

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S PRINTING NETWORK AND THE STAMP ACT

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Some Political Revolutions will probably mark the Beginning of the next Session; for the Struggle for Power is constant in this Country; nor can I see an End to it," London printer William Strahan wrote to Philadelphia printer David Hall in 1764. The English Parliament, in the midst of a governmental shakeup, would in the next session be "endeavouring to extinguish, in some Degree at least, our enormous Debt, which, if it is suffered to increase, must sooner or later overwhelm us."¹

These two forces, political reorganization and the enormous national debt, prompted Parliament to devise the Stamp Act. This measure, which taxed publications and legal papers, jeopardized the revenue of printers and lawyers—the two groups most capable of leading public opinion—and set the stage for the American Revolution.

Because of their tangible influence on the public, it is particularly important to consider the reactions of printers to the Stamp Act. When the tax took effect, there were twenty-two

newspapers printed in colonial British North America. Nine of these were under the proprietorship of printers allied with Benjamin Franklin. Some had formal partnerships with Franklin, others had worked for him in his Philadelphia printing house, and still others were related to him or financially indebted to him. As a group, this informal association of printers comprised Franklin's printing "network." His network began in 1729 when he formed a printing partnership with Hugh Meredith in Philadelphia and continued through his partnerships in the 1780s with grandson Benjamin Franklin Bache, who printed in Philadelphia, and with Philadelphia and New York printer Francis Childs. Franklin's network stretched from New England to the West Indies, comprised more than two dozen printers, and was the first chiefly non-family-based printing alliance in America. It served as a training ground for many early American printers, a mechanism of growth for the domestic press, and a source of moral principles for a mass audience.²

The Franklin network had existed for more than three decades when the Stamp Act crisis arose. Lord George Grenville advocated the tax as a means of collecting revenue, effectively forcing the colonies to pay a portion of the costs incurred during the French and Indian War. This military victory enabled Great Britain to become the predominant world power, albeit a nearly bankrupt one. By January 1763, the British national debt was 130 million pounds sterling. Strapped with a huge debt, Parliament decided that since the American colonists had benefited from the victory, they should assume part of the financial burden.³

At the beginning of the French and Indian War, colonial assemblies had approved stamp taxes in Massachusetts in 1755 and New York in 1757 to raise revenue for military expenditures. These taxes received a mixed response from printers in the Franklin network. In New York, Hugh Gaine raised the subscription price of his newspaper and defended the tax as a necessary expense to defend the colony from French incursions. James Parker also raised the price of his newspaper but publicly opposed the tax, claiming luxury items should be taxed instead.⁴

Opposition to these taxes was limited, though, because they were imposed by the colonial legislatures themselves, with some public support, and also because they were not overly burdensome to colonists. The levies were modest and sporadically enforced, and the acts creating them expired during the early years of the fighting. By the war's end, colonial contributions to defray the costs of the lengthy military campaign were nominal. This prompted

such key figures in British government as the Earl of Halifax, Charles Townshend, and the Earl of Bute to conclude the colonies would not voluntarily remit their share to reduce the debt. They determined that Parliament would have to force the colonists to pay for their defense.⁵

Grenville's plan, which had been suggested by merchant and land speculator Henry McCulloh, required that a stamp be placed on all legal documents, including loans, bills of sale, court briefs, college degrees, appointments to office, and indentures of apprenticeship, as well as on all dice, cards, almanacs, and newspapers. The tax would be almost impossible to violate because without the stamp colonists jeopardized their property, liberty, and economic prosperity. In short, British officials believed that self-interest would compel colonists to comply with the law. The tax would be easy to collect and would facilitate the enforcement of other laws such as charging fees on bonds and bills of lading; these documents had to bear the stamp or else they could be regarded as evidence of attempted fraud or smuggling.⁶

However, royal leaders knew it would be difficult to convince colonists to accept the tax. One Connecticut legislator used Franklinesque rhetoric to justify it. "The Stamp Duty may in some respects be distressing to ye present Generation, tho they would certainly be a means of promoting industry," William Johnson wrote. Upon learning from a member of Parliament about the Stamp Act's imminent passage, lawyer Jared Ingersoll responded, "You say America can and ought to contribute to its own Defence. We, one and all, say the same on this Side of the Water, we only differ about the Means."⁷

Grenville's plan received the support it needed and was approved by Parliament on February 27, 1765, with little dissent. It was signed into law by King George III the following month and designated to take effect on November 1, despite Benjamin Franklin's arguments in London against the tax. Franklin, who favored American representation in Parliament, contended colonists would bridle at an internal tax that neither they nor their legislatures had approved. English ministers countered by insisting that "the Colonies were all virtually represented in Parliament." Franklin offered an alternative to the tax. He recommended the Crown generate revenue by issuing one form of paper currency for all of the colonies, charging interest on it, and using the interest to pay the military debt. Since the colonists needed a reliable medium of exchange, Franklin argued, they would not object to paying the interest. However, Grenville disapproved of issuing paper money as legal tender and asserted Parliament's right to tax the colonists. He was, Franklin observed, "besotted with his Stamp Scheme."⁸

Despite the suspicion among some colonists that Franklin had encouraged the passage of the Stamp Act (a view exacerbated by the fact that Franklin arranged for several of his friends to become stamp distributors), Franklin remonstrated against passage of the tax. London printer William Strahan told Franklin's Philadelphia printing partner David Hall that Franklin "took all possible Pains to remove some of the Inconveniencies" of the Stamp Act, "tho' without Effect. But to think of his preventing the Tax being imposed altogether, he is as little able to stem the Tide at London Bridge with his little Finger."⁹

Franklin repeatedly professed that he had done everything possible to oppose the tax. "God knows I did all in my Power to prevent" the Stamp Act, he assured Hall, and informed Philadelphia politician Charles Thomson, "I took every Step in my Power, to prevent the Passing of the Stamp Act."¹⁰ Beaten by Grenville's resolve, Franklin advised that submitting to the tax was the most prudent course. "We might as well have hinder'd the Suns setting," he wrote to Thomson. "But since 'tis down, my Friend, and it may be long before it rises again, Let us make as good a Night of it as we can. We may still Light Candles. Frugallity and Industry will go a great way towards indemnifying us." Thomson responded that such infringements on colonial liberties as trade curtailment, the creation of vice-admiralty courts to prosecute offenses against the Stamp Act without juries, and a press "so restricted that we cannot complain," had stirred up public resentment past the point "of the candles you mention being lighted." The problem, he added, was that "Should the behaviour of the colonies happen not to square with these sovereign notions, (as I much fear it will not) what remains but by violence to compel them to obedience. Violence will beget resentment, and provoke to acts never dreamt of."¹¹

Thomson's assessment was accurate. Colonists were incensed, contending they should not be taxed by a political body to which they did not send representatives.¹² Inspired by journalistic rhetoric, Americans responded with unified retaliation in the form of non-importation of British goods and mob actions. Crowds gathered, riots broke out, and aggrieved factions threatened government officials in most colonial cities. The day after the tax took effect in New York, a mob attacked a British military officer's residence. As a participant recalled, "with one Consent [we] began upon the house and in Less than 10 Minutes had [it] down," then plundered and burned its contents. The following day a larger group, numbering in the thousands, "resolv'd to have the Governor Ded or Alive" if he enforced the

Stamp Act. He did not. As one observer in New York noted, "the Tempers of the people are so alter'd by the frightfull Stamp Act, tis beyond Conception, so violent & so universal." He added, "Strange Scenes we have had, Madness & folly triumphant."¹³

Acerbic newspaper printers and their correspondents, recognizing the tax as a threat to their livelihoods and to free expression, mounted a fierce propaganda campaign to rally public support. The Stamp Act's arrival was heralded with ringing denunciations equating the tax with despotism and proclaiming that taxation without parliamentary representation constituted tyranny. Throughout the colonies, essayists and orators argued that if the tax revenue was used to pay military expenses, the colonial assemblies would be stripped of the means to control royal officials, especially governors. The most persuasive of these excoriations were offered by the two groups most directly burdened by the Stamp Act—lawyers and printers. Because the measure placed a duty on all legal documents, on the paper used to publish newspapers, and on newspaper advertisements (which Franklin network printer James Parker called "the Life of a Paper"), these practitioners were galvanized to use their powers of persuasion to escalate the tax issue into an epic conflict between freedom and slavery.¹⁴

Colonial printers opposed the stamp tax in various ways. A few suspended publication rather than affix the stamp to their newspapers, some published without titles or other identifying references, and others openly defied the tax by printing without stamps. The *New-Hampshire Gazette* equated the tax with slavery and claimed the law to be "as fatal to almost all that is dear to us, as the *Ides of March* were, to the Life of *Caesar*." The *Connecticut Courant* said of the stamps, "it is hoped that every Lover of his Country will spurn, with the highest Indignation, the base Thought of ever purchasing a single one; and despise, execrate and detest the wretch who shall presume to countenance the Use of them, in any way whatever." In the pages of the press, "all the Colonys from Philadelphia to [New] Hampshire have Remonstrated Home against the Late Impositions," Rhode Island merchant Nicholas Brown wrote, adding, "we hope for a Discontinuance of them." The press had much to do with whipping up public fervor against the stamp tax and its agents. Joseph Galloway complained to Franklin, "The Printers on the Continent hav[e] combined together to print every thing inflammatory and nothing that is rational and Cool." As a result, "the people are Taught to believe the greatest Absurdities, and their Passions are excited to a Degree of Resentment against the Mother Country, beyond all Description."¹⁵

Many newspapers faithfully reported on colonial assemblies and town meetings that protested the tax, and opened up their columns to writers condemning the measure. Newspapers such as the *Boston Gazette* printed the names of stamp-tax collectors, calling them “mean mercenary Hirelings or Parricides among ourselves, who for a little filthy lucre would at any time betr[ay] every Right, Liberty, and Privilege of their fellow subjects.” The tax collectors were intimidated and hanged in public effigy. Pennsylvania stamp agent John Hughes, repeatedly threatened by mobs, suspected he would be killed and vowed, “I will defend my House at the Risque of my Life.” He was ultimately compelled to resign and was vilified for years afterward. Connecticut stamp master Jared Ingersoll told a friend about mob violence, including house burnings of government officials, who “were threatened in the highest manner with political death, so strong are the peoples resentments against the Stamp Act.” He added that he had suffered “the indignity of being burnt in Effigy & of having every ill natured thing published of me in News papers in the most unrestrained manner. I have been called Traitor, Parricide & the hardest of Names [and] am charged with having contributed to get the Stamp Act passed & all to Secure myself the office of Distributor.”¹⁶

Franklin, serving as a provincial agent in England, was out of touch with the tenor of the times. He was genuinely surprised by the public outcry against the Stamp Act in general and the stamp distributors in particular. Maryland stamp master Zachariah Hood reported that a mob “pull’d down my House, and obliged me to flie (with a single Suit)” or expect physical injury, and Pennsylvania distributor John Hughes told Franklin that a “Frenzy or Madness has got such hold of the People of all Ranks” that his life was in danger. Believing that public opposition would abate, Franklin cautioned Hughes to remain in his post, and suggested that “Acting with Coolness and Steadiness, and with every Circumstance in your Power of Favour to the People, will by degrees reconcile them.”¹⁷

An ocean away from the scenes of public and journalistic uprising, Franklin underestimated the colonial opposition occasioned by the economic restraint on the press, its advertisers, and its audience. Ever the pragmatist, Franklin accepted the tax as the law of the land. He counseled his network printers on how to minimize financial losses and on how to take the appropriate stance in the face of the growing revolutionary sentiment against the Stamp Act. “I think it will affect the Printers more than anybody,” he told David Hall.¹⁸ Fully expecting the measure to be enforced, Franklin advocated placid neutrality and submission as being in America’s best interest. “Loyalty

to the Crown and faithful Adherence to the Government of this Nation," he wrote to John Hughes, "will always be the wisest Course for you and I to take, whatever may be the Madness of the Populace or their blind Leaders, who can only bring themselves and Country into Trouble."¹⁹ Franklin advised Hall to stop selling *Pennsylvania Gazette* subscriptions and advertising space on credit, and to raise the newspaper's price. He also ordered over-sized half-sheets of newsprint for the Philadelphia printing shop, in a misguided effort to pay only half the tax. Franklin guessed that about ten percent of the subscribers would drop the *Gazette* due to the higher costs, but Hall painted a gloomier picture. He told Franklin most of the readers "will drop the Paper, when the Act takes Place, being resolved, as they say, not to pay any thing towards that Tax they can possibly avoid; and News Papers, they tell me, they can, and will, do without; so that there is the greatest Reason to fear that the Number of our Customers, from the First of November next, will be very trifling."²⁰ Two weeks before the tax took effect, Hall told Franklin that at least five hundred subscribers had cancelled, with more cancellations expected. Hall doubted the diminished revenue justified continuing the newspaper, but Franklin urged him to continue publishing the *Gazette*.²¹

Heeding Franklin's admonition to do nothing that might injure the colonies' reputation in England, Hall refrained from vigorous editorial criticism of the Stamp Act. Although many Pennsylvanians disdained Hall's stance, Franklin approved of his partner's editorial judgment. When Hall declined to publish vitriolic essays against the Stamp Act, Franklin endorsed the decision. "I think you have acted very prudently in omitting the Pieces," he wrote to Hall from London. "Nothing has done America more Hurt here than those kind of Writings . . . I should have been equally averse to printing them." Hall had always managed his press with circumspection, much to Franklin's delight. "Your prudent Conduct . . . gives me great Satisfaction," Franklin informed him. Hall, whom Franklin described as "so faithful a Partner," won Franklin's admiration with diligent business practices and careful selection of material to print. When Franklin wrote a controversial essay condemning violence against Native Americans, Hall cautiously avoided the dispute by arranging for Franklin's former Pennsylvania German-language partner Anton Armbruster to print the pamphlet.²²

Hall's mild position on the Stamp Act was also influenced by his desire to spare Franklin embarrassment while serving as Pennsylvania's agent in England. Hall's former London employer, William Strahan, also counseled patience and obedience, suggesting that the economic impact of the tax

might drive off several of Hall's Philadelphia competitors. This thought may have comforted Hall, who had become concerned about the increasing number of printing houses in the city.²³

With his two printing mentors advocating full compliance with the Stamp Act, the law-abiding Hall resolved to submit to its mandates. He was deeply troubled, however, by the levy's effect on the economic fortunes of American printers. In private correspondence, Hall called the Stamp Act a "horrid Law" that "will ruin us all in this Part of the World." Because all the stamped paper had to come from England, the measure would "ruin all our Paper-Makers" in the colonies, Hall lamented.²⁴

Hall also faced public pressure to join his fellow printers in lambasting the tax. Aroused colonists interpreted his policy of equal access for competing views and his avoidance of inserting his own editorial comments as timidity, and responded with subscription cancellations and personal harangues. Besieged by "the Clamours of the People," Hall informed Franklin of the widespread view that because "our Gazette, spreads more generally than all the other Papers put together on the Continent, our not Publishing, as the Printers of the other Papers do, will be an infinite Hurt to the Liberties of the People." Chafing under the dual restrictions of British law and Franklin's advice, Hall complained, "all the Papers on the Continent, ours excepted, were full of Spirited Papers against the Stamp Law, and that because, I did not publish those Papers likewise, I was much blamed, got a great Deal of Ill-will, and that some of our Customers had dropt on that Account." He concluded he would have to appease the public, despite Franklin's instructions to calmly submit to the tax. "So that how to Behave, I am really at a loss, but believe it will be best to humour them in some Publications, as they seem to insist so much upon it." Hall suspended publication of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* the day before the tax took effect, blaming "the most *Unconstitutional Act* that ever these Colonies could have imagined," but resumed publication a week later, issuing the newspaper without a heading or imprint and proclaiming "No Stamped Paper to be had."²⁵

Franklin's other partners and associates faced economic and political dilemmas occasioned by the Stamp Act. Like Hall, South Carolina printer Peter Timothy found himself entangled in the stricture of the law, the neutrality Franklin advocated, and the passion of the people. Although privately regarding the tax as a "hellish Idea," he followed Franklin's practical business advice. Timothy told readers "the STAMP-ACT must necessarily occasion an advance in the price" of the *South-Carolina Gazette*, and noted that "READY

MONEY" must accompany all advertisements because of the tax, "which the printers are to pay weekly." He changed his mind the day before the tax took effect, however, announcing the suspension of his newspaper because it would be "impossible to continue without great loss to the printer." The journalistic void was filled by Charles Crouch, Timothy's dishonest former apprentice, who was supported by Charleston radicals. They set up Crouch with his own printing shop and newspaper and, as Timothy informed Franklin, supported this "worthless Fellow" with "their utmost Zeal and Interest." As a result of "declining to direct, support and engage in the most violent Opposition," Timothy found himself "from the most *popular* reduced to the most *unpopular* Man in the Province."²⁶

New York printer and longtime Franklin partner James Parker, who had opposed colonial efforts to impose stamp taxes the previous decade, railed privately against "the fatal *Black-Act*," likening it to "a killing Frost" that "strikes a deadly Blow" at the printing trade. Parker had leased his New York newspaper to another Franklin network member, John Holt, before the tax took effect, and thus was not compelled to take an editorial stance on the subject. Parker regarded it as a blessing that "I am not a Master-Printer at New-York, or perhaps the Impetuosity of my Temper would have plunged me deep" into the controversy. He had planned to commence a newspaper in Burlington, New Jersey, but told Franklin "the News of the killing Stamp, has struck a deadly Blow to all my Hopes on that Head."²⁷

Younger printers who had risen through the ranks in the Franklin network were more ardent in their opposition to the tax. Holt was indecisive until pressured into radicalism by the New York Sons of Liberty. The first issue of Holt's *New-York Gazette: or, the Weekly Post-Boy* that appeared after the Stamp Act took effect announced it would ignore the tax, noting that the paper stood for "LIBERTY and PROSPERITY, and no STAMPS." Parker commented bitterly that Holt's defiant posture was a ploy to align himself with the prevailing radical factions. "Holt, who is grown so elate and popular, by his Appearance against the Act, had Nothing to lose: for had he suffered for it, I should have suffered the Loss of my Tools &c. whilst he got the Credit of it," he wrote. After his lease with Parker expired, Holt started his own newspaper, the *New-York Journal*, with the financial backing of the Sons of Liberty. Indebted to Parker both financially and morally, Holt nonetheless appropriated the *Post-Boy's* subscription list and accused Parker in the *Journal's* inaugural issue of having "deserted the Cause of Liberty" during the Stamp Act.²⁸

Other Franklin network printers were less bold. The nearly bankrupt William Weyman suspended publication of his New York newspaper several months before the Stamp Act took effect, resuming late in the year. Hugh Gainé opened the pages of his *New-York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* to both sides of the controversy. He published essays denying Britain's right to tax Americans without direct representation as well as papers delineating the British view that the colonies had effectual representation in Parliament because its members superintended the entire empire. Gainé told subscribers he maintained an open press because "to be well acquainted with those Arguments, in Support of Measures which so nearly concern us, is undoubtedly desired by every judicious Reader."²⁹

Angered by the Stamp Act's discriminatory double tax on printed material in languages other than English, Franklin's German-language printing partner Henry Miller adopted a vigorous anti-tax posture in his *Pennsylvanischer Staatsbote*. He printed synopses of protests and resolutions by the Sons of Liberty, often accompanied by sarcastic comments. Shortly before the tax took effect, Miller joined Hall and other Philadelphia printers in temporarily suspending newspaper publication after they had jointly sought legal counsel. Miller's announcement closely paralleled Hall's, citing "the most unconstitutional law these colonies have ever seen . . . places too heavy a burden on the editor." He resumed publication three weeks later without stamps, confident of public support.³⁰

The most intriguing publication of the era was *The Constitutional Courant*, a single-issue screed printed in New Jersey to resemble a newspaper. Published pseudonymously by Franklin network member William Goddard, the *Constitutional Courant* bore the celebrated Benjamin Franklin illustration of the segmented serpent, with each part representing a colony, under the exhortation "JOIN OR DIE."³¹ Goddard's appropriation of Franklin's "JOIN, OR DIE" (minus the comma) was innovative in that it lent a new meaning to the emblem. Franklin had initially used it in his *Pennsylvania Gazette* of May 9, 1754, on the eve of the French and Indian War, to call for colonial unity against invaders. The emblem was soon widely reproduced in other newspapers. Goddard reprinted it eleven years later as a symbol of colonial opposition to the Stamp Act in particular and British authority in general.³²

The *Constitutional Courant* consisted chiefly of two lengthy anti-tax essays. One, by "Philoleutherus," portrayed the men serving as stamp distributors and revenue collectors as greedy and wicked. He cautioned them, "Ye blots and stains of America! Ye vipers of human kind! Your names shall be blasted

with infamy, the public execration shall pursue you while living, and your memories shall rot, when death has disabled you from propagating vassalage and misery any further." He added, "Murder your fathers, rip op the bowels of your mothers, dash the infants you have begotten against the stones, and be blameless;—but enslave your country! This, this is guilt, this calls for heaven's fiercest vengeance."³³

The other essay, by "Philopatrinae," blamed Parliament for the tax and the lawlessness it incited. Philopatrinae asserted, "the guilt of all these violences is most justly chargeable upon the authors and abettors of the Stamp Act. They who endeavour to destroy the foundations of the English constitution, and break thro' the fence of the laws, in order to let in a torrent of tyranny and oppression upon their fellow-subjects, ought not to be surprized if they are overwhelmed in it themselves."³⁴

Although printed in New Jersey, the *Constitutional Courant* first appeared in New York, where street hawkers sold it. Copies of the screed were also delivered to other colonies via post-riders. It was sold as far away as Charleston, reprinted in Boston and Philadelphia, and enjoyed sales in the thousands. The *Constitutional Courant* had such an immediate and widespread effect that the English *Annual Register* of 1765 labeled it the most influential Stamp Act essay to appear in North America. It noted that the *Constitutional Courant* contained "things of the most serious nature, and such as the most despotic tyrant might expect to see remonstrated against by the most abject vassals."³⁵

British officials decided not to try to determine the identity of the printer and writer, regarding it "prudent at this time to delay the makeing [of] more particular Enquiry least it should be the occasion of raising the Mob, which it is thought proper by all means to avoid," New York's acting governor wrote. Major General Thomas Gage, the commander of British troops in North America, also expressed "apprehensions about prosecuting the Printers at this juncture." In Gage's opinion, the Stamp Act could only be enforced by large concentrations of military troops in each city, a luxury Great Britain could not afford. As a result, a perplexed and frustrated Gage could do little more than watch as publications such as the *Constitutional Courant* "raise people of all degrees against the Stamp Act" and cause them to be "transported with phrenzy," he wrote back to London.³⁶

The *Constitutional Courant* and other American newspaper essays denouncing the tax were distributed to members of Parliament. Some, like Grenville, called the colonial response "downright Rebellion," and others proposed

minor alterations in the stamp tax. In an impassioned speech before the House of Commons, however, William Pitt concurred with the colonial view that Parliament had no right to lay taxes on America and cautioned that more trouble would ensue if the tax was enforced. His view prevailed, and Parliament repealed the Stamp Act on February 22, 1766.³⁷ The repeal "will make thousands of hearts leap for joy," the Rev. George Whitefield predicted, while a Connecticut legislator wrote his wife that the news "is Joy and Gladness to all true sons of Liberty."³⁸ The chief catalysts of the repeal were Britain's economic woes caused by the non-importation movement and the riotous behavior in the colonies, which portended an emerging spirit of independence. Franklin had fueled Parliament's fear that Grenville's Stamp Act and rigid policies of enforcement had unleashed a colonial movement for economic liberty. Summoned to testify in the House of Commons during deliberations about repeal, Franklin portrayed the colonists as loyal subjects who did not object to all taxes, simply ones levied without legislative representation and inimical to their interests.³⁹

Following the repeal, some members of Parliament discussed a plan to make the colonies pay for the stamped paper that had been refused and destroyed. In a newspaper essay, Franklin responded that the proposal reminded him of a Frenchman who heated a poker and asked an Englishman to let him insert the poker into his backside. When the Englishman refused, the Frenchman requested payment for the trouble and expense of heating the iron.⁴⁰

It is difficult to imagine a parliamentary action more ill-conceived than the Stamp Act. By placing the heaviest tax burden on the two groups most capable of directing public opinion, the British government kindled flames of resentment and nationalism that it could never quench. Lawyers (through speeches and journalistic writings) and printers (by publishing their own essays and those of others) fanned these flames, manufacturing a reality for their audience chiefly to serve their own purposes, venting their frustration over a tax that would most directly affect them. Printers, because of their central role in the social construction of knowledge, the dissemination of "news," and the shaping of popular sentiment, succeeded in making their fight one for colonists more generally.

Aggressive young printers who received their vocational training in the Franklin network, such as Charles Crouch, William Goddard, and John Holt,

used their presses to frame the most extreme and influential arguments for colonial solidarity. Their elder counterparts, such as David Hall and Peter Timothy, followed Franklin's counsel of deference, prudence, and equanimity, only to suffer public resentment until they united their presses with the radical cause.

Franklin's advice and instructions to them were based on his beliefs about what was best for the people and the nation. Franklin thought himself well qualified to judge how colonists should behave regarding the Stamp Act. He believed in the prevailing wisdom of British officials and was convinced that submission, coupled with peaceful and reasoned remonstrance, was the surest way to secure change. It was this message he hoped his network members would convey to colonial readers. Most did not, however, and thus contributed to the public resentment of the Stamp Act that a decade later, and after many additional incidents, erupted in the American Revolution.

NOTES

1. William Strahan to David Hall, September 19, 1764, David Hall Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia [hereafter APS]. For the argument that Great Britain's political turbulence in the 1760s prompted many governmental leaders on both sides of the Atlantic to conclude that the press enjoyed too much freedom and should be restrained, see Robert R. Rea, *The English Press in Politics, 1760–1774* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963).
2. On Franklin's printing network, see Ralph L. Frasca, "The Virtue of the Art: Benjamin Franklin's Printing Network and the Moral Aspirations of the Early-American Press" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1994).
3. For comparison, the annual national budget at the time was 8 million pounds sterling. Larry L. Gerlach, *Prologue to Independence: New Jersey in the Coming of the American Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1976), 92–93. On the American Stamp Act generally, see John L. Bullion, *A Great and Necessary Measure: George Grenville and the Taxation of America, 1763–1765* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982); Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763–1789* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 70–93; Edward S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953).
4. *New-York Mercury*, December 20, 1756; *New-York Gazette, or Weekly Post-Boy*, October 4, December 20 and 27, 1756, April 18 and October 17, 1757. Parker also authored a brief pamphlet responding to an advocate of the New York stamp tax. Parker argued the duty was "a very grievous Burden upon Printers in general in New-York," and, taking a Franklinesque stance, instead proposed a tax on periwigs and other objects of "Luxury." James Parker, *A Letter to the Gentleman in the City of New-York* (New York: James Parker, 1759).
5. Mack Thompson, "Massachusetts and New York Stamp Acts," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 26 (1969): 253–58; Bullion, *A Great and Necessary Measure*, 25–26.

6. "The Stamp Act," in *Documents of American History*, ed. Henry Steele Commager (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968), 53–55; Bullion, *A Great and Necessary Measure*, 64–65, 104–5. On Grenville, see Philip Lawson, "George Grenville and America: The Years of Opposition, 1765 to 1770," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 37 (1980): 561–76.
7. "To the Printer of the London Chronicle," December 30, 1758, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959–) (hereafter *PBF*), 8:215; *Poor Richard's Almanack*, 1758, *ibid.*, 7:341; William Johnson to Cadwallader Colden, September 13, 1765, Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection, New-York Historical Society [hereafter NYHS]; Jared Ingersoll to T.W., July 6, 1764, in *Mr. Ingersoll's Letters Relating to the Stamp-Act* (New Haven: Samuel Green, 1766).
8. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 16, 1765; Benjamin Franklin to Cadwalader Evans, May 9, 1766, in *PBF*, 13:268–69; "Scheme for Supplying the Colonies with a Paper Currency," February 11–12, 1765, *ibid.*, 12:47–60; Thomas Pownall and Franklin to George Grenville, February 12, 1765, *ibid.*, 12:60–61; Franklin to James Galloway, October 11, 1766, *ibid.*, 13:447–50; Verner W. Crane, "Benjamin Franklin and the Stamp Act," *Colonial Society of Massachusetts Transactions* 82 (1934): 56–57.
9. William Strahan to David Hall, July 8, 1765, David Hall Papers, APS.
10. Benjamin Franklin to David Hall, September 14, 1765, in *PBF*, 12:267; Benjamin Franklin to Charles Thomson, July 11, 1765, *ibid.*, 12:207.
11. Benjamin Franklin to Charles Thomson, July 11, 1765, in *PBF*, 12:207–8; Thomson to Franklin, September 24, 1765, *ibid.*, 12:279–80.
12. The colonists' reluctance to be governed by Englishmen, rather than Americans, was not new in 1765. In fact, it was a legacy of their ancestors' protests a century earlier. Responding to an English plan to send officials to America to compel colonists' obedience to English laws, Massachusetts Governor John Endecott expressed his opposition in a letter to lord chancellor Edward Hyde, claiming English enforcement of colonial laws would be "altogether inconsistent with the charter & privileges" that King Charles II promised "not in the least to violate or infringe." John Endecott to Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, November 8, 1664, Collection of Original Letters Relating to the American Colonies, John Carter Brown Library. A generation later, New Englanders engaged in a bloodless uprising known as the Revolution of 1689 to secure greater rights of governmental self-determination. For an examination of a pamphlet that fueled the revolt, see Ian K. Steele, "Origins of Boston's Revolutionary Declaration of 18 April 1689," *New England Quarterly* 62 (1989): 75–81.
13. E. Carther to [?], November 2, 1765, Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection, NYHS; John Watts to Moses Franks, November 9, 1765, John Watts Letterbook, NYHS; Watts to General Monckton, November 22, 1765, *ibid.* For more on civil disturbances in New York, see Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760–1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

Some mob actions were carefully orchestrated by Whig leaders, and others were spontaneous eruptions, but nearly all were designed to highlight grievances symbolically through attacks on property rather than on persons. For more on the causes and purposes of early American civil disorders, see Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Political Mobs and the American Revolution, 1765–1776," *Proceedings of the*

American Philosophical Society 99 (1955): 244–50; Thomas P. Slaughter, “Crowds in Eighteenth-Century America: Reflections and New Directions,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 115 (1991): 3–14.

Psychologists who study mob behavior have persuasively argued that outrage and anger can spread from person to person like a virus and, when a crowd of these highly aroused people forms, they may suspend self-evaluation and adopt the group's attitudes, which are often established by its most vigorous members. Gustave LeBon, *The Crowd* (New York: Viking, 1960); Neal E. Miller and John Dollard, *Social Learning and Imitation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941). This point is exemplified by Major General Thomas Gage's observation about Boston rioters who ransacked and destroyed numerous houses. “People then began to be terrified at the spirit they had raised, to perceive that popular fury was not to be guided, and each individual feared he might be the next victim to their rapacity.” Thomas Gage to Henry Seymour Conway, September 23, 1765, Stamp Act Papers, Bancroft Transcript, Library of Congress [hereafter LC].

14. James Parker to Benjamin Franklin, December 24, 1767, in *PBF*, 14:347. Colonial publications are rife with examples of attacks on the Stamp Act. For a discussion of how the press galvanized public opinion against the tax, see Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764–1776* (New York: Knopf, 1971), 67–84. For a full treatment of how the tax affected printers, see Francis G. Walett, “The Impact of the Stamp Act on the Colonial Press,” in *Newsletters to Newspapers: 18th-Century Journalism*, ed. Donovan H. Bond and W. Reynolds McLeod (Morgantown: School of Journalism, West Virginia University, 1977): 157–69. See also Morgan and Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 187–89.

Many other sources furnish information about attacks on the stamp levy by lawyers and politicians. For example, see Philip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763–1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 6, 11, 16, 18, 23, 41, 49; Morgan and Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 168–79.

15. *New-Hampshire Gazette*, October 31, 1765; *Connecticut Courant*, October 28, 1765; Nicholas Brown to Esek Hopkins, December 30, 1764, Brigantine Sally Papers, John Carter Brown Library; Joseph Galloway to Benjamin Franklin, January 13, 1766, in *PBF*, 13:36.
16. *Boston Gazette*, August 12, 1765; John Hughes to Benjamin Franklin, September 12, 1765, in *PBF*, 12:266; Jared Ingersoll to Richard Jackson, November 3, 1765, Ingersoll Papers, New Haven Colony Historical Society. Stamp distributors were often compelled by crowds to sign statements pledging they would not enforce the tax. See, for example, Affidavit of John Hughes, October 7, 1765, Society Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania [hereafter HSP].
17. Zachariah Hood to Benjamin Franklin, September 23, 1765, in *PBF*, 12:278; John Hughes to Franklin, September 8, 1765, *ibid.*, 12:264; Franklin to Hughes, August 9, 1765, *ibid.*, 12:234–35. Such acts of violence and rebellion were more likely in areas farther removed from the British Empire's seat of government in London. Indeed, even within England royal authorities encountered difficulties enforcing laws in distant and rural areas. Robert W. Malcolmson, “‘A set of ungovernable people’: the Kingswood Colliers in the Eighteenth Century,” in *An Ungovernable People: English and Their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. John Brewer and John Styles (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 85–86.
18. Benjamin Franklin to David Hall, February 14, 1765, in *PBF*, 12:65–66.

19. Benjamin Franklin to John Hughes, August 9, 1765, *ibid.*, 12:235.
20. Benjamin Franklin to David Hall, June 8, August 9, 1765, *ibid.*, 12:171–72, 233–34; Hall to Franklin, June 20, June 22, 1765, *ibid.*, 12:189–90.
21. Hall to Franklin, October 14, 1765, *ibid.*, 12:319–20.
22. Benjamin Franklin to David Hall, September 14, 1765, *ibid.*, 12:268; Franklin to Hall, April 8, 1759, *ibid.*, 8:317; Franklin to Deborah Franklin, June 10, 1758, *ibid.*, 8:92; Benjamin Franklin, *A Narrative of the Late Massacres in Lancaster County . . .* (Philadelphia: Anton Armbruster, 1764).
23. William Strahan to David Hall, August 19, 1765, Society Collection, APS. Hall had apparently mentioned his plethora of competitors in a letter to Strahan earlier that summer and in one to Franklin in December 1758, both of which are lost. “The Country is increasing and Business must increase with it,” Franklin responded. “We are pretty well establish’d, and shall probably with God’s Blessing and a prudent Conduct always have our Share. The young ones will not be so likely to hurt us as one another.” Benjamin Franklin to Hall, April 8, 1759, in *PBF*, 8:319.
24. David Hall to William Strahan, September 6, 1765, Society Collection, APS; Hall to Henry Unwin, May 19, 1765, David Hall Papers, APS.
25. David Hall to Benjamin Franklin, September 6, 1765, in *PBF*, 12:258; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 31, November 7, 1765. Hall’s emergence as a patriot during the Stamp Act crisis is discussed in Robert D. Harlan, “David Hall and the Stamp Act,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 61 (1967): 13–37; Robert Hurd Kany, “David Hall: Printing Partner of Benjamin Franklin,” (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1963), 180–96.
26. Peter Timothy to Benjamin Franklin, September 3, 1768, in *PBF*, 15:202; *South-Carolina Gazette*, October 19, 31, 1765. Ironically, Crouch was Timothy’s brother-in-law. Isaiah Thomas, *History of Printing in America*, ed. Marcus McCorison (New York: Weathervane, 1970), 571. For more on Timothy’s activities and their effect on his reputation, see Jeffery A. Smith, “Impartiality and Revolutionary Ideology: Editorial Policies of the *South-Carolina Gazette*, 1732–1775,” *Journal of Southern History* 49 (1983), 522–24.
27. *Connecticut Gazette*, November 1, 1765; James Parker to Benjamin Franklin, April 25, June 14, August 8, September 22, 1765, in *PBF*, 12:111, 175, 230, 277; Alan Dyer, *A Biography of James Parker, Colonial Printer* (Troy, NY: Whitston, 1982), 75–76.
28. *New York Gazette: or, the Weekly Post-Boy*, November 7, 1765; James Parker to Benjamin Franklin, November 11, 1766, in *PBF*, 13:474; *New-York Journal*, May 29, 1766.
29. *New-York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, January 28, May 20, June 17, November 18, December 23, 1765.
30. David Hall to Benjamin Franklin, October 14, 1765, in *PBF*, 12:320; *Pennsylvanischer Staatsbote*, October 28, 1765. For more on German printers’ response to the Stamp Act, see Willi Paul Adams, “The Colonial German-Language Press and the American Revolution,” in *The Press & American Revolution*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1980), 181–93.
31. Ralph Frasca, “‘At the Sign of the Bribe Refused’: The *Constitutional Courant* and the Stamp Tax, 1765,” *New Jersey History* 107 (Fall-Winter 1989): 21–39; Ward L. Miner, *William Goddard, Newspaperman* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1962).

32. The newspapers included the *New-York Gazette: or, Weekly Post-Boy*, May 13, 1754; *New-York Mercury*, May 13, 1754; *Boston Gazette*, May 21, 1754; *Boston News-Letter*, May 23, 1754. For a history of the uses of Franklin's emblem, see Lester C. Olson, "Benjamin Franklin's Pictorial Representations of the British Colonies in America: A Study in Rhetorical Iconology," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 18–42.
33. *Constitutional Courant*, September 21, 1765.
34. Ibid.
35. Miner, *William Goddard, Newspaperman*, 50–52; Thomas, *History of Printing in America*, 524–25; Edmund Burke, ed., *Annual Register for 1765*, 3d ed. (London: Lackington, Allen, 1802), 50–51.
36. Cadwallader Colden to Henry Seymour Conway, [1765], in *Cadwallader Colden Letter Books* (New York: New-York Historical Society Collections, 1876–77), 2:45; Thomas Gage to Henry Seymour Conway, September 23, November 4, November 8, 1765, Stamp Act Papers, Bancroft Transcript, LC.
37. W. Blair to Mark Baskett, December 21, 1765, Stamp Act Papers, Bancroft Transcript, LC; William Strahan to David Hall, January 11, 1766, David Hall Letters, HSP; Benjamin Franklin to Joseph Galloway, January 16, 1766, Franklin Papers, HSP; Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 110–17.
In a face-saving effort following the repeal, Conway told colonial governors that because of the "Moderation, the Forbearance, the unexampled Lenity and Tenderness of Parliament towards the Colonies" exemplified in the repeal, their citizens were expected to show "cheerful obedience to the laws and legislative authority of Great Britain" and "respectful gratitude to the mother country." Henry Seymour Conway to Governors of Various Provinces in America, March 31, 1766, Stamp Act Papers, Bancroft Transcript, LC.
38. George Whitefield to Peter Van Burgh Livingston, February 27, 1766, Collections, Connecticut Historical Society; Benadam Gallup to [?] Gallup, May 24, 1766, State Archives, Connecticut State Library.
39. "Examination before the Committee of the Whole of the House of Commons," February 13, 1766, in *PBF*, 13:156–59.
40. *The Pennsylvania Chronicle, and Universal Advertiser*, March 23, 1767, reprinted in *PBF*, 13:182–84. Late in life, Franklin acknowledged authorship of this essay. Benjamin Franklin to Jane Mecom, November 26, 1788, in *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. John Bigelow (New York: Knickerbocker, 1904), 12:19.

