgh wine merchant Robert Alexander. Alexander paid fellow Scot David Martin to paint the portrait. Franklin admired the portrait, which was exhibited to London audiences in the spring of 1767.

Editor's Note: In 1765, the English Parliament passed The Stamp Act. It put a tax on all important papers written and printed in the American colonies. Americans were against this tax because they did not vote for it. Benjamin Franklin was in London. The Parliament wanted to know why the colonies were against the Stamp Act. They asked Franklin to answer their questions. He gave them clear and exact answers.

"There Are Taxes On Land That Is Owned"

Parliament: What is your name, and place of your home?

Ben Franklin: Franklin, of Philadelphia.

Parliament: Do the Americans pay their own American taxes?

Franklin: Yes.

Parliament: What taxes are paid in Pennsylvania?

Franklin: There are taxes on land that is owned. The number of adults in the family are also taxed. There is a tax on businesses, wine and rum and another tax on all black slaves that are brought into the country.

Parliament: Why do you have these taxes?

Franklin: It pays for the government and local military.

Parliament: Do all the people pay those taxes?

Franklin: No. Many live away from the cities in the frontier and are poor, so they pay very little tax.

"It Will Go To Other Colonies That Britain Has Conquered"

Parliament: Are the Colonies able to pay the Stamp Tax?

Franklin: I don't think so.

Parliament: Do you know that the money from the stamps will be used in America?

Franklin: I know it is the plan, but I think it will go to other colonies that Britain has conquered, not us.

Parliament: We protect America. Don't you think you should pay part of the costs?

Franklin: That is not really true. The Colonies paid for 25,000 men during the French and Indian war. We spent many millions.

Parliament: Were you not paid for what you spent by Parliament?

Franklin: It was a very small part of what we spent. For example, Pennsylvania spent about \$2.5 million. But only \$300,000 was repaid.

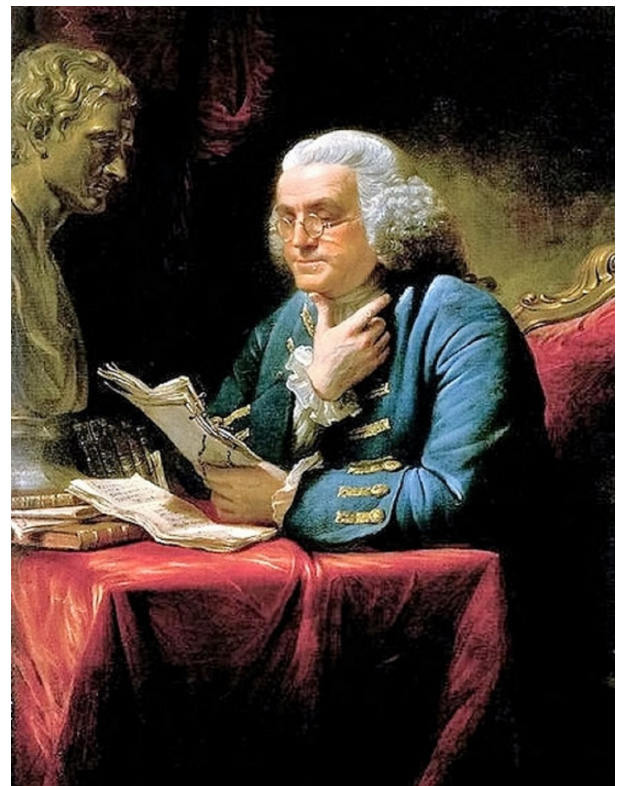
Parliament: Do you not think the people of America would pay the stamp tax if it was lowered?

Franklin: No, never. Only if soldiers forced them.

"We Felt That Parliament Would Solve The Problems"

Parliament: How did America feel about England before the year 1763?

Franklin: America felt England was best. They supported the king and accepted the laws of Parliament. Our people followed your English ways. People from England were treated with respect and some were even looked up to. Sometimes your leaders



would make our lives difficult, but we felt that Parliament would solve the problems. They often did.

Parliament: And now?

Franklin: Oh, very much changed!

Parliament: What has caused this change?

Franklin: There are many causes. The Colonies have been stopped from bringing gold and silver into the country and are not allowed to make paper money. We now have this stamp tax. Trials by juries have been taken away and our protests to Parliament have been ignored.

"We Did Not Vote For This Tax"

Parliament: Do you not think they would accept the Stamp Act if the tax were lower?

Franklin: No.

Parliament: Do Americans think that Parliament has no right to tax them?

Franklin: They did not vote for the Stamp Tax, but they do pay duty taxes. These were passed by an act of Parliament. They are for products coming to America.

Parliament: What are the differences between the two taxes?

Franklin: The Stamp Act says we cannot sell things or land, pay debts, marry or make a will unless we pay this tax. It takes our money and punishes us if we do not pay it. We did not vote for this tax and it has been forced on the people. The other tax is put on products coming into the country. That tax is added to the price. If the price is too high, we don't buy it. For example, English cloth is brought into the country. The Americans can make their own cloth, so we don't need English cloth.

Parliament: Can they find enough wool in North America?

Franklin: They have stopped eating lamb, so now there is more wool. They do not need the great English spinning factories because the people spin the wool themselves at home.

"We Won't Buy English Products"

Parliament: Can our army force them to follow the Stamp Act?

Franklin: No.

Parliament: Why not?

Franklin: Suppose an army is sent to America. They cannot force a man to take stamps.

Parliament: What else will happen?

Franklin: The colonies will not respect England. We won't buy English products.

Parliament: How can they live without English products?

Franklin: Cloth and other things can be made at home. We have learned to do without some fashionable English goods.

Parliament: Do you think the Americans will buy their own poor goods when ours are better?

Franklin: Yes, they will pay more, but they will also save their pride.

"Mobs Have Protested In The Street About The Tax"

Parliament: What if the Stamp Act should end? Would the Americans stop paying the taxes we now have?

Franklin: It is hard to answer because I don't know what people will do in the future.

Parliament: What if the Parliament passes a small tax? Would Americans pay it?

Franklin: If they could not vote for it in Parliament, they would not pay it. Mobs have protested in the streets about the tax, but we punish the ringleaders of riots. America has been greatly misunderstood here. During the last war, the Colonies paid and clothed nearly 25,000 men and we went deeply into debt.

"They Think Of Themselves As Part Of England's Empire"

Parliament: But suppose England should go to war in Europe. Would North America help?

Franklin: I do think they would, because they think of themselves as a part of England's Empire. Americans are seen here as foreigners, but we are Englishmen. In 1739, America sent 3,000 men to join your army in Colombia. The last war with the French began about the borders between Canada and Nova Scotia. It spread to Ohio where your rights to trade in Indian country were challenged. But, both the French and Indians had been our friends. The people of America, being mostly farmers and planters, traded with the Indians. But the English now fought the French and Indians to control the rivers, fur trade, and farmland. This was really an English war, but the people of America joined them and helped win the war.

Parliament: If the Stamp Act should end and the Crown should ask the Colonies for a sum of money, would they pay it?

Franklin: I believe they would.

Parliament: Why do you think so?

Franklin: I can speak for the Colony I live in. They always think it their duty to help the Crown when they are able to help.

Parliament: What if the war was in Europe and did not affect them?

Franklin: They would help because they are part of the empire.

Parliament: If the Stamp Act should end, would America accept the rights of Parliament to tax them?

Franklin: No, never. Unless armed soldiers force them.

Parliament: What used to make Americans proud?

Franklin: Wearing the fashions and using the products of England.

Parliament: What now makes them proud?

Franklin: To wear their old clothes over again till they can make new ones.