



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on December 16, 2023

250th Anniversary of the Boston Tea Party

Today marks the 250th anniversary of the “Boston Tea Party,” when 342 chests — with nearly 100,000 pounds of tea — were dumped by the Sons of Liberty off three ships in Boston Harbor, on December 16, 1773. That event touched off a series of actions and reactions that led eventually the 13 British Colonies to declare their secession from the British Empire.

Unfortunately, the reasons for this drastic action are largely misunderstood in modern America.

Tensions between the British government and its Colonies on the eastern seaboard of North America had been rising for years. After the British won the French and Indian War, the Colonists no longer felt threatened by the French, and thus felt less dependent upon the Mother Country. When the British attempted to impose direct taxes on goods produced in the Colonies, with the hated Stamp Tax in 1765, in order to help pay for the late war, Colonial resistance was so great that the tax was eventually repealed.

Before this, Colonists had largely accepted taxes on trade. But now, even these taxes — which raised the price of imported goods — were increasingly resented. One good that was quite popular in both England and in the Colonies was tea. In response, many Colonists stopped drinking tea. In January 1770, for example, 538 women in Boston agreed to boycott tea as long as it was taxed. Some women turned to substitutes such as coffee and even raspberry leaves.

The British East India Company — losing so much of its American market — was facing bankruptcy. Their solution was to persuade Parliament to enact the Tea Act of May 10, 1773, which allowed the tea to be shipped duty-free to the Colonies, and once there, the company would hold a monopoly on the sale of tea — cutting out Colonial merchants. Why did Parliament opt to give them such a sweet deal? That so many members of Parliament were shareholders in the company could have had something to do with it.

Unfortunately, the granting of monopolies to favored companies by legislative bodies is still practiced today in our own country; the Federal Reserve System is a prime example.

When three vessels carrying the tea — the *Dartmouth*, the *Eleanor*, and the *Beaver* — arrived in Boston Harbor, they were not allowed to unload their cargo. Other port cities also did not allow the unloading of the monopoly tea. When the owners of the ships asked permission to return the tea to Britain, the British-appointed governor of Massachusetts refused.



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On the evening of December 16, 1773, several hundred members and supporters of the Sons of Liberty used small boats to row out to the three ships, and over the course of about three hours, proceeded to dump all the tea into the water. The next day, the Committee of Correspondence (like the Sons of Liberty, the creation of Boston patriot Samuel Adams) sent Paul Revere with a report of the action to New York and Philadelphia.

King George III and Parliament reacted angrily to the news, declaring Massachusetts to be in rebellion and passing a series of laws they dubbed the Coercive Acts. These laws, which the Colonists named the Intolerable Acts, closed the port of Boston until all the tea was paid for, and placed Massachusetts under a military dictatorship led by General Thomas Gage. The ensuing battles of Lexington and Concord — where the shots heard around the world were fired — were less than two years away.

Many Americans at the time, including “patriots” who opposed British policies, were embarrassed by the lawless action, with its destruction of private property. But it certainly fit the goal of Samuel Adams, the leader of the Sons of Liberty. Adams did not ask for all Colonists to approve of the action, or even of some of the other activities of his group. He noted, “It does not take a majority to prevail, but rather an irate, tireless minority, keen on setting brush fires of freedom in the minds of men.”

Because of Adams and others like him — such as his cousin, John Adams, John Hancock, Patrick Henry, George Washington, and Paul Revere — they did eventually prevail, and we are the heirs of the freedom they left us.

However, much of what they fought against, including the government granting of monopolies to favored corporations, remains a problem today. The men of Adams’ day had to resort to extreme measures, such as the Boston Tea Party. But we can follow their example of educating our fellow citizens on the principles of limited government and constitutional liberty, and we can organize to take *political* action.

As Adams said, it does not take a majority to prevail, but it does take a “tireless minority, keen on setting brush fires of freedom in the minds of men.”



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