

Document A: B.W.'s Public Letter (Modified)

This public letter appeared on the front page of The Boston-Gazette and Country Journal, a colonial newspaper, on October 7, 1765. The author's name was printed as "B.W."

To the Inhabitants of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay

My Dear Countrymen,

It is a standing **maxim** of English Liberty "That no man shall be taxed but with his own consent," and you very well know we were not, in any **sober** sense, represented in parliament, when this tax was imposed.

AWAKE! Awake, my Countrymen and defeat those who want to enslave us. Do not be cowards. You were born in Britain, the Land of Light, and you were raised in America, the Land of Liberty. It is your duty to fight this tax. Future generations will bless your efforts and honor the memory of the saviors of their country.

I urge you to tell your representatives that you do not support this terrible and burdensome law. Let them know what you think. They should act as guardians of the liberty of their country.

I look forward to congratulating you on delivering us from the enemies of truth and liberty.

Source: *B.W. "To the Inhabitants of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay," The Boston-Gazette and Country Journal, October 7, 1765.*

Vocabulary

maxim: a statement expressing a general truth

sober: serious

Document B: From a London Newspaper (Modified)

Will Alfred wrote this public letter to Secretary Henry Seymour Conway. Conway was one of two of Britain's Secretaries of State and was responsible for relations with the American colonies. The letter was first published in a London newspaper and then was published in the Boston Gazette Supplement on January 27, 1766, nearly three months after the Stamp Act went into effect.

From a late London paper.

To Mr. Secretary Conway:

The riotous behavior of the people in Boston is remarkable. I would have been less surprised by their behavior if we had taxed their beer, because everyone drinks beer. But the Stamp Act is a tax on none of the necessities of life. It does not affect the poor. And even a poor person can afford this little amount of money. The tax on newspapers only affects the rich—common people do not purchase newspapers. Isn't it surprising, then, that the mob in Boston has begun to riot against this tax even before it has officially gone into effect? I was expressing my wonder at this, when I was informed, that it was not the burden of the tax to be raised, but the *manner in which it was imposed*, that created the discontent: If this is so, the matter is more serious than it may first appear. . . .

The colonists are our brethren and fellow-subjects. . . . We should ask therefore whether we have behaved to them as brethren. . . . The first birth right privilege of a Briton is, that he cannot be legally tried but by his peers. One of the next is, that he cannot be taxed but by a parliament in which he is represented. . . . Do these who impose taxes on the colonists pay also themselves a share of these taxes? If this is not the case, what have the colonists done that they are to be stripped of one of the most valuable privileges of Britons? Have the parliament of Great Britain a right to take from any, the lowest of the subjects, the smallest privilege, which he inherits by birth-right, unless forfeited by law?

Source: Will Alfred, "To Mr. Secretary Conway," Boston Gazette Supplement, January 27, 1766.

Document C: A Stamp Act Collector's Letter (Modified)

John Hughes, a stamp tax collector in Philadelphia, wrote this letter to his bosses in London.

My Lords,

The colonists have been insulting His Majesty, saying that the Stamp Act was unconstitutional, and oppressive.

It is apparent to many people here that the **Presbyterians** are at the head of these riots. They are opposed to Kings and some cry out—'No King but King Jesus.' The leaders fill every newspaper with **inflammatory** pieces, so that the minds of the common people are kept in a continual **ferment**. . . . No one dares write anything that would calm the people down. Doing so would put the writer's life and fortune in danger.

I am convinced the Presbyterians intend nothing less than the throwing off their **allegiance** and obedience to his Majesty, and forming a Republican Empire, in America, and being Lords and Masters themselves.

I am daily threatened by verbal messages and anonymous letters, with a mob of several thousand people, from the Jerseys, New York, and New England.

I conclude with praying, that the Almighty may secure the **allegiance** of America to the Crown of Britain, by destroying the seeds of rebellion, and by punishing the ringleaders of these riots.

Source: *John Hughes, written in Philadelphia, January 13, 1766.*

Vocabulary:

Presbyterians: a religion that gained popularity during the Great Awakening

inflammatory: causing angry or violent feelings

ferment: agitation or excitement, typically leading to violence

allegiance: loyalty

Guiding Questions:

Name _____

1. (Sourcing) Who wrote this, and what is his job? Does he side with England or with the colonists? How do you know?

2. (Contextualization) Based on his account, what's going on in America in 1766? How has the Stamp Act affected him personally? Provide evidence from the document to support your answer.

3. Do you believe his account? Give one reason why you would trust his account and one reason why you might not trust his account.

4. (Corroboration) How does the account in this document compare to the accounts in Documents A and B? Do you think most colonists were upset about the Stamp Act, or do you think a few leaders riled up everyone?