SUGAR ACT

The Sugar Act (formally titled the American Revenue Act) was passed by Parliament in April 1764 at the recommendation of George Grenville, chancellor of the exchequer. This law, the first ever passed by Parliament specifically to raise revenue from the colonies, was part of a broader effort to strengthen imperial control after the Seven Years' War and at the same time help reduce the large national debt Britain had incurred during the fighting. Specifically, Grenville hoped to use the revenues from the act to help defray the expenses of the British troops in America. Designed as an extension of the generally unenforced Molasses Act of 1733, the Sugar Act imposed new or higher duties on sugar, textiles, coffee, indigo, and wine from non-British territories; it also added to the list of "enumerated goods" that the colonies could ship only to English ports. It discouraged the sending of foreign goods first to England and then to the colonies (a familiar way of evading import regulations) by doubling the duty on reshipments. Finally, the Sugar Act established a rigorous structure of documentation and inspection to support its provisions.

The colonists maintained that the Sugar Act constituted "taxation without representation," since their elected representatives sat in the colonial legislatures, not in Parliament. Furthermore, Grenville's overall program to extract more revenue from the colonies was perceived by them as an economic threat, in view of the business decline America had experienced since the war. The colonies began corresponding with one another over the issue, and in a number of cities agreements were made not to import British goods. These protests set the stage for the more extensive resistance movements that arose the following year over the Stamp Act.

See also Revolution.

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