

Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania, 1767-1768

Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania were a series of essays written by a Pennsylvania lawyer and legislator, named John Dickinson, and published under the pseudonym "A Farmer." Dickinson played an active role in colonial resistance against the Stamp Act.

But, "I have looked over every statute relating to these colonies, from their first settlement to this time; and I find every one of them founded on this principle, till the Stamp Act administration....Never did the British parliament, till the period above mentioned, think of imposing duties in America for the purpose of raising a revenue," (Dickinson, 1768, p. 13).

"Here then, my dear countrymen, rouse yourselves, and behold the ruin hanging over your heads. If you ONCE admit, that Great Britain may lay duties upon her [exports] to us, for the purpose of levying money on us only, she then will have nothing to do, but to lay those duties on the articles which she prohibits us to manufacture—and the tragedy of American liberty is finished," (Dickinson, 1768, p. 25).

"If, however, it shall happen, by an unfortunate course of affairs, that our applications to his Majesty and the parliament for redress, prove ineffectual, let us then take another step, by withholding from Great Britain all the advantages she has been used to receive from us. Then let us try, if our ingenuity, industry, and frugality, will not give weight to our remonstrances. Let us all be united with one spirit, in one cause," (Dickinson, 1768, p. 35).

"These duties, which will inevitably be levied upon us, and which are now levying upon us, are expressly laid for the sole purpose of taking money. This is the true definition of taxes. They are therefore taxes. This money is to be taken from us. We are therefore taxed. Those who are taxed without their own consent, given by themselves, or their representatives, are slaves. We are taxed without our own consent given by ourselves, or our representatives. We are therefore—I speak it with grief—I speak it with indignation—we are slaves," (Dickinson, 1768, p. 78).

Glossary: (in order of appearance)

Revenue – Money a government collects, usually from taxes.

Duties – Taxes placed on imported goods.

Levying – Imposing or collecting a tax or fee.

Redress – A remedy or correction for a wrong or injustice.

Frugality – Being careful with money; avoiding waste.

Remonstrances – Strong complaints or formal protests.

Consent – Permission or agreement.

Discussion Questions:

1.	What does John Dickinson mean by "consent" when talking about taxes, and why does he think it's important for American freedom?	
2.	What worries does Dickinson have about the Stamp Act setting a bad example (how does he think it could affect future laws and freedoms)?	
3.	How does Dickinson suggest the colonists deal with the Stamp Act?	
4.	How does Dickinson use the word "slaves" to describe being taxed without permission? What effect do you think this word would have on his argument in a slave society, like 1760's colonial America?	