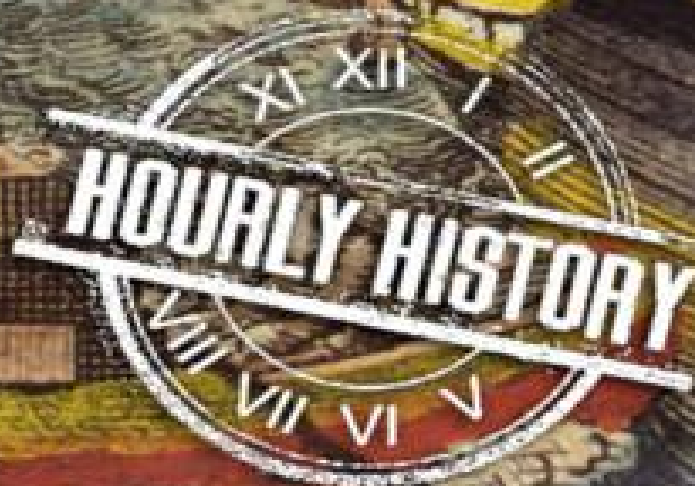




BOSTON TEA PARTY

A HISTORY FROM BEGINNING TO END



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Introduction

The Boston Tea Party is one of the most iconic protests in American history. It is the single most well-known act that many claim led directly to the American War of Independence. Tea was involved, but there wasn't exactly a party and no one was drinking it. This act of defiance occurred in response to taxes the British government levied on tea drinkers. The American colonists at the time had been the target of increasing taxation by the British Crown, and they decided they had finally had enough.

The tax was levied without any representative being present in the British Parliament who could voice the concerns of the colonies. That's what the colonists were initially objecting to—taxation without representation. The tax was actually levied well before the protest began, and after it was instituted, the colonists took to smuggling tea into the Americas to avoid paying it.

The proverbial straw that broke the camel's back, however, came when the British government gave the British East India Company a monopoly on the tea brought into America. While that might not have affected the ability of the colonists to smuggle tea, it did make British tea much cheaper than the illicit tea they were bringing in.

Right after the monopoly was granted, a group of colonial patriots in Philadelphia told the Crown that they would boycott tea. News of their boycott reached Boston where subsequent protests broke out. It was shortly after that, on December 16, 1773, that the event known as the Boston Tea Party occurred.

In response to the subsequent violent protests in Massachusetts, the British Parliament passed acts intended to punish the colony for the incident. These acts not only stripped the colony of home rule, but they also required Americans to house British troops in empty buildings. That ultimately sparked the formation of the First Continental Congress in 1774, and shortly after that, fighting broke out at Lexington and Concord, which is considered the first battle of the American Revolutionary War.

Chapter One

Taxation without Representation

“It cannot be good to tax the Americans . . . You will lose more than you gain.”

—Thomas Hutchinson

In 1765, the British Empire had two big problems they needed to resolve. The first was the fact the British East India Company was facing some dire financial problems. The second problem was the unresolved argument about how much authority Parliament had over the colonies in America if there were no elected representatives to voice colonial concerns.

The first of these problems, the financial struggles of the East India Company, had its origins in the seventeenth century as Europeans began developing a taste for tea. In 1698, England made a deal with the East India Company to give them exclusive rights to import tea. That agreement required that the company sell its tea wholesale at auctions taking place in Britain.

At that time, British companies would then buy the tea and export it to the American colonies. In the colonies, they would sell it again to merchants in New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and Boston. To eliminate foreign competition for their products, the British Parliament passed an act in 1721 that required the colonies to only import tea from Britain.

That was all well and good since the colonists responded by simply smuggling in tea from other places. Up until 1767, the tea that the East India Company brought to Britain to sell was taxed at a rate of approximately 25%. There were also other taxes that were levied on tea that would be consumed in Britain itself. That amounted to quite a bit of tax on tea, and since the Dutch government didn't tax tea brought into their republic, Britons and American colonists alike could simply buy smuggled Dutch tea that was much less expensive.

Because of the large black market for tea in Britain, the East India Company was losing as much as £400,000 each year to smugglers. That figure doesn't include the money they were losing because of the black market in the American colonies where tea was also smuggled in large quantities.

To resolve the problem, Parliament passed what was called the Indemnity Act. This act refunded the 25% tax on tea that was meant to be exported to the American colonies. That helped the East India Company, but now the British government needed to recoup that tax money. To do that, they passed the Townshend Revenue Acts of 1767 and 1768. These acts created new taxes, one of which was levied on the tea in the colonies.

The Townshend Revenue Acts didn't solve the smuggling problem, but it did ignite new controversy regarding the right the British government had to tax the colonies when they had no representation in Parliament. This debate began when Parliament first proposed to directly tax the colonies to raise more money in what was known as the Stamp Act of 1765. At the time this act was passed, it also included a Declaratory Act that essentially reaffirmed the right of the Crown to pass any kind of legislation that affected the colonies that it wanted. A group of colonists known as Whigs objected to those acts and argued that they violated the British Constitution.

While both British Americans and Britons were in agreement that British subjects could only be taxed with the consent of their elected representatives, the British subjects residing in the American colonies were never given the right to elect members to Parliament. The Whigs argued, therefore, that the Crown didn't have the right to tax the colonies. They asserted that the only taxes that could be levied on the colonies were those levied by the colonial assembly governments.

Protests against the Stamp Act were successful in getting it repealed in 1766, but the Declaratory Act remained. When the Townshend Revenue Acts were passed the following year, the Whigs once again initiated protests and boycotts. Many merchants agreed to non-importation agreements, and colonists agreed to boycott British tea. The activists worked to promote local alternatives to British tea, such as Labrador tea, an herbal tea made from Rhododendron plants, and of course, the smuggling continued without missing a beat.

The Whigs were even able to get the sons of the Massachusetts governor, Thomas Hutchinson, to abide by the agreement to boycott imports of British tea. Their protests were so successful that Parliament had little choice but to repeal the majority of the taxes generated by the

Townshend Revenue Acts in 1770. The British government refused, however, to repeal the tax on tea. The prime minister of Britain, Frederick North, argued that the Crown had the right to tax the American subjects and that's why leaving the tea tax was not a violation of the British constitution.

While the tea tax was not repealed, the repeal of the other taxes was enough to calm the protests and bring an end to the boycott on imported British goods. That occurred in October of 1771 and lasted until 1773 during which time British tea was imported in large quantities to the colonies. The tax on that tea was three pence per pound of weight, and Boston was the colony that imported the largest amount of legal tea. The smugglers, however, still sold the most tea in New York and Philadelphia.

Chapter Two

The Tea Act of 1773

“In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.”

—Benjamin Franklin

During the 1760s and early 1770s, the East India Company had a deal with Britain to sell its tea in London, and while the British government eventually made a deal to refund the 25% tax the company paid, it was still struggling financially. Part of the problem was that it had to sell the tea for a very inexpensive price given that it was forced to sell it in London even though the tea was ultimately destined for the Americas.

That meant that the biggest profits went to the British merchants who purchased the tea in London. They were able to impose significant markups in the price, and that, combined with the tea tax that had been part of the Townshend Revenue Acts, meant the American colonists were paying a pretty penny for their tea.

The American colonists, however, didn't rely exclusively on the British tea. They were smuggling the more inexpensive Dutch tea into the colonies to the tune of some 900,000 pounds of tea each year. The British tea was better tasting to the colonists, but they were encouraged to boycott that as a protest against what they considered to be taxation without representation.

Because of the colonial protest, the demand for British tea dropped significantly, and that meant that the British merchants weren't purchasing as much tea from the East India Company. In fact, a huge surplus of tea had accumulated in the company's British warehouses. The situation was complicated by war and famine in Bengal which further reduced the company's revenue from India and weakened its other European markets. Therefore, by 1773, the company was on the verge of financial collapse.

Benjamin Franklin, among others, suggested that allowing the company to export tea directly to the American colonies would improve the situation. That would mean the company would no longer have to pay the taxes charged in London, and it would eliminate the British merchant middlemen.

The prime minister of England, Frederick North, was convinced this was an opportunity to solve several problems with one bill. It would help the company financially and reduce the markups in price in the colonies. That would mean that the British tea would be cheaper than the smuggled Dutch tea that many colonists were drinking. The colonists would, he believed, happily pay for cheaper and better-tasting tea, and since the Townshend tea tax was still in place, their willingness to buy the tea and pay the tax would legitimize Parliament's right to tax the colonies.

Given what was seen as the advantages of passing such legislation, the Tea Act was passed on May 10, 1773. It gave the East India Company the license to export tea directly to North America, thereby eliminating the need to sell their tea at auction in London. It also said that any duties that would have been charged in Britain on tea destined for the colonies and other foreign parts would either be refunded when the tea was exported or not imposed at all. Any merchants receiving the tea in the colonies were required to put up a deposit when they received it.

Parliament did discuss the possibility of waiving the Townshend tea tax, but Prime Minister North opposed that because those revenues were used for paying the salaries of officials of the Crown who resided in the colonies.

Once all were in agreement, the act was passed, and the East India Company now had the right to ship tea to the main American ports which included Philadelphia, New York City, Charleston, and Boston. Those merchants who received the tea in these ports and then made arrangements for its resale were typically favored by the local governor appointed by the Crown in South Carolina, Massachusetts, and New York. In fact, Massachusetts governor Thomas Hutchinson was part-owner of the company that was chosen to receive the tea shipped from the East India Company to Boston.

With this arrangement, the British government was able to successfully undercut the price of the less flavorful Dutch tea that the colonists were smuggling in. While the Crown had hoped this would resolve the question of its authority to tax the colonies, they would be

disappointed. The reaction would not be what they had hoped for and the consequences would be far-reaching.

Chapter Three

The Whigs and Their Role in the Protests

“Belonging to the Whig party, the aim of that party has always been my aim—‘The cause of civil and religious liberty all over the world.’”

—John Russell, 1st Earl Russell

To truly understand the tension between the American colonies and the British Crown, it is important to understand exactly who the Whigs were and how they impacted the protests over British authority.

The term Whig was a shortened version of *whiggamore*, which was a Scottish word to describe cattle drivers who would go to the town of Leith to get corn. The word later referred to a Scottish radical faction, also known as the Kirk Party, who was active in the War of Three Kingdoms during the reign of Charles I. The term was also used to refer to Presbyterian Scottish rebels who fought against the royal Episcopalian order.

With regard to English politics, the term Whig was initially used to describe those people who didn't want to allow King Charles II's brother, James, to ascend to the throne after Charles's death. The Whigs argued that James was a Roman Catholic, and for that reason, he should be excluded. In their minds, Catholicism went hand-in-hand with absolutism, the French monarchy style of government that gave the monarch absolute power. The Whig political stance caused one Tory—the Whigs' opposition—to joke that “the first Whig was the Devil.”

The debate over excluding James came to be known as the Exclusion Crisis, and it ultimately caused King Charles to discontinue and then dissolve a session of Parliament. He had initially offered a compromise that would protect the Protestant church during his brother's reign, but that did little to quell the resistance. He dissolved Parliament because he wanted to give it some time for passions to cool, but while an Exclusion

Bill was passed when Parliament met 13 months later in 1680, it was still opposed by the House of Lords. Renewed passions caused Charles to once again dissolve Parliament in 1681, and while the thought was that would cause the Whigs to suffer losses in the next election, that didn't happen.

When the next Parliament met, Charles again dissolved it and determined that he would rule without it. He had gotten the promise of support from the French King Louis XIV in opposing the Whigs. Without Parliament, the Whigs' political party began to crumble, and many notable Whigs were executed for treason. James would ascend to the throne, but in 1688, he was deposed in what became known as the Glorious Revolution and replaced by his daughter, Queen Mary II and her husband William of Orange. Mary and William ruled with both Whigs and Tories in their government.

The Whig party later split into what were known as Junto Whigs, who were younger and more tightly organized, and Country Whigs, who would eventually merge with the Tories in the 1690s.

By the eighteenth century, Queen Anne had succeeded William, and she initially excluded the Junto Whigs from power. After trying to govern with just the Tories, however, she went back to her father's policy of balancing the two parties in her government. The Tories would later become more and more opposed to the War of Spanish Succession, and that resulted in Anne having to rely more on the Junto Whigs than she would have liked. That caused her to eventually dismiss her Junto ministers and replace them with Tories. In response, the Whigs opposed the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, and that caused Anne to take the advice of her Tory administration leaders to create twelve new Tory peers in order to get the treaty passed.

It was in this way that the Whigs came to advocate for the supremacy of Parliament over the Crown. They were also very protectionist in their trade policies since they feared that the absolute monarchy in France would ultimately endanger Protestantism and their liberty. To prevent that, they successfully passed a Prohibition Act that banned the importation of some French goods.

The Whigs would come to dominate the political scene between 1714 and 1760 when the Tories struggled to remain a relevant political force. Although they were able to retain their presence in the House of Commons, they didn't wield the same political power they had earlier. That would change, however, with the ascension of George III to the throne.

George III wanted to restore the monarchy's power by freeing it from the influence of the Whig lords. He promoted people to leadership roles around him who dismantled the power of the Old Whigs and replaced them with what was referred to as Rockingham Whigs. Once in power, the Rockingham Whigs laid out their philosophy extolling the virtues of their political faction. It was this Whig faction that was opposed by Prime Minister North's government. The Whigs accused him of being a Tory even though his administration was composed of people who had previously been considered Whigs; they were just Old Whigs.

This is what laid the basis for the tension with the American colonies. There was a faction of Whigs who had become known as the Radical Whigs, and it was their writings that would come to influence the colonists in America. In fact, some of the early colonial activists were also calling themselves Whigs, as they allied themselves with the Radical Whigs who opposed Prime Minister North. They also referred to the American loyalists who still supported the monarchy as Tories.

As soon as the American Whigs began to advocate for independence from the British government's authority, however, they instead began to use the label patriots. It is the party of the patriots who would later form the American Whig Party in 1833, and as such, they would oppose a strong presidency just as the original British Whigs had opposed an overly strong monarchy and supported the supremacy of Parliament.

It was these American Whigs—or patriots as they increasingly called themselves—who were protesting the Crown's authority in the colonies. Many of them joined revolutionary organizations such as the Sons of Liberty, which was formed in Boston in 1765. It was through their organization of protests that the Boston Tea Party was eventually planned and executed.

Chapter Four

The Reaction to the Tea Act of 1773

“There emerged a kind of unformed nationalism . . . growing up with more and more men in more and more colonies speaking and writing of an American cause that they largely defined in terms of protecting American liberties against British tyranny.”

—Richard C. Simmons

When Parliament gave the East India Company the right to import tea directly to the American colonies, the result was that the price of British tea was lowered to the point where it undercut the smuggled Dutch tea the colonists had been buying. From Parliament’s point of view, they thought the colonists would be happy about it since they could drink better-tasting tea for a lower price, but that was not to be.

Many of the colonists felt the act was nothing more than a kind of Trojan horse that Parliament was using to seduce them into accepting that the Crown had a right to tax them even though they had no representation in Parliament. Additionally, some of the more prominent and influential colonists reacted with anger because, by allowing the East India Company to sell its tea directly in the colonies, they had effectively undercut the business of many colonial merchants.

What’s more, many of the agents who were chosen by the East India Company to ultimately sell the tea in the colonies were pro-Parliament, which only served to add fuel to a fire that was already burning out of control. The protestors were not simply concerned about the price of their tea. Samuel Adams, a prominent patriot, believed the Tea Act effectively created a monopoly for British tea. That, he argued, could not be instituted without colonial representation in Parliament.

Other colonists felt that the purpose of the new tax was to relieve some of the more prominent British officials of the colonial influence

that weighed on their decisions. This, they said, was a dangerous precedent that infringed on colonial rights, particularly in places like Massachusetts where the Townshend Acts had been implemented in their entirety.

As a result of these sentiments, the passage of the Tea Act revived the colonial boycott of British tea, and it also inspired other acts of protest. Moreover, it made allies out of groups like the Sons of Liberty and local merchants who had previously been adversaries in this debate. Many of the merchants were smugglers whose businesses were at risk of going under, but it wasn't just a problem for them. Even legal tea importers were faced with financial ruin when they were not chosen by the East India Company as consignees to receive and sell their tea. Others feared that the creation of one monopoly by the government would lead to others for different goods coming from abroad.

Because of the anger, mobs of colonists began to intimidate the agents chosen by the East India Company to sell tea. That caused many of them to resign from their commissions. Additionally, crowds began to gather in several colonial port towns, and they were successful in forcing the East India Company ships to turn away before they could unload their controversial cargo. In Charleston, where company consignees were forced to resign, the tea that was left unclaimed was then seized by the port's customs officials.

In Philadelphia, at mass protest meetings, Benjamin Rush urged fellow colonists to oppose the ships attempting to land since their cargo contained what he called "the seeds of slavery." As a result, in early December of 1773, the East India Company's consignees in Philadelphia had resigned their commissions and the ship laden with tea was returned to England after protestors angrily confronted the ship's captain. A similar result occurred in New York, where the consignees had resigned by the time the ship bound for that port arrived, and it was turned back by protestors.

In total, seven ships had been sent by the East India Company to the colonies. Four of them had been headed to Boston, while the remaining three were headed to the ports of New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston. They were carrying more than 2,000 chests that contained some 600,000 pounds of tea. The colonists had learned about the Tea Act after the ships had already departed for the colonies. By the time they were arriving, the protests were in full swing.

In each case except for Boston, the protestors were successful in forcing the resignation of the tea consignees and turning the ships back

to Britain. In Boston, however, it was a different situation. The governor there, Thomas Hutchinson, refused to submit to the protestors' demands. He had two sons who were tea consignees, and he convinced them as well as the others to stand their ground. As a result, the consignees were denounced as traitors by their fellow Bostonians.

It was in this atmosphere of protest that the tea ship *Dartmouth* arrived in Boston in late November of 1773. By law, the ship was required to unload its cargo and pay the duties required within 20 days. Failure to do so would result in the confiscation of the cargo. On November 29, Whig leader Samuel Adams called for a meeting among the protestors.

Thousands of people attended the meeting, which led to the colonists passing a resolution that urged the captain of the ship to return without having paid any import duties. While this was going on, there were 25 men watching the ship to prevent it from unloading the tea. Despite the passage of this resolution, Governor Hutchinson refused to allow the *Dartmouth* to leave before paying the required duty. By that time, two more tea ships arrived in the harbor, the *Eleanor* and the *Beaver*. In this way, the stage was set for the protest that would become known as the Boston Tea Party.

Chapter Five

The Boston Tea Party

“This meeting can do nothing further to save the country.”

—Samuel Adams

December 16, 1773, was the last day that the *Dartmouth* could remain in the harbor without paying the required duties to colonial officials and offloading its cargo. By that point in time, Samuel Adams, the leader of the Whigs, had called a meeting in the Old South Meeting House. Around 7,000 people—almost half of the population of Boston at that time—gathered at the meeting place. After it was reported that Governor Hutchinson was once again refusing to allow the now three ships—the *Dartmouth*, the *Eleanor*, and the *Beaver*—in the harbor to leave as was being demanded by the protestors, Samuel Adams stated that now-famous quote above, “This meeting can do nothing further to save the country.”

It was a prescient statement, and some would later claim it was prearranged to be a signal that the protestors should begin the “tea party.” That claim is questionable, however, as it didn’t appear anywhere in print for more than a century following the actual protest. In fact, eyewitness accounts noted that people didn’t leave the meeting for some ten or fifteen minutes after Adams had said that, and furthermore, Adams himself tried to keep people in place since the meeting wasn’t over yet.

Despite his efforts, people began pouring out of the meeting hall, prepared for action. Several of them donned costumes that they had crafted prior to the meeting. They were aware of the need to disguise their faces because what they were planning to do was, after all, illegal, and many chose to dress as Mohawk warriors in order to be able to completely paint their faces. The Mohawk people were part of the Iroquois League of Nations and lived in and around the New York State area at this time. By choosing to disguise themselves as Mohawks, the Sons of Liberty protestors were making a statement about their alliance with America as opposed to Great Britain. Ironically, the Mohawk would

go on to support the British in the subsequent American Revolutionary War as they sought to maintain their long-standing trade relations and garner support for prohibiting further colonial expansion into their territory.

With disguises in place, on the evening of December 16, between 30 and 130 men snuck on board the three ships anchored in the Boston Harbor. They spent approximately three hours dumping all of the tea chests stowed on the ships into the water. There were 342 chests in total, and that amounted to some 92,000 pounds of tea. The destruction of the tea resulted in a loss of £9,659 or the equivalent of \$1.7 million in modern dollars. This hit Nantucket-born colonist William Rotch particularly hard since he was the owner of two out of the three ships.

The precise location in Boston where this is said to have taken place was at Griffin's Wharf, but that has not been established as fact. Some studies place it at the foot of Hutchinson Street which is today known as Pearl Street. Wherever it took place, this would not be the last of the Tea Party's actions.

There had been another ship headed for Boston, the *William*, but it ran aground at Cape Cod that December. Still, its tea was able to be unloaded, taxed, and eventually sold to private individuals. The Sons of Liberty, in March of 1774, learned that the tea from this ship was being stored in a Boston warehouse. They broke into the warehouse and destroyed everything they were able to find, but some of the tea had already been sold to Davison Newman and Company. That tea was stored in their shop, and so, on March 7, the Sons of Liberty, unwilling to let any British tea into Boston, once again donned their Mohawk disguises and broke into the shop. There, they dumped the last of the tea from the four ships into the Boston Harbor.

Although it is unclear if Samuel Adams actually helped to plan the Boston Tea Party, he did begin to publicize and defend the protestors' actions. He claimed the protest was not an action perpetrated by a lawless mob; rather, it was an act of civil disobedience, a principled protest. He noted that the British government had given the colonists little choice, and they had to act to defend what were their constitutionally granted rights. The British government disagreed, and even those who were considered colonial supporters were angered by the act.

Chapter Six

The British Response

“This is the most magnificent Movement of all. There is a Dignity, a Majesty, a Sublimity in this last Effort of the Patriots that I greatly admire. This Destruction of the Tea is so bold, so daring, so firm, so intrepid, and so inflexible, and it must have so important Consequences and so lasting, that I cannot but consider it as an Epocha in History.”

—John Adams

In the immediate aftermath of the Boston Tea Party, many of the participants fled from Boston to avoid arrest. One participant, George Hewes, later remembered that several protestors went back to their homes and specifically avoided having conversations with anyone about the event. They purposely avoided any attempt to find out who else had been involved so that they could not reveal the identities of other actors should they be caught. Each of the participants understood that they were in charge of keeping their own secrets and taking the risk of any consequences for themselves.

No one had been hurt during the act, and other than the tea and one padlock, there had been no other property damage, nor was there any looting. The participants in the protest had reportedly even swept the ships’ decks clean before leaving. Many claimed that the night of the act was the stillest night that the colony had enjoyed for a very long time.

Only one member of the group known as the Sons of Liberty was caught and imprisoned for his role in the protest. His name was Francis Akeley. He was self-employed as a wheelwright—a person who fabricates and repairs wooden wheels—and would later serve as a militiaman in the American Revolutionary War. He was killed at the Battle of Bunker Hill in Charleston in 1775.

There had been no violence committed during the Boston Tea Party. There was no fighting between the patriots and the British soldiers who were stationed in Boston. Moreover, none of the crewmembers of the

Dartmouth, the *Eleanor*, or the *Beaver* were harmed in any way. The Sons of Liberty were careful in their planning and execution of the protest, but to the British government, that made little difference.

For weeks following the Boston Tea Party, the harbor smelled of the 92,000 plus pounds of tea that had been dumped off the ships. The Sons of Liberty didn't want anyone to try and salvage any of the leaves floating on the water, and for that reason, they would go out in boats to hit any tea they found with their oars in order to sink it or make it unusable. There was a considerable amount of tea floating on the water's surface, and the colonial rebels worked hard to drench it so as to make it completely useless.

On January 20, 1774, London learned of what had happened in Boston, and the Crown reacted by shutting down the Boston Harbor until such time as every one of the 340 chests of tea were paid for in full. The British government passed what was first known as the Coercive Acts, which became known in the colonies as the Intolerable Acts. These acts included the Boston Port Act, the Massachusetts Government Act, the Administration of Justice Act, the Quartering Act, and the Quebec Act.

The Boston Port Act ordered that the port of Boston remain closed until the damage caused by the Boston Tea Party was paid for in whole. The Massachusetts Government Act restricted the entire colony of Massachusetts from holding democratic town meetings. It also changed the governor's council from an elected to an appointed body. The Administration of Justice Act held that British officials acting on behalf of the Crown were immune to any kind of criminal prosecution in Massachusetts. The Quartering Act mandated that colonists were required to house and quarter British troops whenever they so demanded, even if that meant putting them up in their own homes.

These four acts were passed in the first version of the Intolerable Acts, but a fifth act, the Quebec Act was then joined with the other acts. It granted the Canadians the right to continue their judicial system, but what was upsetting to the colonists was that it also extended the right to freely practice Catholicism in Canada. The colonists were mostly Protestants, and they were not happy about the establishment of Catholicism in the colonies.

The aim of this legislation was to both restore order and to punish the perpetrators of the Boston Tea Party, and it imposed some very strict laws. The British Parliament hoped to effectively cut the New England colonies off from the rest of the American colonies so that there would be little opportunity to form a unified resistance to the Crown. The

expectation was that the other colonies would simply abandon Boston to its fate, but that wasn't what happened. Instead, infuriated colonists from all American colonies came to the defense of the city. They sent in supplies and they also decided to form Provincial Congresses to discuss what they perceived as harmful acts on the part of the British government. They also were determined to mobilize their resistance to the monarchy.

George Washington wrote, in June of 1774, that, "The cause of Boston . . . ever will be considered as the cause of America." He felt this way despite holding personal views that the conduct of the Sons of Liberty was wrong because they had destroyed private property, something many elites like Washington found deplorable. Benjamin Franklin was another elite who was appalled by the destruction of the property.

None of the efforts to de-escalate the situation worked, however, as by September of 1774, the colonists formed the First Continental Congress. It met for the first time in Philadelphia to discuss how to create a united resistance to what they considered British tyranny. In October of that year, they petitioned the British government to repeal the Intolerable Acts in a document called the Declaration and Resolves.

The Declaration and Resolves called for not only the repeal of the Intolerable Acts but the censure of the British government. It also implemented a boycott of any goods coming from Britain, and it declared that the colonists had the right to govern themselves independently. For that purpose, it called upon colonists to form and train their own militia.

Great Britain would not capitulate to their demands, however, and that would put the colonies on the path toward revolution. In fact, within months, the so-called "shot heard round the world" would ring out in Concord, Massachusetts. This is considered the start of the American Revolutionary War.

Chapter Seven

Of Patriots and Patriotism: The Major Players

“Our contest is not only whether we ourselves shall be free, but whether there shall be left to mankind an asylum on earth for civil and religious liberty.”

—Samuel Adams

While Samuel Adams’s role in the Boston Tea Party is not clear, it is true that he was one of the leaders of the Sons of Liberty. He was born in Boston on September 16, 1722, to his father Samuel Adams, Sr., and his mother Mary Fifield. Although he was one of twelve children born to his parents, only two of his siblings survived past the age of three. One of his cousins, John Adams, would go on to serve as the second president of the United States.

Several generations of his family were maltsters, that is malt producers for brewing beer. While many people describe Adams as a brewer of beer, there is no evidence that he ever worked as anything but a maltster.

His run-ins with the British government began in 1748 when he and his friends became upset over the British impressment, which was the practice of forcibly recruiting manpower from the colonies into the British Royal Navy. In response, Adams and some friends started *The Independent Advertiser*, a weekly newspaper that included many political essays emphasizing the importance of resisting any encroachment on constitutional rights.

Adams was also a proud Puritan and worried that New England would collapse if it abandoned its Puritanical values. He particularly noted the importance of virtue and emphasized that in his political writings as well. Like his father, he began a political career after gaining the support of the Boston Caucus. He was first elected to political office

in 1747 and served as a clerk of the Boston market. By 1756, he was well-known in Boston political circles and was elected as tax collector, a post which came with a small income. He wasn't a good tax collector, however, as he often failed to collect taxes from people who could not or would not pay. That made him popular among the Boston citizenry, but it also left him liable for the tax shortages he didn't collect.

By 1765, Adams owed more than £8,000 and was forced to sue the delinquent taxpayers for the uncollected taxes. Still, many people refused to pay, and his political opponents used the situation to obtain a court judgment against him in the amount of some £1,500. His friends paid the fine and the town meeting chose to write off the remaining debt since, by that time, Adams had emerged as a popular leader.

Following Britain's victory in the French and Indian War in 1763, Adams emerged as an important public servant in Boston. Because the British government was deep in debt as a result of the war, Parliament sought to levy more taxes on the colonies for the first time. Adams vehemently opposed the new taxes that resulted from the Sugar Act of 1764, arguing that without representation in Parliament, the Crown could not impose taxes on British subjects. That, he said, would infringe on their constitutional rights. He was the one who argued that only the colonial assemblies could tax colonists. He, of course, went on to oppose the Stamp Act and the Townshend Acts as well.

John Hancock was another one of the more famous patriots that were involved in the Boston Tea Party. Born in Braintree, Massachusetts, on January 23, 1737, he was a merchant who, like Samuel Adams, became increasingly involved in political affairs as the British government made repeated attempts to exercise authority over the colonies. He emerged as a leader in Boston politics in 1765 when he was elected as one of the five Boston selectmen. It was not long after that the British government passed the Stamp Act. Hancock's initial response was moderate, but he quickly changed his mind and joined the active resistance to the tax by boycotting British goods. That made him very popular in Boston, and he was soon elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1766.

Hancock was supported by Samuel Adams, and though the two men were very different, they developed a relationship described as mentor (Adams) and protégé (Hancock). In 1768, Hancock's ship, the *Liberty*, arrived in Boston carrying a cargo of wine. Though customs officials found just 25 pipes of wine, they suspected that more had been unloaded prior to their inspection of the ship. There was no evidence for this, and so nothing came of it, but a month later, a tidesman who had stayed on

the ship overnight when it laid anchor changed his story and said he was forcibly held while wine was illegally unloaded.

That caused customs officials to seize the *Liberty*, and since the citizenry of Boston was already upset because the British Royal Navy had been impressing colonists into service, a riot broke out in protest. The confrontation was escalated when sailors attempting to seize the *Liberty* were mistaken for a so-called press gang—that is, naval officials looking to grab citizens and force them into military service. The entire affair ultimately caused the customs officials to seek refuge at Castle William, an island fort in the Boston Harbor. Hancock was later sued and his ship was confiscated.

The incident reinforced a previous decision by the Crown to station troops in Boston to quell unrest. As the colonists became increasingly opposed to British authority, tensions rose, and in March of 1770, five civilians were killed in what became known as the Boston Massacre. Hancock wasn't involved in that incident, but he was so incensed by the abuse of authority that he formed a committee to demand the British troops be removed. He was ultimately successful in getting the regiments removed to Castle William, and as a result of that, he was celebrated as a hero in Boston. That boosted his political career, and he was elected to a second term in a nearly unanimous vote even despite the fact that his guilt or innocence in the *Liberty* affair remained unclear. Though he did not take an active part in the Boston Tea Party, he approved of the action and would later play a major role in the American Revolutionary War as one of the signers of the American Declaration of Independence.

Paul Revere was another famous American rebel who participated in both the Boston Tea Party and the American Revolutionary War. Born on the north side of Boston in 1734, Revere was a silversmith by trade. He had learned from his father, and because of this trade, he was connected to a veritable cross-section of Boston society, something that he would use to great benefit during the Revolutionary War.

Though a Puritan by birth, Revere preferred the Church of England and became part of the first group of people to ring the newly casted bells at Christ Church, also known as the Old North Church. Though he would, at his father's insistence, return to the Puritan Church, that affiliation wouldn't last.

After his father died in 1754, Revere joined the provincial army where he was commissioned as a second lieutenant. He later returned to Boston to take over the silver shop that had been previously run by his father. He became increasingly involved in political affairs and helped to

organize an intelligence group to keep watch over the actions of the British military. During the Boston Tea Party, he was an active participant. He donned a Mohawk disguise and helped dump the tea into the harbor. He would continue to support the protests and argue for colonial independence. He continued to stay vigilant on the activities of the British regiments stationed in Boston, and on April 16, 1775, he noted that British troop movements were going to endanger rebel military stores, so he rode to Concord to warn the patriots to move them. Two days later, he would make the midnight ride for which he is famous today to alert his countrymen that the British “redcoats” were coming. He was signaled of their approach with two lanterns in the Old North Church he so loved. The use of two lanterns signaled the approach of the British by sea.

Most of the other participants in the Boston Tea Party never revealed their identities for fear they would face both civil and criminal charges. They also worried they would be condemned by Boston’s elite because they had destroyed private property. The ages of most of the participants ranged from teenagers to around 40-year-olds, and they came from all walks of life. Some were craftsmen, others were artisans, and others owned businesses or were tradesmen, apprentices, and common laborers. All were united by their desire to protect their rights and protest British tyranny. Many would go on to play a role in the American Revolution.

Chapter Eight

The Road to Revolution

“I am not a Virginian, but an American.”

—Patrick Henry

The Boston Tea Party was the first significant act of defiance that would eventually lead to an all-out war against Great Britain. It wasn't the last act, however, as in March of 1774, approximately 60 Bostonians would board the ship the *Fortune* and dump yet another 30 chests of tea into the Boston Harbor. While this so-called “Second Boston Tea Party” didn't garner as much notoriety as the first, it did encourage even more demonstrations where tea was dumped in Maryland, New York, and South Carolina.

After the British Parliament passed the Intolerable Acts, tensions began to rise rapidly in the colonies. In September of 1774, the colonists convened the First Continental Congress, the goal of which was to determine how to appropriately respond to what the colonists felt was British oppression. The Congress consisted of elected delegates from each of the 13 colonies except for Georgia. It met in Carpenters Hall in Philadelphia on September 5 of that year.

The meeting was held in secret so as to avoid revealing to the British government that the colonies were uniting in opposition to its policies. Among the famous American patriots present were George Washington, Patrick Henry, Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, Samuel Adams, and John Adams. Peyton Randolph from Virginia was elected as president of the Congress.

While there was some suggestion that perhaps the colonies should try to work something out with the British government so that they could have their freedom and remain under British rule, very few of the delegates agreed with this approach. Still, they wrote up a list of the basic rights they expected and sent it to King George III. They also demanded the repeal of the Intolerable Acts. Benjamin Franklin was sent across the Atlantic to present the demands to the British Parliament in

person. In the meantime, the Congress formed the Continental Association and agreed to stop all trade between the colonies and Great Britain until the demands were met. While the Congress began as delegates from separate colonies, it wasn't long before everyone began to think of themselves as united Americans. The famous quote by Patrick Henry above illustrated that fact.

It soon became evident to the Congress attendants that the colonists were behind their actions. The governor of Massachusetts began taking some warlike actions, and the colonists themselves were also preparing. That indicated the people were willing to abide by the decisions made by the Congress even if that meant war with Great Britain. The Congress was adjourned on October 26, 1774, but the men had decided to convene it again in Philadelphia if King George III failed to repeal the Intolerable Acts.

The Second Continental Congress was set to meet on May 10, 1775, to determine what the colonies would do if the Crown had not repealed or modified the Intolerable Acts, but before that could happen, the American Revolutionary War began with the "shot heard round the world" fired at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. Hundreds of British troops had marched on the two towns to seize weapons they learned the colonial militiamen were stashing. Paul Revere, however, made his famous ride and the militiamen were warned of the approaching redcoats. The fighting began in Lexington in the town green, but that would only be the first of many battles. With the war underway, the Second Continental Congress met instead to take charge of the war effort.

Chapter Nine

The Legacy of the Boston Tea Party

“Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? . . . I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.”

—Patrick Henry

Aside from the immediate consequences in the aftermath of the Boston Tea Party, the protest event had a number of other significant effects on American culture and political structure. That legacy still affects the United States today. As a consequence of the tea boycotts and the fact that many of the American colonists considered tea drinking to be unpatriotic, tea drinking declined even after the American Revolutionary War had been won. Instead, Americans came to prefer coffee as a hot drink and still do. It's a notable difference with modern British culture. John Adams, who would become the second president of the United States, was among those who continued to boycott tea following the revolution. In this way, the Boston Tea Party resulted in considerable cultural changes as well as changes related to political policy.

Another legacy of the Boston Tea Party is that it has become the reference point for many other political protests. The colonists themselves equated taxation without representation with British tyranny, and of course, countries the world over have seen fierce protests against taxes which often unfairly burden the lower classes. The Boston Tea Party not only came to be a symbol of abusive government policy, but it is also symbolic of the union of the underdogs against a common enemy. The colonists had only just begun to consider what it would take to defeat the British government should war become necessary. Yet, their ideals were such that they could do nothing different than what they felt was just. Many others have since followed in their footsteps.

Interestingly, the Boston Tea Party was not called as such until 1834 when one of the last survivors of the event, George Robert Twelves Hewes, referred to it as the Tea Party in biographical publications. Up until that time, it had simply been described as the “destruction of the tea.” This was due to the fact that many of the original colonists abhorred the destruction of private property, and even as they ultimately supported the cause of the protest movement, they could not celebrate that kind of behavior. For that reason, it was initially ignored when the earliest historical descriptions of the American Revolutionary War were written. Eventually though, the event would come to capture the imagination of political protestors around the world.

In 1908, Mohandas K. Gandhi led a protest that involved the burning of required registration certifications for East Indians in South Africa. It was known as the Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance and its aim was to control the entry of Indians into the country. If every man, woman, and child over the age of eight didn’t register by the stated date, they would no longer be permitted to stay. Of course, the law also required them to have their fingerprints taken along with the registration certificates. Following registration, the Indian people were required to carry the certificate with them at all times and produce them on demand by any police officer. Failure to comply could even result in prison time. In covering the burning of the certificates en masse, a British newspaper compared the protest to the Boston Tea Party.

Gandhi himself, upon meeting with the viceroy of India in 1930 following the Salt March—a protest against the British salt monopoly in that country—wryly took out some tax-free salt he had in his shawl and said he brought it “to remind us of the famous Boston Tea Party.”

American activists across the range of political viewpoints have also referenced the Boston Tea Party as symbolic of their own protests. On the 200th anniversary of the Boston Tea Party in 1973, protestors meeting at Faneuil Hall in Boston called for impeaching then-President Richard Nixon during the ongoing oil crisis. The protestors even went so far as to board a replica ship in the Boston Harbor to hang Nixon in effigy as they dumped numerous empty oil drums into the water.

In 1998, two U.S. Congressmen made a statement against the federal tax code by putting it into a chest that they then marked “tea” and dumping it into the Boston Harbor. Political parties have even used the name of the protest for their political party. Such was the case in 2006 when a libertarian political party laid claim to the name. In 2007, on the 234th anniversary of the protest, their candidate Ron Paul raised \$6

million in just 24 hours. This type of money-raising campaign ultimately produced the Tea Party movement which dominated the conservative wing of American politics for several years. Their dominance culminated in the 2010 midterm elections when they swept control of the United States House of Representatives.

The Boston Tea Party as a protest arose from a complicated history where violence had commonly been used to achieve political goals. The protestors found that particularly unappealing and were careful to avoid harming anyone during the event. They also didn't damage any other property, just the tea. Previous protests had been very violent. Even Thomas Hutchinson, the governor of Massachusetts, had been forced to flee with his family in 1765 when a mob protesting the Stamp Act destroyed his home.

Many other violent attacks had been perpetrated on tea commissioner's homes and families in the months leading up to the Boston Tea Party. The organizers of the Tea Party believed that to be contrary to what they were trying to achieve. It was, they believed, the polar opposite of democracy. They knew that such mob violence would never produce a long-term solution to the problems the colonies had with the British government, and they understood that violence is oftentimes ineffective as a political tool. The leaders of the Sons of Liberty—men like John Hancock and Samuel Adams—knew that they ultimately wanted to achieve democratic self-rule, but they also knew that had to be based on civil political debate and freedom of speech. That was the society they wanted to create, and while they understood that a war might be necessary, the new country they would establish had to be based on the rule of law.

For that reason, most of the leaders who organized the Boston Tea Party didn't participate in drafting the Declaration of Independence or the United States Constitution. Paul Revere was one exception, but the rest felt that since they had rallied the people to protest, their participation in those activities would not be appropriate. Instead, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson took the lead on enshrining the rule of law via a representative democracy in writing. They were not associated with any violence related to the previous protests, and while the Boston Tea Party was non-violent, it did involve the destruction of private property, something most elites of the day found offensive. For this reason, the Boston Tea Party was one of the last acts of mob protest in the colonies before the inauguration of American democracy.

In the modern world, though the Boston Tea Party is often cited by protestors who don't want new taxes, the colonial protestors weren't actually protesting the taxes themselves. They were protesting the fact that they were being taxed without proper representation in the British Parliament. They also were protesting the idea that taxes should be levied simply for the reason of funding the government without any benefit going to the people that are being taxed. It's one thing to tax people so that governments can build new roads for the people to use, and it's quite another to tax people simply to put money in the government's coffers. The Boston Tea Party protest and the people who boycotted tea all recognized the necessity of taxes for the general welfare; they simply wanted to benefit from such taxation and have representatives who could fight for their interests.

The ideal sought by these early players in American democracy was actually one in which violence would no longer play any role in politics; rather, political ideals would be properly debated by elected officials who represented the people who put them in office. They would represent their interests and fight for fair policies that would benefit the people as a whole. In many ways, the United States of America is still fighting for those very ideals, but the Boston Tea Party was, for those early patriots, a blow for freedom and justice for all.

Conclusion

The Boston Tea Party was a protest that had followed years of what the colonists in America considered to be unfair legislation that was passed without colonial representation in Parliament. Much of the legislation also conveyed no benefit to the people being taxed. Though the colonists made several attempts to negotiate with the British Crown, King George III simply would not give up what he saw as his right to do as he wished in the colonies.

Many of the colonists were Whigs, and they later became part of the Sons of Liberty. These were people who were accustomed to protesting what they viewed as unfair laws. They were part of a long history of both violent and non-violent protests. Still, it's notable that the organizers of the Boston Tea Party were careful not to hurt anyone as they carried out their actions. They wanted to make a statement, one that would get the attention of the Crown, and their initial intent was not to start a war of independence.

The Boston Tea Party would ultimately do just that, however, as the British government pushed back against the protest with even harsher legislation. Despite all attempts to come to an agreement, eventually there was nothing left but the initiation of a revolution. That's why the Boston Tea Party has since become a symbol of justice and freedom. People the world over have used it to symbolize their struggles for the same principles that the colonists were hoping to achieve.

Linda Gondosch once asked of the protest, "The 'Indians' knew the destruction of the tea had to be finished by midnight—not one minute later. Destroying the tea was against the law. The men were defying King George III of Great Britain. They could be tried for a crime against the government, thrown into jail, and hanged. Why would they risk their lives just to destroy a cargo of tea?" The simple answer to that question was freedom and liberty for all.

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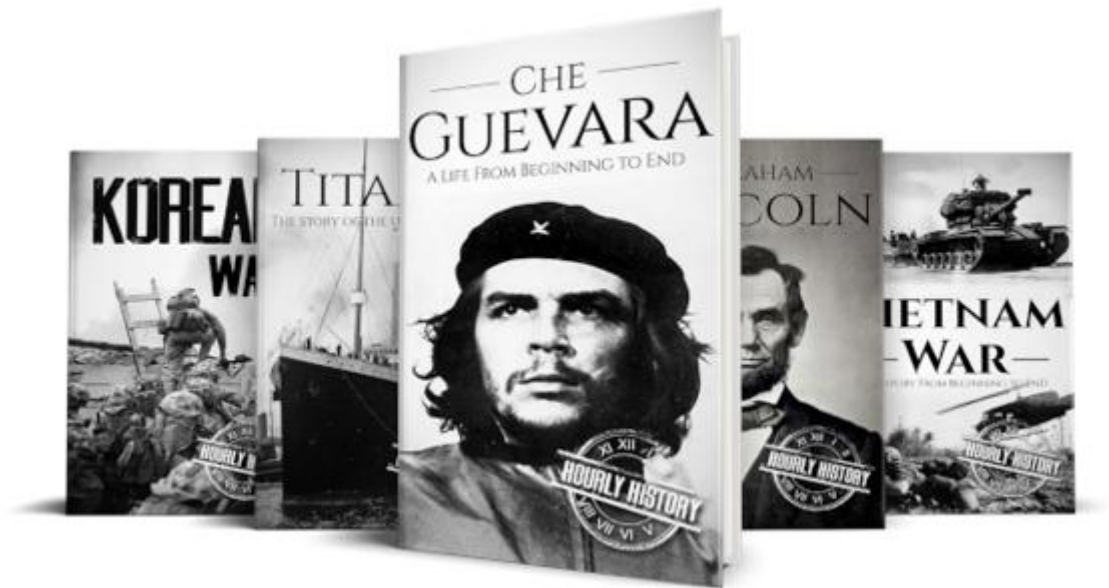
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