

The 16th Amendment: How the U.S. Federal Income Tax Became D.C.'s Favorite Political Weapon

The American Revolution was sparked in part by unjust taxation. After all, the colonists in Boston rebelled against Britain for imposing “taxation without representation,” and summarily tossed English tea into the harbor in protest in 1773.

Nowadays Americans collectively spend more than *6 billion hours each year* filling out tax forms, keeping records, and learning new tax rules according to the Office of Management and Budget. Complying with the byzantine U.S. tax code is estimated to cost the American economy hundreds of billions of dollars annually – time and money that could otherwise be used for more productive activities like entrepreneurship and investment, or just more family and leisure time.

The majority of these six billion hours sacrificed by Americans to Washington each year goes to complying with a tax that didn't even exist until 100 years ago – the federal income tax.

Worse still, this tax has become a political weapon for Washington to incentivize certain activities (home ownership, charitable giving, etc.) and to punish others. It's a tax that follows Americans wherever they go in the world, and it's one that was originally sold to the American people by President Woodrow Wilson as a means of “soaking the rich” during the so-called Gilded Age.

How did a country that was founded on the concept of limited government come to embrace such a draconian policy? And what does it say about Washington that tax reform has become synonymous with class warfare and corporate lobbyists?

Read on to learn the history of the 16th Amendment – which authorized the federal collection of an income tax – and how that power has ultimately meant the growth of Washington at the expense of just about everyone else.

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