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New Taxes - Sugar and Stamp Act

By Cathy Pearl

The French and Indian War had ended in 1763. England had spent a lot of money on the war. They had fought the war to protect the American colonists. England decided that the colonists should help pay the debts.

The Sugar Act was passed on April 5, 1764. England told the colonists it was a way to help control trade. The Sugar Act taxed things like cloth and certain wines. It also put a three pence tax on molasses. This was about three cents. The act said rum and French wine could not be imported to the colonies.

The British Navy began to sail along the coast. They wanted to catch smugglers. British officers could take goods from the smugglers without going to court. The smuggler was then tried in a British court. A British court only had a judge. It did not have a jury. The judge also received money if the smuggler was found guilty. The colonists did not think this was fair. This meant the judge would vote people guilty in order to get more money.

Colonists complained about this tax, but they went along with it. It wasn't until the Stamp Act that the colonists began to fight back. The Stamp Act was passed in March 1765. It was the first time England taxed the colonists to raise money. The Sugar Act also raised money, but that's not what the colonists were told. The Stamp Act taxed newspapers, pamphlets, and almost all printed material. The papers would have to have a government stamp on them. This would show that the tax had been paid.

This tax touched almost all Americans. It affected powerful people in the colonies like printers and lawyers. People reacted strongly. In October 1765, a Stamp Act Congress was held. People from nine colonies came. They discussed ways to protest the new tax. They wrote letters to the king and Parliament. The letters said that the colonies could not be taxed. The colonies did not have anyone to represent their ideas in Parliament. This argument became known as "no taxation without representation."

Merchants also organized a boycott. A boycott is when people refuse to buy certain things. The merchants boycotted things made by the British. They would not buy them. This was hard for people who sold British goods. They weren't making any money.

Colonists formed large groups or mobs. These groups would go to homes. In the homes were people who sold the stamp that was to be put on the printed material. The groups would threaten the stamp seller and his family. They would chase the seller from his house and steal what he owned. The mobs would destroy the house.

Soon, most people who were supposed to sell the stamps had run away. They were afraid that they would be killed. British merchants were also unhappy. The boycott was ruining their businesses. They weren't making any money. Parliament decided the Stamp Act wasn't a good idea. They repealed it in March 1766.

England was broke after the French and Indian War. They decided to tax the colonists to make money. Colonists went along with the Sugar Act but reacted strongly to the Stamp Act. The American colonists and England were moving quickly toward war.

New Taxes - Sugar and Stamp Act

Questions

_____ 1. How much was the tax on molasses?

A. Three pence
B. Six pence
C. Nine pence

_____ 2. How many colonies sent people to the Stamp Act Congress?

A. Six
B. Nine
C. Three

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3. What is a boycott?

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4. Why did England tax the colonists?

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_____ 5. What did the Sugar Act tax?

A. Cloth
B. Certain Wines
C. Both a and b

_____ 6. When did Parliament repeal the Stamp Act?

A. 1766
B. 1767
C. 1765

Pretend you are a colonist. You have just heard about the Stamp Act. Write a letter to Parliament telling them why you think the Stamp Act is unfair.

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Do you think it was all right for mobs to threaten people who sold stamps for the Stamp Act? Why or why not?

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