

The Boston Tea Party and Taxation Without Representation

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In the middle of the 18th century the American colonists held feelings of anger and resentment towards the English Parliament for taxing the American colonies as a way of recouping war costs for the British from the French and Indian War. These attitudes were mainly the result of several actions by the British that violated the rights of the new American citizens. The Declaration of Independence and eventually the American Revolution were direct results of the mistreatment by the British. Some of the main actions that caused this anger are the Townshend, Stamp, Sugar, Intolerable and Tea Acts.

The British Parliament held the power to tax without consent. The colonists found it hard to consider themselves free when there was a government taxing them without their consent. With the passing of the Stamp Act and the Sugar Act a tax on sugar and molasses the colonists were outraged. The colonists believed that the English Parliament was within its right to legislate them but were uncomfortable with their power to tax them without representation. The Stamp Act Congress was formed by colonists in New York in revolt to these new tax laws. The Stamp Act Congress discussed what they felt the limits of the English Parliament's authority should be and with continued discussion, the consensus of the Congress led more towards a revolution against the British. Along with these thoughts of revolution, mobs and riots in protest of the new tax laws unified the colonists in support of gaining independence from England. In July of 1766 Charles Townshend the Chancellor of the Exchequer created the Townshend Acts which placed tariffs on the colonist's imports of paper, glass, lead and tea. The legal importation of these goods was only from England so the British greatly discouraged their purchase in order to force

the manufacturing of taxable goods by the colonists. The colonist's reaction to these new laws was not violence but instead resulted in the forming of groups such as the Sons of Liberty which were colonists who secretly resisted and opposed the new tax laws. These anti tax groups continued to unify the colonists and strengthened their move towards independence from mother England and taxation without representation.

Some of the last regulations that were passed by the British Parliament without the consent of the colonists were the Intolerable Acts which came into effect after the Boston Tea Party which is one of the more prominent revolts of the period pre Revolutionary War. The Tea Act of 1773 was "an attempt to rescue the almost bankrupt East India Company, Prime Minister Lord North gave the business a monopoly on the sale and distribution of tea in the colonies. The Tea Act lowered the price on tea to the point that even the smugglers could not match, and Parliament expected the colonists to welcome the windfall" (cliffnotes). This law provided no new taxes on tea and because of this the British assumed that colonists would welcome the new law due to the drop in price of tea to consumers, but the colonists did not like the British cutting out the colonial middleman and dropping the taxes only for the East India Company which allowed them to sell their goods cheaper than the colonial merchants. The colonist's response was to boycott the tea and unlike previous protests large amounts of the colonists were involved. The colonies made plans to prevent the East India Company from unloading its cargo in colonial ports. In most ports the colonists persuaded agents of the East India Company to resign which caused the shipments of tea to either be returned to England or be warehoused. The company's agents in Boston refused to resign and with support from the royal governor they made preparations to unload any incoming cargoes regardless of opposition. Because of the colonists failure to turn away three ships in harbor carrying tea, the colonists organized to dump the tea into the harbor. On December 16, 1773, three large groups of men each disguised as Mohawk

Indians were led by Samuel Adams through a crowd of spectators to the three tea bearing ships. George Hewes recalls the men were “ordered by our commander to open the hatches and take out all the chests of tea and throw them overboard, and we immediately proceeded to execute his orders, first cutting and splitting the chests with our tomahawks, so as to thoroughly expose them to the effects of the water. In about three hours from the time we went on board, we had thus broken and thrown overboard every tea chest to be found in the ship, while those in the other ships were disposing of the tea in the same way, at the same time. We were surrounded by British armed ships, but no attempt was made to resist us.” (James). When the colonists refused to pay for the destroyed property, Prime Minister Lord North decided to implement the Coercive Acts. “These four acts closed the port of Boston, drastically reduced the powers of self-government in the colony, permitted royal officers to be tried in other colonies or in England when accused of crime and provided for the quartering of troops in the colonists’ barns and empty houses”(wikipedia). The British failed to see that these acts would do nothing but further anger the colonists and lead them to continue their pursuit of independence.

By violating the rights of the Americans time and time again the British eventually forced the colonists into war and the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The American Revolutionary War can be seen to be caused in some part by the taxes implemented by the British and the strong belief of the colonists of no taxation without representation. Had the British government treated the colonists more fairly we probably would not be the United States we are today because the colonists would have had no reason to end British rule over them. Without these and other historic events that shaped our country and our lives you and I would not be alive today enjoying the new nation our forefathers created.

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