

Virginia Resolves on the Stamp Act

Patrick Henry

30 May 1765

[Text of Virginia Resolves from Morison, *Sources and Documents*, pp. 17-18]

In 1765 the British Parliament passed the Stamp Act, which placed a tax on newspapers, almanacs, pamphlets and broadsides, all kinds of legal documents, insurance policies, ship's papers, licenses, dice and playing cards. This led to widespread protest in the American colonies, and to the slogan, "No taxation without representation!"

The Virginia legislature did not actually adopt the fifth and sixth resolves, which were quite radical, but this document, including all six resolves, was published widely in newspapers across the colonies. Therefore, colonists were exposed to Henry's radical ideas, and this document served as influential propaganda for the cause. Eight other colonies followed suit and had adopted similar resolves by the end of 1765.

Virginia Resolves. On May 29, 1765, the House of Burgesses of Virginia came to the following resolutions:

Whereas the honorable House of Commons in England have late drawn into question how far the general assembly of this colony has power to enact laws for laying taxes and imposing duties payable to the pope of this his majesty's most ancient colony — For settling and ascertaining the same to all future times, the House of Burgesses of this present general assembly have come to the several following resolutions:

Resolved, That the first adventurers and settlers of this his majesty's colony and dominion of Virginia brought with them and transmitted to their posterity and all others, his majesty's subjects since inhabiting in this is majesty's colony, all the privileges and immunities that have at any time been held, enjoyed, and possessed by the people of Great Britain.

Resolved, That by the two royal charters granted by King James the First, the colonists aforesaid are declared entitled to all privileges of faithful, liege, and natural born subjects, to all intents and purposes, as if they had been abiding and born within the realm of England.

Resolved, That his majesty's liege people of this his most ancient colony have enjoyed the right being thus governed by their own assembly, in the article of taxes and internal police; and that the same have never been forfeited or any other way yielded up, but have been constantly recognized by the kind and people of Great Britain.

Resolved therefore, That the general assembly of the colony, together with his majesty or his substitute have in their representative capacity the only exclusive right and power to levy taxes and impositions on the inhabitants of this colony and that every attempt to vest such a power in any person or persons whatsoever other than the general assembly aforesaid is illegal,

unconstitutional, and unjust, and ahs a manifest tendency to destroy British, as well as American freedom.

The following resolves were not passed, though drawn up by the committee. They are inserted as a specimen of the first and early energies of the Old Dominion, as Virginia is often called.

Resolved, That his majesty's liege people, the inhabitants of this colony, are not bound to yield obedience to any law or ordinance whatsoever designed to impose any taxation whatsoever upon them, other than the laws and ordinances of the general assembly aforesaid.

Resolved, That any person who shall by speaking or writing maintain that any person or persons other than the general assembly of this colony have any right or power to impose or lay any taxation whatsoever on the people here shall be deemed an enemy to this his majesty's colony.

Version published widely in newspapers, with additional resolution. There were also some variations from publication to publication:

Resolved, That the first adventurers and settlers of this His Majesty's Colony and Dominion of Virginia brought with them, and transmitted to their posterity, and all other of His Majesty's subjects since inhabiting this His Majesty's said Colony, all the liberties, privileges, franchises, and immunities, that have at any time been held, enjoyed, and possessed, by the people of Great Britain.

Resolved, That by two royal charters, granted by King James the First, the colonists aforesaid are declared entitled to all liberties, privileges, and immunities of denizens and natural subjects, to all intents and purposes, as if they had been abiding and born within the realm of England.

Resolved, That the taxation of the people by themselves, or by persons chosen by themselves to represent them, who can only know what taxes the people are able to bear, or the easiest method of raising them, and must themselves be affected by every tax laid on the people, is the only security against a burthensome taxation, and the distinguishing characteristick of British freedom, without which the ancient constitution cannot exist.

Resolved, That His Majesty's liege people of this his most ancient and loyal Colony have without interruption enjoyed the inestimable right of being governed by such laws, respecting their internal polity and taxation, as are derived from their own consent, with the approbation of their sovereign, or his substitute; and that the same hath never been forfeited or yielded up, but hath been constantly recognized by the kings and people of Great Britain.

Resolved therefore, That the General Assembly of this Colony have the only and sole exclusive right and power to lay taxes and impositions upon the inhabitants of this Colony, and that every attempt to vest such power in any person or persons whatsoever other than the General Assembly aforesaid has a manifest tendency to destroy British as well as American freedom.

Resolved, That His Majesty's liege people, the inhabitants of this Colony are not bound to yield obedience to any law or ordinance whatever, designed to impose any taxation whatsoever upon them other than the laws or ordinances of the General Assembly aforesaid.

Resolved, That any person who shall, by speaking or writing, assert or maintain that any person or persons other than the General Assembly of this Colony, have any right or power to impose or lay any taxation on the people here, shall be deemed an enemy to His Majesty's Colony.

The above "Virginia Resolves" should not be confused with another set, drafted by George Mason, introduced by George Washington, and adopted unanimously by the Virginia House of Burgesses on May 16, 1769, as a protest to the 1767 Townshend Acts, enacted by the British Parliament after the repeal of the 1765 Stamp Act in 1766, which had been the target of the 1765 "Virginia Resolves" above. In February, 1768, Samuel Adams had drawn up and issued the Circular Letter, which reported that the Massachusetts General Court had denounced the Townshend Acts in violation of the principle of *no taxation without representation*, reasserted that the colonies were not represented adequately in the British Parliament, and attacked the Crown's attempt to make colonial governors and judges independent from the people. The Virginia Resolves of 1769 again recognized only the right of the Virginia governor and legislature to tax Virginians, condemned the British government for censuring the Circular Letters, and condemned Parliament's notion that dissidents be taken to England for trial.

Another set sometimes called "Virginia Resolves" were adopted Oct. 22, 1774, by the First Continental Congress, to create a "[Non-Importation Association](#)", essentially a boycott of trade with Britain.

Finally, the name "Virginia Resolves" has also often been used to refer to the "[Virginia Resolution of 1798](#)", authored by James Madison, which together with the "Kentucky Resolutions of 1798", authored by Thomas Jefferson, protested the Alien and Seditions Acts of 1798, and called for state laws to obstruct their enforcement, which came to be called state "nullification" of union laws, and established the "Doctrine of '98" for interpretation of the Constitution which became the platform of the Democratic Republican Party that elected Jefferson to the presidency in 1800, which came to be called the "Revolution of 1800", and ushered in the Jeffersonian Era that lasted through 1824.