

## *Townshend Acts*

From June 15 to July 2, 1767, the British Parliament issued a series of resolutions called the Townshend Acts to generate revenue in the colonies. Military expenses and territorial gains from its victory in the French and Indian War (1754–63) left the British government in the American colonies with immense debts.

An earlier attempt at taxation in the colonies failed when protests by merchants and petitions from colonial representatives persuaded Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act in 1766. In addition to financing its debts, Great Britain also used the Townshend Acts as a means of reinforcing its authority in the colonies.



*Figure 1: Charles Townshend (1725–67) secured the passage of the the Townshend Acts in the British Parliament.*

The colonists named the acts after Charles Townshend, British chancellor of the Exchequer, or treasury, who secured the passage of the resolutions in Parliament. The acts burdened the colonies with oppressive mandates and excessive taxes on essential imported British commodities.

One of the Townshend Acts, the Suspending Act, ordered the New York representative assembly to cease all activity until it complied with the terms of the Quartering Act of 1765. According to the Quartering Act, the colonists were required to provide housing, food, medical care, and transportation to British soldiers stationed in colonial towns.

The Townshend duties were direct taxes on imported British goods in the colonies such as glass, paper, paint, and tea. Great Britain used the proceeds from these taxes to finance the defense of the new British territories. France ceded all of its land east of the Mississippi River to Great Britain in the Treaty of Paris of 1763 after the French and Indian War.

The Townshend Acts also established the Board of Customs Commissioners with headquarters in Boston for the collection of the Townshend duties. Aside from customs agents, British military officers and coast guard vessels also enforced tax payments in the colonies with search warrants and other legal documents necessary to ensure compliance.

With no representation in Parliament, colonial legislative assemblies were limited in their abilities to contest the Townshend Acts. Resistance to the acts followed as colonists withheld payments and staged public demonstrations denouncing the taxes.

In another retaliatory measure, colonial merchants boycotted British imports, which put an economic strain on markets in Great Britain. Pressure from colonial protests and the nonimportation agreement among merchants caused the British government to ease the resolutions. On March 5, 1770, Parliament repealed all the Townshend Acts except for a tea tax.

Nevertheless, Great Britain persisted in delegating strict laws and heavy taxes in the colonies. Consequently, the colonists' animosity toward British authorities led to the American Revolution in 1775.

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