

# The stamp act resolutions and the declaratory act



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The American Revolution was sparked, in very many respects, by a well-reasoned disagreement between the British crown and the American colonists concerning the nature of government and the rights of the governed. Although practical realities arose which gave fuel to the fire, the burning question of how the crown ought to rule and what rights the colonists had under that rule was the central concern around which the Revolution revolved. The small rebellion that arose due to the passage by the crown of the Stamp Act precipitated the crisis and provided a kind of dress rehearsal for the argumentative debate that would eventually lead to war. More precisely, the Stamp Act rebellion represented a last-ditch effort by the colonists to increase their own freedom and independence within the confines of their relationship with the crown before, in failing to achieve the end they sought, they were forced to throw off the crown entirely and declare independence. In this brief paper, the argument put forward by the colonists in the Stamp Act Resolutions and the crown's response through Parliament in the Declaratory Act of 1766 will be reviewed to determine the position of both the colonists and the British government as the two headed to war. The taxes imposed by the crown following the French and Indian War were intended by the British government to re-emphasize their control over the colonies in addition to raising funds for financing their empire. The colonists found the taxes oppressive and unreasonable, but not only due to their practical costs, but also due to the ideological foundations upon which they were founded. The colonists believed that they were being asked to bear all the responsibilities of being British citizens without any of the rights. Therefore they passed the Stamp Act Resolutions as a response to the taxing regime. The Resolutions presented an argument that was built around the <https://assignbuster.com/the-stamp-act-resolutions-and-the-declaratory-act/>

idea that they were British citizens. They claimed that they owed the same allegiance to the Crown as those born within England's borders. But this allegiance was not entirely one-sided, as they were owed the same rights as those born in England, including the right not to be taxed without consent or representation. Because the only representation that they themselves had, not being represented in the Parliament by elected officials, was their own various colonial governments, they argued that the only taxes that could be imposed on them were the taxes voted by their own representative bodies (The Virginia Stamp Act Resolutions — 1765). The colonists' argument was intended to carve out a right to representation for themselves as governed subjects. The colonists argued that the only arm of the British government that had moral authority to impose taxes was the colonial governments. If it was meant to convince the British government of a governing hypocrisy, it met a response that did not acknowledge the argument's validity. The Declaratory Act, in fact, reasserted the crown's right to pass any law it saw fit through the Parliament regarding the colonies. The reasoning was that the colonists were dependent upon the crown for their establishment, existence, and well-being, and that they were therefore subject to the laws that the crown imposed through its rightful bodies. Britain, in other words, argued that the colonists, being dependent on the crown, were subject to it (The Declaratory Act). This expressed the crown's view that it was the ultimate authority in the relationship. But it led Americans to ask: Are we dependent? And later, just one step to the side of that question... Are we subject? (Morgan and Morgan 1995, p. 70). The Stamp Act Resolutions and the Declaratory Act were examples of the two best arguments the two opposing sides had regarding the tension that was building in their established

relationship. The colonists argued to increase their freedom, and the crown to express its authority. Ultimately this led to the war for independence based on an expressed intent of the colonists to take that freedom by force if necessary and the crown's intent to hold its possessions. In the end the argument put forward by the colonists seemed to have the strongest moral authority, and in any event the practical realities of ruling an unwilling subject from afar came to be too much for the British government to manage in its hold on empire. Works Cited Morgan, Edmund Sears, and Morgan, Helen M. *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. *The Declaratory Act*. [Online] Retrieved May 30, 2011. . *The Virginia Stamp Act Resolutions — 1765*. [Online] Retrieved May 30, 2011.