

# March to Independence Timeline

1766

The year 1766 was marked by significant events following the intense colonial opposition to the Stamp Act of 1765. It saw the culmination of colonial protests, the repeal of the Stamp Act, and the simultaneous assertion of British authority through the Declaratory Act. The political tension between Britain and its American colonies continued to grow, with both sides claiming victories of sorts. Here's a detailed timeline of consequential events in 1766:

## Key Events in 1766:

1. January-February: Colonial resistance to the Stamp Act continues, with boycotts and protests in full swing. Parliamentary debate over repeal intensifies.
2. February 13: Benjamin Franklin testifies before Parliament, arguing against the Stamp Act.
3. March 18: Parliament repeals the Stamp Act, a major victory for colonial resistance. The same day, Parliament passes the Declaratory Act, asserting its authority over the colonies.
4. Spring-Summer: Colonial celebrations over the repeal of the Stamp Act, and non-importation agreements are lifted. Trade between the colonies and Britain resumes.
5. August-October: Growing concern among colonial leaders about the implications of the Declaratory Act and the future of British control over the colonies.
6. Late 1766: Power in Britain begins to shift toward Charles Townshend, setting the stage for future conflict over taxation and governance.

---

## January 1766: Colonial Resistance Intensifies

- January 1766: As 1766 begins, protests against the Stamp Act continue in the colonies. Non-importation agreements remain in effect, with colonial merchants boycotting British goods. The refusal to use stamped paper has effectively nullified the Stamp Act in many places. Colonial assemblies, including those in Virginia and Massachusetts, send petitions to Britain demanding repeal of the tax.
- Sons of Liberty Activity: The Sons of Liberty remain active, organizing demonstrations and encouraging resistance. Their efforts ensure that colonial protests stay at the forefront of public attention.

---

## February 1766: Parliamentary Debate on the Stamp Act

- February 1766: Debate over the Stamp Act intensifies in the British Parliament. British merchants, suffering from the colonial boycotts, pressure Parliament to repeal the tax. The economic strain on British industries and the rising tensions in the colonies lead to serious discussions about the future of British policy in North America.
  - Benjamin Franklin Testifies: On February 13, 1766, Benjamin Franklin, acting as a colonial agent in London, testifies before the British House of Commons. In his testimony, Franklin argues that the colonies oppose the Stamp Act because it was imposed without their consent. He suggests that internal taxes, like the Stamp Act, are unacceptable to the colonies, but

# March to Independence Timeline

1766

external trade duties might be more tolerable. His testimony is influential in shaping parliamentary opinion on the repeal of the act.

**Benjamin Franklin's testimony before the British Parliament on February 13, 1766**, is one of the most famous moments in the debate over the **Stamp Act**. Franklin, who was living in London at the time as the colonial agent for Pennsylvania and several other colonies, was called to testify before the House of Commons to explain the American colonists' opposition to the Stamp Act and to answer questions about colonial attitudes toward British taxation and governance.

During his testimony, Franklin provided crucial insight into why the Stamp Act was so deeply unpopular in the American colonies and explained the colonists' broader objections to taxation without representation. Franklin's responses helped persuade Parliament to **repeal the Stamp Act in March 1766**, though they also laid the groundwork for future conflicts between Britain and the colonies.

## Background on the Stamp Act

The **Stamp Act** was passed by the British Parliament in **March 1765** as a way to raise revenue to help pay for the British military presence in North America after the **French and Indian War** (1754–1763). The act required that all legal documents, newspapers, pamphlets, and other printed materials in the colonies be produced on stamped paper, which carried a tax. It was the first direct tax levied by Parliament on the American colonists, who were already burdened with economic difficulties from post-war debt and trade restrictions.

The colonists reacted with widespread anger and protests, arguing that only their own colonial legislatures, and not the distant British Parliament, had the right to tax them. Their central argument was **"no taxation without representation"**, which Franklin articulated before Parliament.

## Franklin's Testimony Before Parliament

Franklin was questioned extensively by members of Parliament, particularly by supporters of the Stamp Act, who wanted to understand the reasons for colonial resistance. His testimony provides a clear summary of the American objections to the act and highlights several key themes: the economic burden the tax imposed, the lack of colonial representation in Parliament, and the colonies' willingness to pay taxes imposed by their own legislatures.

Here are some of the key points and **quotes** from Franklin's testimony:

### 1. The Economic Burden of the Stamp Act

Franklin emphasized that the colonies were already suffering from economic hardship and that the Stamp Act would exacerbate these problems. When asked if the colonists could afford to pay the tax, Franklin responded bluntly:

**"The goods they take from Britain are either necessaries, mere conveniences, or superfluities; all of which, except a few articles of luxury imported by the rich, are absolutely necessary."**

# March to Independence Timeline

1766

He explained that the colonists had already been economically strained by a post-war recession, and the Stamp Act would impose an additional financial burden on them.

Franklin also noted that the tax would disproportionately affect certain segments of society, particularly **lawyers, printers, and merchants**, who relied heavily on the kinds of documents that would require stamped paper. He argued that this burden would trickle down to ordinary colonists as well, as they would have to pay higher prices for printed materials and legal services.

## 2. "No Taxation Without Representation"

A central point of Franklin's testimony was the principle of **no taxation without representation**, which he articulated in response to questions about why the colonists objected to the Stamp Act. Franklin explained that the colonists believed only their own legislatures had the authority to impose taxes on them, because only those legislatures represented the interests of the colonists:

**"The Americans have not acted in all things like our Saxon ancestors; they have formed a Constitution for themselves, and by their Constitution they have declared that their own representatives shall have the power of taxing them, and that they will submit to no taxes but such as are laid by their own representatives."**

He continued to emphasize that the colonies had no direct representation in the British Parliament:

**"The colonies have always paid the taxes laid by their own assemblies, and therefore the government here should not lay taxes upon them without their consent."**

Franklin argued that because the American colonies did not have representatives in Parliament, any tax imposed by Parliament was inherently unjust and violated their rights as British subjects.

## 3. Colonial Willingness to Pay Local Taxes

Franklin made it clear that the colonists were not opposed to taxation itself; rather, they were opposed to taxation imposed by a distant government in which they had no representation. He noted that the colonies were willing to pay taxes imposed by their own legislatures, and they had already done so to support their own defense:

**"The colonies raised, clothed, and paid during the last war near twenty-five thousand men, and spent many millions."**

This reference to the **French and Indian War** (also known as the **Seven Years' War**) was particularly important, as it showed that the colonies had already contributed significantly to the defense of the British Empire and were capable of managing their own financial affairs.

Franklin further explained that the colonial assemblies had always been willing to raise revenue when necessary, and there was no need for Parliament to impose a direct tax like the Stamp Act.

## 4. The Threat of Colonial Unrest and Noncompliance

When asked about the potential for unrest in the colonies if the Stamp Act was enforced, Franklin warned Parliament that resistance to the tax could turn violent.

# March to Independence Timeline

1766

He predicted that the colonists would not comply with the act, and that British officials attempting to enforce it could face widespread opposition:

**"The people will never submit to it."**

This was not an idle threat. By the time Franklin testified, the **Sons of Liberty** and other colonial protest groups had already begun organizing demonstrations, including the destruction of property and public protests against tax collectors. Franklin's testimony reflected the reality that enforcing the Stamp Act in the colonies would be extremely difficult without risking serious unrest.

## 5. British Arguments in Support of the Stamp Act

Members of Parliament who supported the Stamp Act believed that it was a reasonable way to raise revenue from the colonies, particularly since Britain had incurred significant debt during the French and Indian War in defense of the colonies. Some MPs argued that since British subjects in England were taxed heavily, it was only fair that the American colonies contribute their share to the empire.

One of the key arguments from Franklin's opposition was that the colonists benefited from the protection of the British military and navy, and thus should be expected to help cover the costs of that protection. As **Prime Minister George Grenville**, the architect of the Stamp Act, famously argued:

**"The colonies are a part of the British Empire. We have a right to bind them in all cases whatsoever."**

This view was based on the idea of **Parliamentary sovereignty**, the principle that Parliament had supreme authority over all British subjects, including those in the colonies, and therefore had the right to impose taxes for the good of the empire as a whole.

Another common argument from proponents of the Stamp Act was that the American colonies enjoyed significant autonomy and prosperity, and therefore it was reasonable to expect them to help pay down the debt incurred in defending them.

## 6. The Question of Colonial Representation in Parliament

One of the most intriguing parts of Franklin's testimony came when he was asked whether the colonies would be satisfied if they were allowed to send representatives to Parliament. Franklin responded that the colonies might accept representation in Parliament, but he quickly added that it was impractical:

**"If we could be properly represented, I should think we ought to be taxed by Parliament. But the number of representatives would necessarily be very great, and we could neither be properly represented, nor would they ever consent to admit representatives from America."**

Franklin's response was both diplomatic and realistic. He acknowledged that if the colonies were given actual representation, they might accept British taxation, but he also recognized that Parliament was unlikely to grant that representation, and the practicalities of transatlantic representation made it almost impossible.

## Impact of Franklin's Testimony

# March to Independence Timeline

1766

**Franklin's testimony** had a profound impact on the debate over the Stamp Act. His clear, articulate arguments convinced many in Parliament that the Stamp Act was impractical and that enforcing it would lead to further unrest in the colonies. His emphasis on the colonists' willingness to pay taxes imposed by their own legislatures also suggested that there were alternative ways to raise revenue without alienating the colonies.

As a result, Parliament voted to **repeal the Stamp Act** on **March 18, 1766**. However, the same day, Parliament passed the **Declaratory Act**, which affirmed its right to legislate for the colonies "in all cases whatsoever." This set the stage for further conflicts between Britain and the colonies over the issue of taxation and representation.

## Conclusion

**Benjamin Franklin's testimony before Parliament** was a turning point in the debate over the **Stamp Act** and the broader question of British authority over the American colonies. His arguments, grounded in the principles of **no taxation without representation** and the colonists' right to self-governance, resonated with many in Britain and helped secure the repeal of the act. However, the underlying issues Franklin raised—about representation, taxation, and the relationship between Britain and its colonies—remained unresolved and would eventually lead to the **American Revolution**.

Transcription of Franklin's Testimony:

[https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item\\_id=251&img\\_step=1&pid=2&mode=transcript#page1](https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=251&img_step=1&pid=2&mode=transcript#page1)

---

## March 1766: Repeal of the Stamp Act

- March 4, 1766: After months of debate and pressure from both British merchants and colonial agents, the House of Commons passes a resolution to repeal the Stamp Act. The House of Lords later concurs.
- March 18, 1766: Stamp Act Repealed – Parliament officially repeals the Stamp Act, ending one of the most controversial laws imposed on the American colonies. The decision to repeal is largely influenced by the economic impact of the colonial boycotts on British merchants and manufacturers, combined with fears that enforcing the tax could provoke even more serious unrest in the colonies.
  - Colonial Reaction: News of the repeal is met with widespread celebration in the colonies. Public celebrations, bonfires, and parades take place in major cities like Boston, New York, and Charleston. The repeal is seen as a victory for colonial resistance and as proof that unified action can force Britain to respond to colonial grievances.

---

## March 1766: Declaratory Act Passed

- March 18, 1766: On the same day that the Stamp Act is repealed, Parliament passes the Declaratory Act, asserting its authority to make laws binding the colonies "in all

# March to Independence Timeline

1766

cases whatsoever." The Declaratory Act reaffirms Parliament's right to tax and legislate for the colonies, even though the Stamp Act has been repealed.

- Significance: The Declaratory Act signals that although Parliament has conceded on the Stamp Act, it has not renounced its overall control over the colonies. This sets the stage for future conflicts, as it essentially leaves the door open for Britain to impose new taxes and laws on the colonies without their consent.
  - Colonial Response: Although the immediate focus is on celebrating the repeal of the Stamp Act, many colonial leaders recognize the threat posed by the Declaratory Act. It represents a broader assertion of British authority and foreshadows future confrontations over colonial self-governance and taxation.
- 

## April-July 1766: Calm Before the Storm

- Spring-Summer 1766: The repeal of the Stamp Act leads to a temporary easing of tensions between Britain and the colonies. Many colonists believe that their collective resistance has succeeded and that British officials will now be more cautious about imposing taxes without representation.
  - Trade Resumes: With the repeal of the Stamp Act, the colonial non-importation agreements are lifted, and trade between Britain and the colonies resumes. British merchants welcome the return of normal trade relations, but the underlying issues remain unresolved.
- 

## August 1766: Growing Concerns over British Authority

- August 1766: Despite the repeal of the Stamp Act, there is growing concern in the colonies over Parliament's continued assertion of its right to legislate for the colonies under the Declaratory Act. Colonial leaders like John Adams, Samuel Adams, and Patrick Henry warn that the struggle over taxation and self-governance is far from over.
    - John Adams' Reflection: In Massachusetts, John Adams reflects on the Declaratory Act and the implications it has for the future. He recognizes that the fundamental question of Parliament's authority over the colonies has not been resolved and that further conflict is likely.
- 

## October 1766: Colonial Political Realignment

- Fall 1766: As the excitement over the repeal of the Stamp Act fades, colonial political leaders begin to focus on the larger issue of British control over the colonies. Newspapers and pamphlets circulate throughout the colonies, discussing the implications of the Declaratory Act and the future of colonial governance.
  - Political Clubs and Committees: In cities like Boston, Philadelphia, and Charleston, political clubs and committees continue to meet, discussing ways to protect colonial rights. These groups lay the groundwork for future

# March to Independence Timeline

1766

resistance to British policies and help shape the ideological foundation of the American Revolution.

---

## **Late 1766: British Preparations for Future Control**

- Late 1766: In Britain, Prime Minister William Pitt, who had supported the repeal of the Stamp Act, falls ill, and his influence in government begins to decline. The real power begins to shift to Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend, who is more determined to assert control over the colonies. Townshend's later policies, particularly the Townshend Acts of 1767, will reignite colonial resistance.
  - British Military Presence: Although tensions have temporarily eased, the British government maintains a military presence in the colonies to enforce customs regulations and ensure order. The costs of maintaining these troops remain a concern for Britain, leading to further discussions about colonial taxation.
-