



Introducing the Gadsden Flag

The Gadsden flag is a historical American flag with a yellow field depicting a rattlesnake coiled and ready to strike. Positioned below the rattlesnake are the words “Dont tread on me”. The flag is named after American general and statesman Christopher Gadsden (1724–1805), who designed it in 1775 during the American Revolution. It was also used by the Continental Marines as an early motto flag, along with the Moultrie Flag. In modern times, the Gadsden flag is a libertarian symbol. It is sometimes associated with the Tea Party movement.



South Carolina’s Christopher Gadsden is as much a symbol of the spirit of the American Revolution as his flag. When Parliament passed the Stamp Act in 1765, Gadsden helped rally opposition to that oppressive law. He argued that taxation without representation in Parliament violated the most basic laws of the English constitution and the natural rights of citizens.

The Stamp Act, like many of the attempts to control the colonies, would set an unlawful precedent. The taxes on tea, trade and even paper were modest. The real problem, the revolutionaries understood, is that the Stamp Act laid the groundwork for the unlimited and unrepresentative expansion of government. It was the thin edge of the wedge.

Gadsden was a man of principle who understood that government, unless held in check, grows slowly and inexorably. And a government that has no limits, no constitutionally drawn boundaries,

soon becomes the master and the citizens become heavily-taxed workers little more than slaves. Without representation--the ability to fight for their interests--the colonies would be subject to the whim and will of politicians ever in search of more revenue and swag to grant the “court locusts” who buzz around institutions of power expecting a handout.

When the Stamp Act was passed the British envoy who was set to enforce the new law tried to land in Charleston. But Gadsden led the Sons of Liberty against the tax-collecting functionary. The patriots would not let his ship anchor to enforce the illegal act. Then, the captain of the British ship turned back through the mouth of the Charleston harbor to anchor at Fort Johnson.

The Sons of Liberty heard of this and decided to show Parliament just how much they hated oppressive taxes. They traveled to the fort, took it over, and aimed the British guns at the Stamp Act collector’s ship. Outmatched and obviously outgunned, the captain set to sea never to return. Through legal channels, the patriots continued their resistance to the Stamp Act and eventually had it overturned.

Eight years later, when America was in full rebellion against British rule Christopher Gadsden became a colonel in the Revolutionary Army and presented his unique ensign as the flag of the Cause.