

# The Townshend Acts

By Jane Runyon



<sup>1</sup> When George III ruled in England, he needed a lot of help. He was not a particularly intelligent fellow. He didn't really see any need to have much "book" learning because, after all, he was the king. Someone would tell him what to think. One British nobleman decided to take advantage of this situation to further his own ambitions. His name was Lord Charles Townshend. He was better known to the citizens of England as "Champagne Charlie." He got this nickname because of his love of parties, champagne, and the life he had in society. In order to keep his status in society and continue to receive invitations to the best parties, he decided to make himself indispensable to King George as his advisor. Lord Townshend had a very likable personality and endeared himself to the king by agreeing with everything the king said.

<sup>2</sup> One of the more significant problems the king had to deal with was that the British treasury was getting low. It was up to the king to devise a plan by which the treasury could be replenished. King George and Lord Townshend decided that the best way to get money was to tax the citizens. Not only would they tax the British citizens who were already having a hard time making a living, but they would also tax the colonists in America. They rationalized that part of the reason the treasury was low was because British soldiers had to be sent to the colonies for the protection of the British citizens who had settled there. To be more specific, they would tax items that had to be shipped to the colonies from England. The colonists would have to pay the costs of transporting the goods across the Atlantic; they would also be **obliged** to pay an extra fee to the king.

<sup>3</sup> In 1765, the first tax was put into place. Every piece of printed paper the colonists used would be required to have a stamp showing that a tax had been paid on it. The taxed items included legal documents, playing cards, pamphlets, advertising, and newspapers. The colonists called it the Stamp Act. They did not like the idea of having a tax like this and sent a strong message to the king about their feelings. When the king sent British officials to the colonies to collect the revenue from this tax, some were met by angry colonists who covered the king's officials with sticky tar and feathers. This was a very humiliating act. The tax collectors urged the king to reconsider his decision. One year later the tax was repealed.

<sup>4</sup> The treasury was still low, so the king and Lord Townshend now decided to tax cider. This cider was an alcoholic drink that was cheap enough for all Englishmen to enjoy. It didn't take very long for the British citizens to protest this tax, and it was also **repealed**.

<sup>5</sup> Not one to give up easily, Townshend now convinced the king to place a tax on other goods exported to the colonies. This time a tax was levied on lead, glass, paper, paint, and tea. Again the colonists protested against the tax. This time they followed their protests with a **boycott** on English goods. This not only put a halt to tax money being sent to the British treasury, but it also put a dent in the profits being made by British

traders and the makers of the British goods. The protests were heard from the colonists and also from the merchants caught between the taxes and the boycott. The king heard the message loud and clear. He repealed the taxes on everything but tea. He was not about to accept total defeat from the colonists. By 1770, all but one of Townsend's ideas had been dismissed. He had succeeded in making himself a fixture in the king's court. He had also succeeded in making many enemies in the new world.

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<p>1. What characteristics would you use to describe Lord Townshend?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>2. Who was instrumental in convincing the king to repeal the tax on printed paper?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A The merchants</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Lord Townshend</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C The tax collectors</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Parliament</p>
<p>3. King George III was a very intelligent man.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A False</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B True</p>	<p>4. How can a boycott affect the economy of an entire country?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>5. After the Stamp Act was repealed, what did the king then tax?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Cider</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Silk</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Tea</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Newspapers</p>	<p>6. British tax collectors were tarred and feathered to protest the Stamp Act.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A False</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B True</p>
<p>7. Why did the king and Lord Townshend feel it was necessary to levy taxes?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A The king and Lord Townshend needed money for more champagne.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B The British treasury needed money.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C The colonists were being punished.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D The king and Lord Townshend liked being in power.</p>	<p>8. Do you think it was fair for the king to levy so many taxes on the colonies? Why or why not?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>