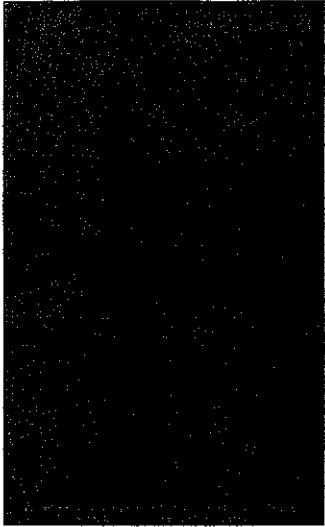


A website from the Massachusetts Historical Society; founded 1791.



page image

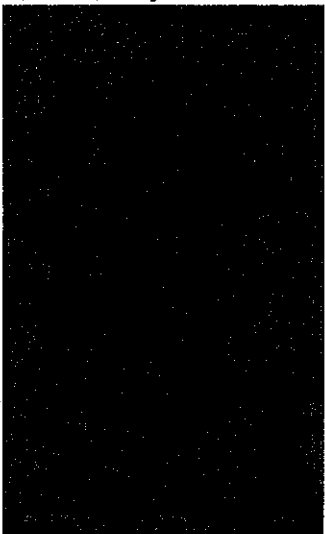


page image

How great is my Loss, in neglecting to keep a regular journal, through the last Spring, Summer, and Fall. In the Course of my Business, as a Surveyor of High-Ways, as one of the Committee, for dividing, planning, and selling the North-Commons, in the Course of my two great journeys to Pounalborough and Marthas Vineyard, and in several smaller journeys to Plymouth, Taunton and Boston, I had many fine Opportunities and Materials for Speculation. -- The Year 1765 has been the most remarkable Year of my Life. That enormous Engine,

fabricated by the british Parliament, for battering

down all the Rights and Liberties of America, I mean the Stamp Act, has raised and spread, thro the whole Continent, a Spirit that will be recorded to our Honour, with all future Generations. In every Colony, from Georgia to New Hampshire inclusively, the Stamp Distributors and Inspectors have been compelled, by the unconquerable Rage of the People, to renounce their offices. Such and so universal has been the Resentment of the People, that every Man who has dared to speak in favour of the Stamps, or to soften the detestation in which they are held, how great soever his Abilities and Virtues



page image

had been esteemed before, or whatever his fortune, Connections and Influence had been, has been seen to sink into universal Contempt and Ignominy.

The People, even to the lowest Ranks, have become more attentive to their Liberties, more inquisitive about them, and more determined to defend them, than they were ever before known or had occasion to be. Innumerable have been the Monuments of Wit, Humour, Sense, Learning, Spirit, Patriotism, and Heroism, erected in the S in the several Colonies and Provinces, in the Course of this Year. Our Presses have groaned, our Pulpits have thundered, our Legislatures have resolved, our Towns have voted, The Crown Officers have every where trembled, and all their little Tools and Creatures, been afraid to Speak and ashamed to be seen.

This Spirit however has not yet been sufficient to banish, from Persons in Authority, that Timidity, which they have discovered from the Beginning. The executive Courts have not yet dared to adjudge the Stamp-Act void nor to proceed with Business as usual, tho it should seem that Necessity alone would be sufficient to justify Business, at present, tho the Act should be allowed to be obligatory. The Stamps are in the Castle. Mr. Oliver has no Commission. The Governor has no Authority to distribute, or even to unpack the Bales, the Act has never been proclaimed nor read in the Province; Yet the Probate office is shut, the Custom House is shut, the Courts of justice are shut, and all Business seems at a

Stand. Yesterday and the day before, the two last days of Service for January Term, only one Man asked me for a Writ, and he was soon determined to waive his Request. I have not drawn a Writ since 1st. Novr.

How long We are to remain in this languid Condition, this passive Obedience to the Stamp Act, is not certain. But such a Pause cannot be lasting. Debtors grow insolent. Creditors grow angry. And it is to be expected that the Public offices will very soon be forced open, unless such favourable Accounts should be received from England, as to draw away the Fears of the Great, or unless a greater Dread of the Multitude should drive away the Fear of Censure from G. Britain.

It is my Opinion that by this Timorous Inactivity we discover Cowardice, and too much Respect and Regard to the Act. This Rest appears to be by Implication at least an Acknowledgement of the Authority of

Parliament to tax Us. And if this Authority is once acknowledged and established, the Ruin of America will become inevitable.

This long Interval of Indolence and Idleness will make a large Chasm in my affairs if it should not reduce me to Distress and

incapacitate me to answer the Demands upon me. But I must endeavour in some degree to compensate the Disadvantage, by posting my Books, reducing my Accounts into better order, and by diminishing my Expences, but above all by improving the Leisure of this Winter, in a diligent Application to my Studies. I find that Idleness lies between Business and Study, i.e. The Transision from the Hurry of a multiplicity of Business, to the Tranquility that is necessary for intense Study, is not easy. There must be a Vacation, an Interval between them, for the Mind to recollect itself.

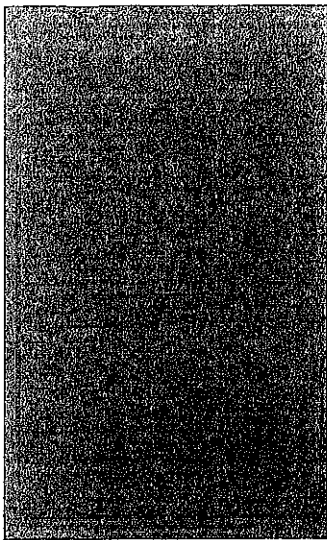
The Bar seem to me to behave like a Flock of shot Pidgeons. They seem to be stopped, the Net seems to be thrown over them, and they have scarcely Courage left to flounce and to flutter. So sudden an Interruption in my Career, is very unfortunate for me. I was but just

getting into my Geers, just getting under Sail, and an Embargo is laid upon the Ship. Thirty Years of my Life are passed in Preparation for Business. I have had Poverty to struggle with- Envy and jealousy [*illegible*] and Malice of Enemies to encounter-no Friends, or but few to assist me, so that I have groped in dark Obscurity, till of late, and had but just become known, and gained a small degree of Reputation, when this execrable Project was set on foot for my Ruin

as well as that of America in General, and of Great Britain.

A fair Morning after a severe Storm of 3 days and 4 Nights. A vast Quantity of rain fell.

About 12. O Clock came in Messrs. Crafts and Chase and gave me a particular Account of the Proceedings of the Sons of Liberty on Tuesday last, in prevailing on Mr. Oliver to renounce his Office of Distributor of Stamps, by a Declaration under his Hand, and under his Oath, taken before justice Dana, in Hanover Square, under the very Tree of Liberty, nay under the very Limb where he had been hanged in Effigy, Aug. 14th. 1765. Their absolute Requisition of an Oath, and under that Tree, were Circumstances, extreamly humiliating and

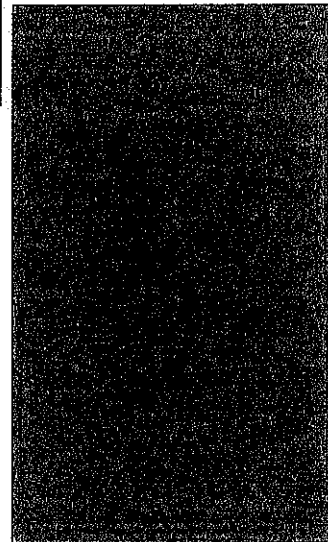


page image

mortifying, as Punishment for his [*illegible*] receiving a Deputation to be Distributor after his pretended Resignation, and for his faint and indirect Declaration in the News Papers last Monday.

About one O'Clock came in Mr. Clark, one of the Constables of the Town of Boston, with a Letter from Mr. Wm. Cooper their Town Clerk in these Words

Sir, I am directed by the Town to acquaint you, that they have this day voted unanimously, that Jeremiah Gridley, James Otis, and John Adams Esqrs. be applied to, as Council to appear before his Excellency the Governor in Council, in Support 'of their Memorial, praying



page image

that the Courts of Law in this Province may be opened. A Copy of said Memorial will be handed you, on your coming to Town. I am sir, your most obedient hum. sert.,

Wm. Cooper Town Clerk

Boston Decr. 18th. 1765

John Adams Esqr.

The Reasons which induced Boston to choose me, at a distance, and unknown as I am, The particular Persons concerned and measures concerted to bring this about, I am wholly at a loss to conjecture: as I am, what the future Effects and Consequences will be both with Regard to myself and the Public.

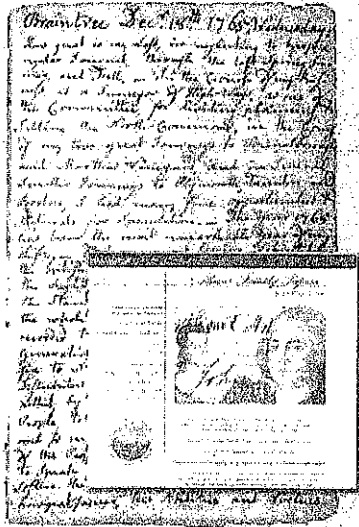
But when I recollect my own Reflections and Speculations Yesterday, a part of which were committed to Writing last Night, and may be seen under Decr. 18th, and compare them with the Proceedings of Boston Yesterday of which the foregoing Letter informed me, I cannot but Wonder, and call to Mind my Ld. Bacons Observation, about secret invisible Laws of Nature, [and] Communications and Influences between Places, that are not discoverable by Sense. But I am now under all obligations of Honour, Gratitude Interest and Ambition as well as Honour, Gratitude and Duty, to exert the Utmost of my Abilities, in this important Cause. How shall it be conducted? Shall we contend that the Stamp-Act is void? That the Parliament have no legal Authority to impose Internal Taxes upon Us?-Because We are not represented in it? And therefore that the Stamp Act ought to be waived by the judges, as against natural Equity and the

Constitution? Shall we use these, as Arguments for opening the Courts of Law? Or shall We ground ourselves on Necessity only.

Mr. Otis reasoned with great Learning and Zeal, on the judges Oaths, the &c.

## John Adams diary 11, 18 - 29 December 1765

John Adams ponders the cost of resistance to the Stamp Act in this diary entry for 18 December 1765.



### The Cost of Resistance

On 1 November, with stamp masters having resigned their commissions and the stamps locked away in forts under the command of royal forces, no one is quite sure how to go on with business without getting into trouble. Rhode Island has voted to protect from harm all colonial officials who disregard the stamps and proceed with daily affairs as usual. But Massachusetts' assemblymen refuse to pass such a measure, arguing that to do so acknowledges the Stamp Act's legitimacy. Meanwhile the ports and courts are closed; lawyers are idle and trade is at an impasse. As public officials in executive, legislative, and judicial jurisdictions

pass the buck from one to another and back again, John Adams turns to his diary to bemoan the loss of his recently won reputation and of his income.

### Questions to Consider

1. Consider the provisions of the Stamp Act. What activities should be avoided because they require stamps? Write a paragraph about how everyday life will be affected if people simply refuse to engage in activities requiring stamps.
2. Another option is to ignore the Stamp Act and proceed with business as usual. Consider the penalties provisions (17-27) of the Stamp Act. What do merchants stand to lose? Farmers? Royal appointees?
3. What does Adams mean by the phrase "passive Obedience to the Stamp Act." How does he characterize it? What does he fear may result from it? Does he believe that this condition will continue? Why or why not?

### Further Exploration

4. Adams considers his own self-interest. Compare his reflections to those of James Murray. What in their views might characterize one as a loyalist and the other as a patriot? (Click here to read James Murray's letter to his brother concerning the Stamp Act.
5. Today the right to be taxed by a vote of our own representatives might seem like a somewhat obscure or remote concept. Think about the times in which we now live. What right