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The Sons of Liberty and the Creation of a Movement Model

On Christmas Day 1765, a new era in the history of protest began. On frozen Connecticut fields outside New London, Sons of Liberty from New York City met deputations from the surrounding region. Building from the escalating resistance to the Stamp Act across Britain's American colonies since news of the reviled legislation arrived several months earlier, the groups agreed "to associate, advise, protect and defend each other in the peaceable, full and just enjoyment of their inherent and accustomed rights as British subjects" – pledging to come "with their full force if required" to contest government incursions on their liberties. Even more importantly, all present pledged to spread the alliance to "perfect the like association with all the colonies on the continent" to reinforce their efforts.[1] Within weeks, their pact spread from New Hampshire to Georgia, enabling unprecedented coordination across the thirteen colonies.

The Sons of Liberty–centered opposition to the Stamp Act in 1765–66 created a fundamentally new kind of protest campaign. Utilizing correspondence and newspaper publicity, the colonists combined their efforts into an unprecedented political alliance, openly affiliating and coordinating their actions. In so doing, they created a model of allied corresponding societies with far-flung ramifications for both their standoff with British authorities and subsequent Atlantic movements over the decades to come.

The Rise of the Sons of Liberty

Word of the Stamp Act reached American shores in April 1765, though the legislation's start date and full contents were only published in late May.[2] Parliament passed the measure to service debts from the recent Seven Years' War, promoting austerity while exploiting the colonies' growing civil society and limiting their self-government. British authorities required various stamps on items from newspapers and pamphlets (though not books) to playing cards

[1] Connecticut Historical Society, American Revolution Collection, Box 11, Folder M; Edmund S. and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 201.
[2] *Boston Evening-Post*, May 27, 1765.

and dice, to apprenticeship papers, professional licenses, and legal documents, even though "internal" taxes had previously been under the purview of colonial legislatures.[3] Colonists contemplated resistance. At an otherwise genteel Maryland planters gathering on a ship in Baltimore harbor that June, a French traveler described locals loudly, "Damning their souls if they would pay and Damn them but they would fight to the last Drop of their blood before they would Consent to any such slavery."[4] Elaborating an adequate method of protest, however – short of outright rebellion, which none yet endorsed – required innovations as unprecedented as the legislation itself.

The House of Burgesses, believing their unique right to levy internal taxes challenged by Parliament, galvanized an anti–Stamp Act campaign by passing the Virginia Resolves on May 30. Twenty-nine-year-old firebrand Patrick Henry's resolutions declared any British attempt to usurp taxation rights within the colony as "illegal, unconstitutional, and unjust," threatening "to destroy British, as well as American freedom." The Burgesses declined to pass even more radical resolves declaring their citizens "not bound to yield obedience to any law" violating their rights. Yet after rumors that the legislature would declare anyone enforcing the Stamp Act "an Enemy to his Country," Virginia's governor dissolved the assembly.[5] The resolves, immediately sent northward by courier, circulated broadly before being published in Boston (and then across the colonies), emboldening widespread opposition.[6] Protests against the unwelcome measures seemed certain: newspapers ran an anonymous July letter declaring "Associations are forming," with thousands subscribing to oppose the act, without describing how.[7] With enforcement to begin on November 1, papers printed several would-be stamp officers' names.[8]

Resistance to new British taxes had already begun two years earlier. In November 1763, reacting to growing British enforcement of long-dormant customs duties (some designed to quash virtually all trading with non-British colonies) during an acute postwar recession, Boston's merchants organized a "grand committee" to "open a correspondence with the principal merchants in all our sister colonies, endeavoring to promote a union, and a coalition of all

[3] Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act*, 96–97.
[4] "Journal of a French Traveler in the Colonies, 1765," *American Historical Review* 27, no. 1 (1921), 73.
[5] Jack P. Greene, *The Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689–1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 363; Mercy Otis Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution* (Boston: Larkin, 1805), Vol. 1, 405–6; "Diary of a French Traveler," 745.
[6] NA CO 5/891 270; William Gordon, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America* (London, 1788), Vol. 1, 171.
[7] *New-York Gazette*, July 11, 1765; *Boston Gazette*, July 22, 1765.
[8] *New Hampshire Gazette*, June 28, 1765; *South-Carolina Gazette*, July 15, 1765.

their councils." New York passed a matching petition.[9] Officials responded by enlisting the British Navy to seize contraband cargo, even allowing crews to keep half the captured goods. Profitable (though illegal) trade with French and Spanish colonies was curtailed. The crackdowns affected most American importers, while favoring British and Caribbean interests over continental concerns.[10] Colonists observed a growing imperial consensus that excluded them. Only a significant show of colonial solidarity and resistance could derail Parliament's reorganization plans.

Massachusetts' House of Representatives urged other colonial assemblies to protest together for the restrictions' repeal – appointing a Committee of Correspondence to lead the campaign. Selected legislators would "acquaint" the other colonies with the instructions Massachusetts sent its London lobbyist, publicizing their "desire the several assemblies on the continent join with them in the same measures."[11] Legislatures from Rhode Island to South Carolina appointed similar committees, and nine petitioned Parliament in 1764 for redress.[12] Two hundred and fifty copies of committee resolutions reached London for the city's merchants.[13] Colonists nevertheless hoped to mitigate the worst British restrictions through presenting a powerful, united front. Parliament deciding American taxes seemed anathema. New York petitioned: "Without such a Right" to self-taxation, "there can be no Liberty, no Happiness, no Security."[14] Although the colonies competed for British favor and finance, and had previously been more concerned with imperial than "American" concerns, now, as dissenting minister William Gordon wrote in his early history of the era, "a new kind of correspondence was opened between the colonies, tending to unite them" against unwanted legislation.[15] The

[9] Charles Rappelye, *Sons of Providence: The Brown Brothers, the Slave Trade, and the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 43; Joseph S. Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries: New York City and the Road to Independence, 1763–1776* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 62.

[10] Thomas P. Slaughter, *Independence: The Tangled Roots of the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2014), 250; O'Shaughnessy, *Empire*, 63–68; Edward Countryman, *The American Revolution*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003); 52–53.

[11] Gordon, *History of the Rise*, Vol. 1, 153; C. A. Weslager, *The Stamp Act Congress* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1976), 58.

[12] David Lee Russell, *The American Revolution in the Southern Colonies* (Jefferson, NC: Macfarland, 2000), 26; Les Standiford, *Desperate Sons: Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, John Hancock, and the Secret Bands of Radicals Who Led the Colonies to War* (New York: Harper, 2012), 35; Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763–1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 68.

[13] Massachusetts Historical Society, Ezekiel Price Papers, 29.

[14] Edmund S. Morgan, *Prologue to Revolution: Sources and Documents on the Stamp Act Crisis, 1764–1766* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 9.

[15] Gordon, *History of the Rise*, Vol. 1, 153.

British Parliament, however, gave the 1764 petitions no formal consideration.[16]

The increasingly dysfunctional relationship between the colonies and Parliament contributed to the Stamp Act's disastrous rollout. Parliamentary authorities sent a preliminary proposal for colonial consultation in June 1764, with Prime Minister George Grenville asking for "the sense of the Colonies themselves upon the matter, and if they could point out any system or plan as effectual," he would entertain it. Colonial legislatures, seething after recent levies, nevertheless wanted more information. Massachusetts drafted an alternative tax plan, asking Parliament for "the particular sum expected from each province" in revenue.[17] Rather than continuing negotiations, Grenville pressed forward, impatient for funds and believing the prosperous colonies better able to shoulder new taxes than Britain itself.[18] London merchants petitioned against the measure due to colonial indebtedness (which new taxes would hinder their ability to collect), while addresses arrived from the West Indies, Virginia, and the Carolinas. They were dismissed unread with the ministry declaring the right to petition did not extend to "money bills."[19] No one during debates in Parliament spoke favorably of a colonial right to self-taxation.

The name "Sons of Liberty", and indeed much of the group's initial inspiration, came from abroad. An Irish Tory polemicist used the phrase in 1756 to rail against County Antrim's Patriot Club, likening such "Sons of Liberty" to "Cromwell's grim ghost" during an Irish Parliamentary financial dispute.[20] The term gained positive use during the British Parliament's Stamp Act debates. Colonel Isaac Barré, an Irish Protestant son of French Huguenots and veteran wounded in the recent conquest of Quebec, took a strong pro-American position, declaring the colonists "sons of liberty" and asserting early settlers "fled tyranny" to seek "true English liberties" in a harsh land.[21] By adopting a term from British and Irish debates, those colonists calling themselves Sons of Liberty sought Atlantic audiences.

More than most subsequent social movements, just who (or what) the Sons of Liberty initially were was only hazily defined. A secret organization to coordinate resistance in Boston known as the Loyal Nine developed by

[16] Bruce A. Ragsdale, *A Planters' Republic: The Search for Economic Independence in Revolutionary Virginia* (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1996), 50.
[17] Morgan, *Prologue*, 28.
[18] John L. Bullion, *A Great and Necessary Measure: George Grenville and the Genesis of the Stamp Act, 1763–1765* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982), 198.
[19] Gordon, *History of the Rise*, Vol. 1, 161; *Boston Gazette*, May 20, 1765.
[20] *Advice to the Patriot Club of the County of Antrim on the Present State of Affairs in Ireland, and Some Late Changes in the Administration of That Kingdom* (Dublin, 1756), 14; Vincent Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760–1783* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 39.
[21] Peter Brown, *The Chathamites: A Study in the Relationship between Personalities and Ideas in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 190–97.

August 1765, featuring the outspoken Samuel Adams and *Boston Gazette* printer Benjamin Edes, though the extent of the group's linkage with the later organization is unclear. Keeping the Sons' composition and actions secret seemed prudent for an extralegal campaign. The movement appeared coordinated by well-placed figures, however: as early historian David Ramsay wrote, Stamp Act protests "were not ebullitions of a thoughtless mob, but for the most part, planned by leading men of character and influence" in the colonies. Believing "the bulk of mankind, are more led by their senses, than by their reason," organizers mobilized exemplary displays against stamp supporters.[22] Keeping the leadership secret made it easier to speak for the full populace, while crowds' apparent spontaneity made them all the more intimidating.

Boston initiated public protests, bringing the wrath and collective power of the townspeople against Stamp Act enforcers. On the Wednesday, August 14 market day, agitators allegedly organized by the Loyal Nine hung an effigy of prosperous merchant and would-be stamp collector Andrew Oliver from a well-placed tree and publicized an evening demonstration. Upon cutting the figure down, "some thousands" paraded the effigy past government headquarters on King Street, where the town council sat debating whether to repress the protest, giving "three huzzas" audible inside. The group continued to a new building Oliver was constructing, which they labeled a future "stamp office" and destroyed. Protesters proceeded with building beams to Fort Hill, used the tainted wood to build a pyre, and then incinerated the effigy. Hearing Oliver had returned home, protesters proceeded there, forcing the detested official to flee to Castle William.[23] Twelve days later, on August 26 a second mob after a bonfire rally marched on the residences of three prominent alleged Stamp Act supporters: the Admiralty court's Deputy Registrar, Comptroller of the Customs, and Lieutenant Governor. The crowd, "enflam'd with Rum & Wine," devastated their properties, "burnt & scattered the books & files," along with destroying windows, furniture, and personal effects, before promptly dispersing at midnight.[24] Though Boston's town meeting the next day would "vote their detestation" of such attacks on private property (offering £300 to "any one who shall discover the Leader, or Leaders of the

[22] David Ramsay, *History of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: Aitken, 1789), Vol. 1, 69–70.

[23] *Providence Gazette*, August 24, 1765; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 29, 1765; *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 16, 126–27; Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act*, 123–24; Maier, *Resistance*, 85.

[24] *By His Excellency Francis Bernard, Esq. A Proclamation* (Boston, 1765); *New Hampshire Gazette*, September 6, 1765; *Boston Evening Gazette*, September 7, 1765; Harvard Business School Library, William Lloyd Letterbook, 151; MHS James Freeman Letterbook; NA CO 5/217 15; MHS John Tudor Papers.

Mob"), a denunciation assemblies down to Charleston echoed, a new paradigm of intimidating protest spread against Stamp Act supporters.[25]

The colonial press magnified Bostonians' actions, inspiring copycat protests and a growing spirit of Stamp Act resistance. Norwich, Connecticut residents, emulating the "noble patriotic fire" having "of late shown so conspicuous in Boston," marched a stamp officer effigy through town before burning it on a public square, where participants drank "very constitutional Healths" before dispersing.[26] Newport, Rhode Island destroyed effigies of three suspect figures, "burnt amid the acclamations of thousands," on August 27.[27] Southward, protests erupted in Baltimore on August 28 and in Annapolis, Elk Ridge, and Frederick Town, Maryland the next day, featuring effigies reading "Tyranny," "Oppression," and "Damn my Country I'll get money." The Annapolis effigy met an ignominious end as protesters "whipped it at the whipping post, placed it in the Pillory, afterwards hung it on a Gibbet and then burned it."[28] In northern Virginia, Burgess and prominent landowner Richard Henry Lee even enlisted his slaves to march an effigy of the local stamp officer to a nearby courthouse, for having "endeavoured to fasten the chains of slavery on this my native country," without apparent irony.[29] Across regions, the general British attack on colonial privileges encouraged matching protests in response.

The symbolic violence's vehemence, so widely repeated, broadcast the situation's seriousness. "Exhibitions of this sort are now very common in this Province," the *Pennsylvania Gazette* described in mid-September.[30] Such widespread agitation created a symphony of opposition, by which, as a Boston letter informed *South-Carolina Gazette* readers, "we shall diffuse among his Majesty's American subjects a general joy, equal to the resignation of a STAMP-OFFICER, or even the repeal of the STAMP ACT itself."[31] Boston Congregationalist minister Jonathan Mayhew found colonists "sanguine in the expectation of a speedy repeal," with the measure becoming "pernicious to Great Britain, by ruining the colonies." Though the colonies remained "very far indeed, from desiring to be independent," he asserted, "this Act will never be carried into execution, without the effusion of much blood."[32] Fellow Boston reverend Samuel Mather asserted the Stamp Act encouraged

[25] *New London Gazette*, August 30, 1765; MHS James Freeman Letterbook.
[26] *New London Gazette*, August 23, 1765.
[27] *South-Carolina Gazette*, September 21, 1765; Gordon, *History of the Rise*, Vol. 1, 183.
[28] Library of Congress Peter Force Papers, American Stamp Act Papers, Box VIII B: 5–6; Ramsay, Vol. 1, 69–70.
[29] J. Kent McGaughy, *Richard Henry Lee of Virginia* (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2004), 78.
[30] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 12 and 19, 1765; *Boston Post-Boy*, September 23, 1765; *South-Carolina Gazette*, September 28, 1765.
[31] *South-Carolina Gazette*, September 21, 1765.
[32] MHS Thomas Hollis Papers.

"alienation from the Mother Country: And any Methods to enforce it will only increase this alienation."[33] Governor Francis Bernard fretted, "if things do not take another turn before the 1st Novr, the very appearance of Government will cease."[34] British administrators would be unable to function in such a charged atmosphere.

As protests, breathlessly reported by the colonial press, spread across the colonies, soon too did stamp officer resignations. Oliver, three days after Boston's initial protest, resigned his commission on August 17. Bernard declared the government "utterly unable to oppose or correct an insurrection of this kind," given how protesters vastly outnumbered loyal forces.[35] "We doubt not," declared a New York letter published in the *Boston Gazette*, "the noble Example of our Brethren in Boston, as it is approved by all, will be unanimously followed by all the Colonies that boast the same Origin."[36] On September 16, rumors surfaced in Boston of a new stamp collector passing en route to New Hampshire, leading alarm bells to toll from local steeples. A large crowd met the ship, forcing the official's resignation. Celebrations followed around the recently consecrated Liberty Tree south of Boston Common into evening. Cambridge and Charlestown followed with nighttime bonfires.[37] By early autumn, every New England and New York stamp officer resigned his office. New Jersey's preemptively quit before any protests occurred.[38]

The Stamp Act's continental nature enabled an aggressive, trans-colonial response. In New Haven, on October 11, protesters forced a would-be replacement into a coffin under threat of being buried alive to renounce his office.[39] Eight days later in Charleston, protests erupted after rumors spread of an arriving ship holding "a stamp-officer, stamps, or stampt paper," while another crowd invaded a prominent merchant's house the next week searching for the dreaded stores.[40] Virginia's stamp officer was "ill-treated in effigy at some places," being "carted, whipped, caned, pilloried, crop'd, hanged & burnt," before he resigned on October 30.[41] Had protests died down, royal officials would have pressed ahead: Maryland's Deputy Governor Horatio Sharpe in September directed the vessel carrying stamped papers "to lye off from

[33] MHS Samuel Mather Papers.
[34] British Library, ADD MS 35911, Hardwicke Papers.
[35] NA CO 5/891 270.
[36] *Boston Gazette*, September 9, 1765.
[37] *Boston Gazette*, September 16, 1765; MHS James Freeman Letterbook.
[38] *London Evening Post*, November 7, 1765; BL ADD MS 35911.
[39] *Massachusetts Gazette*, November 17, 1765.
[40] LC James Grant of Balindalloch Papers, MSS 89460, Vol. 8; *South Carolina Gazette*, October 31, 1765.
[41] LC Peter Force Papers, Virginia Reports to British Secretary of State, Box VII E: 17–18 and American Stamp Act Papers, Box VII B: 5–6.

shore . . . till the People shew a better Disposition."[42] Only the extent and intensity of the anti–Stamp Act protests prevented implementation.

Protesters performed for a British audience as much as for colonial ones. Boston merchant Ezekiel Price wrote to an overseas correspondent in September how New World events "will probably make a great noise on your side of the water," and fearing their being "very differently represented," he enclosed "Sundry Newspapers" giving "The Minds of the People" on the Stamp Act.[43] Colonial governors regularly wrote to London authorities in tones of exasperation and futility: "it is impossible for me to point out, or even to Conceive," New Hampshire Governor Benning Wentworth complained in October, "what is Necessary to be done to cure the Insania, which runs through the Continent."[44] American collective performances needed to broadcast their resolve but remained within British rhetorical traditions to appeal to audiences there.

British shows of force failed to deter the colonists. The stamped papers for Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maryland arrived at Philadelphia on October 5 "under the protection of a man of war." Although the port had been less unified in Stamp Act opposition than others, partisans mobilized. At the first sight of the battleship, "all the Colours in the Harbour were hoisted half Mast high," while church bells tolled all day. Agitated crowds gathered on the waterfront. But short of shelling North America's largest city, which would have been an unprecedented atrocity in a British political standoff, the naval show of force remained symbolic. The captain refused to dock, fearing "some violence" to ship or crew. That Saturday night, crowds forced the local stamp officer's resignation after marching to his home and threatening to destroy his "Person and Property" should he not resign.[45] No easy solutions existed for the British.

The campaign exhibited unprecedented unity across the social spectrum. Sara Franklin wrote to her famous father in London of how "The Subject is now the Stamp act and nothing else is talked of" regardless of gender, nationality, or race: "the Dutch talk of the stomp tack the Negroes of the tamp, in short every body has something to say."[46] North American British Army commander Thomas Gage reported to London in September with perhaps

[42] NA CO 5/217 23.
[43] MHS Ezekiel Price Papers, 58.
[44] NA CO 5/934 52.
[45] LC Peter Force Papers, American Stamp Act Papers, Box VIII B: 5–6; American Philosophical Society, Mss. 973.2.M31, Pennsylvania Stamp Act and Nonimportation Resolutions Collection, Vol. 1, 9 and 12.
[46] Benjamin Franklin, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, Leonard W. Labaree et. al., eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959–2017), Vol. 12, 317–18; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750–1850* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1980), 170.

greater surprise that American protesters had succeeded "by Menace or Force to oblige the Stamp Officers to resign" and then pressure authorities to continue business without them. Gage realized, however, that his opponents used altered tactics: protest leaders worked "to prevent Insurrections, of the People, as before to excite them." Gage did not elaborate a clear plan to counter colonial actions, fearing in November that militants "wou'd immediately fly to Arms," while "the Clamour has been so general" that government allies would be scarce.[47] Stamp Act opponents succeeded through developing unanimity and intimidation.

Town meetings, though sometimes denouncing protesters' most violent and destructive actions, encouraged resistance. Weymouth, Massachusetts, found "distress is heard not only from every part of this Province, but from the continent in general," as "we behold poverty rushing in on us like an armed man." Declaring Parliament "mistaken," the small town asserted their "natural Rights," particularly "freedom of Speech & of the Press," to agitate for recompense. Pembroke, Massachusetts, similarly sought to block implementation, intending to "postpone the introduction of said Act until the united cries of the whole continent have reached the ears of our most gracious King and Parliament," expecting redress.[48] While presenting themselves as more respectable alternatives to street protests, town meetings nevertheless joined the movement.

Protesters' success in framing their campaign in terms of "liberty" kept their aggressive tactics largely unchecked by authorities. Maryland's Deputy Governor Horatio Sharpe wrote to London of how the populace "with one Voice" denounced the Stamp Act, while publications "inflame the People & persuade them that Obedience to such an Act was a Surrender of all the Rights they had hitherto enjoyed as British Subjects."[49] Colonial civil society's most influential sectors – newspapermen, lawyers, judges, merchants, and legislators – felt collectively aggrieved. Nor were the still-small urban areas isolated: Gage reported "Country-People who are flocking in" to join the protests.[50] With "the Ministry's giving no instructions" on implementation, Sharpe complained that enforcement appeared impossible without gravely escalating the crisis.[51]

As news of the colonial disturbances spread, authorities in London remained uncertain about how to counter the anti–Stamp Act campaign. Secretary of State Henry Conway wrote to Gage and each colonial governor, not offering "positive instructions," but urging them to navigate between

[47] Thomas Gage, *The Correspondence of General Gage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), Vol. 1, 67–68, 71.
[48] LC Peter Force Papers, Massachusetts Town Records, Box VII E: 39–41.
[49] LC Horatio Sharpe Papers, MSS 1722.
[50] NA CO 5/1098 8.
[51] LC Horatio Sharpe Papers, MSS 1722.

"caution" and the "vigour necessary to suppress outrage and violence" as necessary.[52] Following early disturbances, no high-profile protester prosecutions occurred, perhaps due to their usually avoiding physical violence despite engaging in intimidation and destroying property. The newspaper press, meanwhile, despite being the campaign's most influential facilitator and directly violating the Stamp laws, remained unpunished. Given "the present temper of the people," New York's Lieutenant Governor wrote to British authorities, "this is not a proper time to prosecute the Printers and Publishers of the seditious Papers."[53] Already afoul of colonial opinion, many officials favored tolerating protests to endure the controversy.

While volatile street-protests provided important events for galvanizing common citizens, consensus grew for a "Stamp Act Congress" for continental legislatures to issue a common rebuttal against the act. Though congresses had only previously convened to discuss military defense, Massachusetts issued invitations to "consider a general Address" to British authorities demonstrating colonial opposition.[54] Samuel Adams believed a "Union of Comtees from the several Colonys" could "collect the whole Strength of Reason & Argument" to make common cause.[55] Twenty-seven deputies from nine colonial legislatures met in New York from October 7 to 25, resolving "no Taxes be imposed on them, but with their own Consent, given personally, or by their representatives," considering their right under British precedent.[56] The Congress presented an imposing front: "The Spirit of Democracy is strong among 'em," Gage considered.[57] With the formal protest lodged, the body did not discuss further resistance, but neither did it discourage popular campaigning.

The trans-colonial congress' implications were not lost on Parliament when the American petition arrived. Maryland's colonial agent in London, Charles Garth, wrote of how Members of Parliament he consulted considered it "bespoke too much of a Federal Union," carrying "great Danger to his Majesty's Authority and Government." Parliament refused to formally consider the American address, not wanting to legitimate the Congress.[58] Americans moved boldly and British authorities recognized the risks.

Colonists increased pressure through an organized withdrawal from overseas trade by adopting nonimportation agreements. Particularly fitting since

[52] *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 16, 113–7; LC Peter Force Papers, Ezra Stiles Diary.
[53] Henry Dawson, *The Sons of Liberty in New York* (Poughkeepsie: Platt & Schram, 1859), 78.
[54] Walter H. Conser, Jr., "Stamp Act Resistance," in *Resistance, Politics, and the American Struggle for Independence, 1765–1775*, in Conser, Ronald M. McCarthy, David J. Toscano and Gene Sharp, eds. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner, 1986), 48; Weslager, 50.
[55] Samuel Adams, *Writings*, Vol. 1, 57.
[56] Ibid., 106; LC Peter Force Papers, American Stamp Act Papers, Box VIII B: 5–6.
[57] NA CO 5/219 18.
[58] Maryland Historical Society, Revolutionary War Collection, MSS 1814.