

Townshend Acts



The Townshend Acts was passed in Parliament

This article on the Townshend Acts in Colonial America provides fast facts and information about the effects of these laws and taxes.

- What was the Townshend Acts?
- The Meaning and Definition of the Townshend Acts
- The summary of the Townshend Acts
- The effect of the Townshend Acts
- The reaction of the colonists to the Townshend Acts 1767 / 1768
- Fast and easy to understand explanation of the Townshend Acts for kids

[Townshend Revenue Act Words](#)

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History of the 13 Colonies and the laws & taxes that sparked rebellion against the British

The definition and purpose of the 1767 Townshend Acts and the cry of "No taxation without representation!"

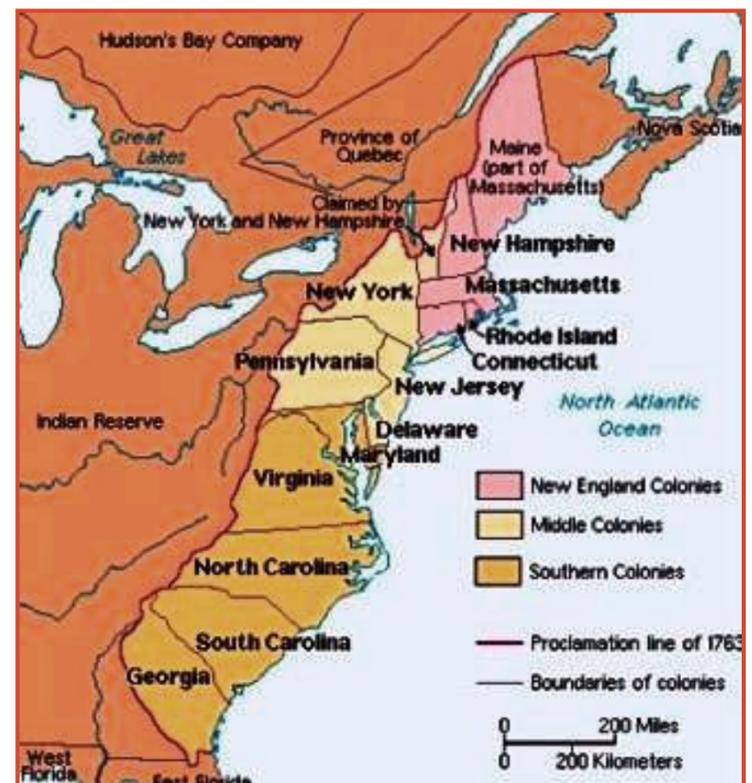
Definition of the Townshend Acts

The Meaning and Definition of the Townshend Acts: The Townshend Acts of 1767 were a series of laws which set new import taxes on British goods including paint, paper, lead, glass and tea and used revenues to maintain British troops in America and to pay the salaries of some Royal officials who were appointed to work in the American colonies.

The names of the Townshend Acts

The names of the Townshend Acts of 1767 were:

- Townshend Act: The Revenue Act of 1767
- Townshend Act: The Indemnity Act of 1767
- Townshend Act: The Commissioners of Customs Act of 1767
- Townshend Act: The Vice Admiralty Court Act of 1767
- Townshend Act: The New York Restraining Act of 1768



Map of the Thirteen Colonies

Townshend Acts - Background Information

The Townshend Acts was one of a series of taxes that divided Great Britain and its colonies in America. Unlike the [Stamp Act of 1765](#), the laws were not a direct tax, but a tax on imports. The Stamp Act had been repealed due to the opposition in the colonies which include the boycott of British goods. The boycott of British goods resulted in British merchants applying pressure on the government to repeal the Stamp Act. The reaction of the merchants together with the violent reaction of the American colonist, which verged on revolution, resulted in the repeal of the hated stamp tax. The colonists were not against the law but they were strongly opposed to taxes imposed by the British parliament, complaining bitterly

with the shout of "No Taxation without representation!" As the colonists celebrated their political victory, the British parliament passed the Declaratory Act. The Declaratory Act provided the British with a broad mandate to impose laws, and taxes, on the American colonies. Within a year of the passing of the Declaratory Act new trade laws were imposed on America. The new taxes, were introduced by the Townshend Acts of 1767.

The Townshend Acts of 1767 - Charles Townshend

The Townshend Acts of 1767 were the idea of Charles Townshend who was one of the ministers of William Pitt and his Chatham ministry. Charles Townshend, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, had the difficult role in the British government of managing finances. Charles Townshend, known as "Champagne Charlie" to his friends, believed that considerable revenue could be raised by placing duties (taxes) on wine, oil, glass, lead, painter's colors, and tea that was imported to the American colonies. Charles Townshend was careful not to impose direct taxes. He also chose to tax commodities that would not hurt the British trade but still raise enough revenue from the colonies. The Townshend Acts made common items like lead, glass, paint, paper, and tea more expensive. None of these items were produced locally and had to be imported into North America. The colonists responded by refusing to buy the products.

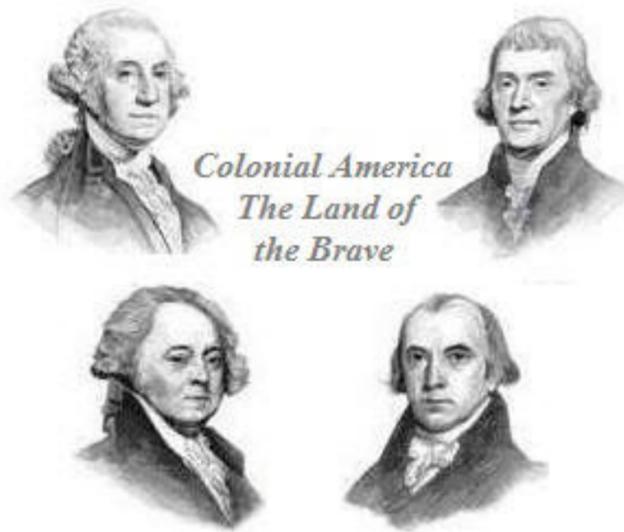
Summary of the Townshend Acts

The Townshend Acts of 1767 regulated colonial trade by taxing items needed by the colonies. Charles Townshend introduced the series of laws, referred to as the Townshend Acts, firstly to impose import taxes on some lucrative British goods sent to America. He followed the initial Townshend Act with others to reorganize the colonial customs service and make it possible to collect the duties (taxes). He even provided that offences against the revenue laws should be tried by judges appointed directly by the king, without being submitted to a jury of any kind.

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Description and Definition of the Townshend Acts & Reaction of the Colonists

The description of the Townshend Acts and definition of the Townshend Acts are detailed in the following chart together with the reaction of the colonists to each of the Townshend Acts:

Description of the Townshend Acts Definition of the Townshend Acts Colonists Reaction to the Townshend Acts

Definition of the Revenue Act 1767 The Revenue Act, one of the laws in the Townshend Acts, set new import duties (taxes) on British goods including paint, paper, lead, glass and tea. The revenues raised help to clear the massive war debt incurred by the French Indian Wars (including the Seven Years War). maintain British troops in America and pay the salaries of Royal Officials.

- Colonists Reaction to the Townshend Acts:*
- 1. The colonists felt the issue regarding the taxation of goods was the same as the previous taxes, leading, once again, to the cry of "No Taxation without representation!"*
 - 2. Patriots encouraged the consumption of smuggled tea as a political protest of the Townshend taxes*
 - 3. The colonist disagreed with an Act that removed the authority of the assemblies to pay the salaries of British officials. The "power of the purse" gave*

the assemblies the ability to effectively check royal power by withholding, or threatening to withhold, payments.

Definition of the Indemnity Act 1767 The Indemnity Act, one of the laws in the Townshend Acts, removed taxes on tea shipped to the American colonies by the British East India Company in order for British tea could compete with Dutch shipped tea which was smuggled into the colonies. The Indemnity Act also affirmed the use of Writs of Assistance (Search Warrants) without the sanction from a court.

Colonists Reaction to the Townshend Acts: Most patriots refused to buy tea unless it had been smuggled. They believed the use of Search Warrants without the sanction of the court would be abused by British officials

Definition of the Commissioners of Customs Act 1767 The Commissioners of Customs Act, one of the laws in the Townshend Acts, implemented tougher customs enforcement which included assigning new customs officials and tax collectors based in Boston.

Colonists Reaction to the Townshend Acts: Colonists were outraged because this Act gave tax collectors the unprecedented authority to search merchants' ships & warehouses without official regulation. Search warrants, called Writs of Assistance had been used to search houses, the legality of which had been previously contested by James Otis

Definition of the New York Restraining Act 1767 The New York Restraining Act, one of the laws in the Townshend Acts, ordered the suspension of the New York Assembly if it did not fully comply with the 1765 Quartering Act.

Colonists Reaction to the Townshend Acts: The colonists disagreed with the Act because it threatened the longstanding autonomy of colonial legislatures

Definition of the Vice Admiralty Court Act 1768 The Vice Admiralty Court Act, one of the laws in the Townshend Acts, created new Admiralty Courts in which colonial smugglers would be prosecuted without a jury. The verdicts of the Admiralty courts were to be decided solely by the judge.

Colonists Reaction to the Townshend Acts: The colonists believed that all Americans, like the British, had the right to be tried by a jury

Effects of the Townshend Acts

Effects of the Townshend Acts: 1. The Massachusetts House of Representatives were dissolved - a circular letter was sent asking for support from other assemblies

Effects of the Townshend Acts: 2. The other colonial assemblies supported Massachusetts and were dissolved

Effects of the Townshend Acts: 3. John Hancock & the Seizure of the Liberty at Boston

Effects of the Townshend Acts: 4. British Troops at Boston

Effects of the Townshend Acts: 5. The Virginia Resolves

Effects of the Townshend Acts: 6. The Virginia Association - Nonimportation Agreements

Effects of the Townshend Acts: 7. Partial Repeal of the Townshend Acts

Description of the Townshend Acts
Definition of the Townshend Acts
Colonists Reaction to the Townshend Acts
Effects of the Townshend Acts

The Significance of the Townshend Acts

The British had passed similar measures before the Townshend Acts with Navigation Acts and the Sugar Act. Had the Sugar Act been enforced the trade of Massachusetts and other New England colonies would have been virtually ruined. But due to the British policy of Salutary Neglect the law was not enforced and, as the taxes were not collected, no one cared whether they were legal or not. The Townshend Acts made it very clear that this tax and the other Townshend taxes were to be collected.

Effect of the Townshend Acts - Colonial Assemblies Dissolved

The Massachusetts General Court denounced the Townshend Acts in violation of the principle of no taxation without representation. The Massachusetts House of Representatives began a campaign against the Townshend Acts by sending a petition to King George asking for the repeal of the Townshend Revenue Act. In February 1768 Samuel Adams of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, drew up a circular letter (the Massachusetts Circular Letter) to the other colonial assemblies asking them to join the resistance movement and oppose the new taxes imposed by the Townshend Acts. The British government ordered the Massachusetts House of Representatives to recall the letter. The House refused and was dissolved. The other colonial assemblies were directed to take no notice of the circular letter. They refused and were dissolved.

Effect of the Townshend Acts - John Hancock & the Seizure of the Liberty at Boston



Townshend Acts - Picture of a Sloop 1775

The Liberty Affair arose following the Townshend Acts. In 1768 the new Customs Officers at Boston seized a sloop called the Liberty, owned by John Hancock, that was carrying a cargo of Madeira wine. The Liberty was seized because John Hancock had not paid the taxes on the wine.

The customs officers seized the sloop and towed her under the guns of a warship which was in Boston harbor. The people of Boston could not recapture the Liberty but they managed to seize one of the war-ship's boats.

The Bostonians carried the boat to the Common, and had a famous bonfire. John Hancock who was a wealthy patriot was charged with smuggling, but was acquitted.

John Hancock was a wealthy patriot and in 1765 John Hancock and Samuel Adams had founded the Sons of Liberty.

John Hancock was to serve as president of Congress and was the first to sign the Declaration of Independence.

Effect of Townshend Acts - British Troops sent to Boston

British troops had been stationed at New York ever since the end of the French Indian war. In 1768, following the Liberty Affair, two regiments were ordered to leave New York to go to Boston to protect the customs officers. This action would ultimately lead to the [Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770](#).

Effect of the Townshend Acts - The Virginia Resolves, 1769

The Virginia Resolves of 1769 were resolutions passed by the [Virginia House of Burgesses](#). Parliament had asked the king to have colonists, accused of certain crimes including treason, brought to England for trial. The Virginia Resolves of 1769 asserted that:

- No colonist should be sent to England for trial
- Only the colonists had the right to tax the colonists
- The colonists had the right to petition either by themselves or with the people of other colonies

Within a matter of months, similar sets of resolutions to the Virginia Resolves were adopted by other colonial assemblies.

Effect of Townshend Acts - The Virginia Association - Nonimportation Agreements

The Nonimportation Agreements were a series of agreements made by the Virginia Association. The Virginia Association became the forerunner to the larger more powerful Continental Association. The Nonimportation Agreement of 1769 opposed the Townshend Acts. The agreements were drafted by George Mason and presented to the Virginia House of Burgesses by George Washington in May 1769. Although the assembly had been dissolved the Virginians met in the the Raleigh tavern. The Nonimportation Agreement of 1769 was a written agreement not to use British goods upon which

duties had been paid. All of the members of the Virginia House of Burgesses signed this agreement. Other colonies joined Virginia in the Nonimportation Agreement standing united against continued British taxation and trade control.

Partial Repeal of the Townshend Acts 1770

The agreement by the colonies not to use no British goods upon which duties had been paid soon effected British trade. British merchants found their trade growing smaller and smaller. They could not even collect their debts, for the colonial merchants said that trade in the colonies was so upset by the Townshend Acts that they could not sell their goods, or collect the money owing to them. The British merchants petitioned Parliament to repeal the taxes imposed by the Townshend Acts. Parliament repealed the Townshend Acts on April 12, 1770, except the tax on tea - leaving the door open to pass the [Tea Act](#) in 1773. The Townshend Acts led to the Boston Massacre, the Tea Act, the Boston Tea Party and the American Revolution.



Effects of the Townshend Acts: - The Declaration of Independence

Townshend Acts

- Meaning and Definition of the Townshend Acts
- History of the Townshend Acts of 1767
- Fast Facts and info about Townshend Acts timeline
- The Townshend Acts article is a great history resource for kids
- Social Studies Homework help for kids on the Townshend Acts of 1767



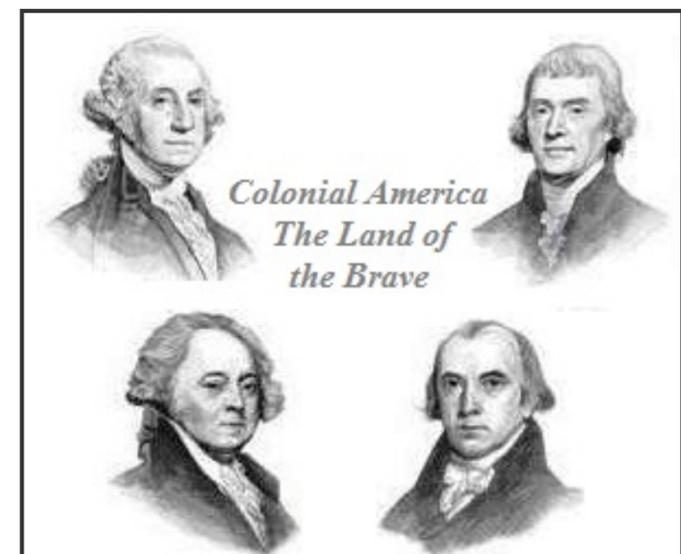
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