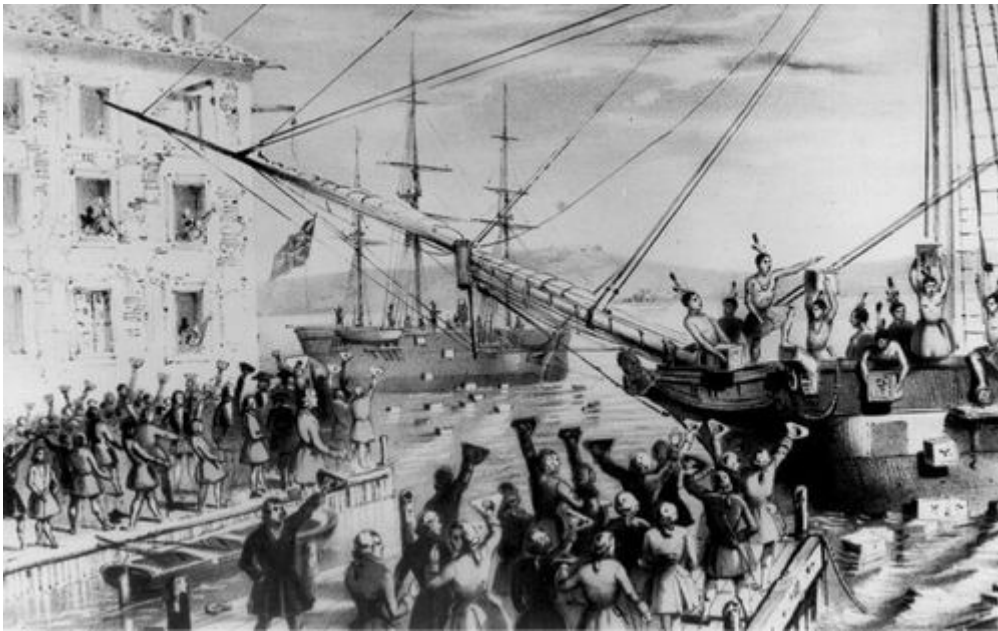


A Very Messy Tea Party

by W.M. Akers



If you know anything about English people, you probably know that many of them love tea. Ever since tea was first imported to Great Britain from China, the English have enjoyed a nice, hot cup of strong tea in the afternoon, and in the 1700s, they brought this habit with them to their colonies in North America.

In the early 1700s, the British government made a special deal with the East India Company, an English organization doing trade in the East Indies. They granted the East India Company a monopoly on tea by agreeing that no other company was allowed to sell tea in Britain or its colonies. This was a great deal for the East India Company, since it meant that the company could charge whatever it wanted for its products. It already cost a lot to get a crate of tea from India to England, and government taxes made the cost of tea even higher.

In the British colonies of North America, colonists did not like having to pay such high prices. Rather than overpay for tea from England, they turned to Dutch smugglers, who sneaked in tea that was just as good-and much less expensive. This was a violation of the English monopoly and against the law, but the colonists didn't care. They got the same cup of tea and had enough money left over to buy cookies for dipping.

The East India Company, however, didn't like this one bit. By the 1760s, they were losing hundreds of thousands of pounds per year to Dutch smugglers-a fortune in a time when

£60 a year was considered a good income. Rather than change their prices to compete with the Dutch smugglers, the company asked the British government for help. Parliament agreed and passed a series of acts in 1767 that would change the course of history.

A Tax on Tea?

With a stroke of the pen, the Townshend Acts raised the prices the colonists paid on all sorts of things. Lead, glass, paints, and paper all became more expensive. But today, the acts are best remembered for raising the price colonists had to pay for tea.

The colonists were outraged, and not just because they had to spend more money at the market. This was the second time the British government had taxed them to pay for the government's expenses—after the incredibly unpopular Stamp Act of 1765—and the colonists did not think it was fair. According to the British tradition, a tax could only be enacted—or "levied"—after elected officials agreed on it. For people living in England, this meant that taxes had to be voted on by Parliament. But the colonists didn't have any representatives in Parliament. They didn't have any representatives at all.

The common phrase "No taxation without representation!" became popular then, referring to the government taxing people without their consent.

The Sons of Liberty

With the Tea Act of 1773, Parliament allowed the East India Company to sell tea to the colonists for less money than ever before. With this act, the East India Company was able to cut American merchants out of the picture, selling tea directly to American distributors. Suddenly, English tea was cheaper than smuggled Dutch tea, which should have made the colonists happy. The act, however, had a negative effect on the American economy, which angered the colonists. Moreover, the Townshend tax was still in effect, and colonists didn't want a shilling of their money going toward something they considered unfair. It was a question of principle, and a few colonists in Boston were very principled indeed. There was no legal way for the colonists to fight back. And so they decided to break the law.

In November 1773, the *Dartmouth*, a tea ship, arrived in Boston Harbor, carrying thousands of pounds of discounted, yet taxed tea. But the people of Boston didn't want to buy this tea. They didn't want to drink it. They didn't even want to let it off the ship. Led by Samuel Adams, protestors calling themselves the Sons of Liberty did everything they could to make the captain of the ship turn around and go home. But the British governor would not let the *Dartmouth* leave.

Finally, on December 16, a sizeable group of colonists sneaked aboard the *Dartmouth* disguised as Native Americans. Working quietly, they emptied the holds of the *Dartmouth* and two other ships that had recently docked in port. Three hundred forty-two chests of tea went into the frigid Boston Harbor—a statement that Britain and the East India Company could not ignore. No matter how cheap the product, if it was taxed, the colonists didn't want it.

It was more than two years after the Boston Tea Party that the Declaration of Independence was signed, but once that tea went into the harbor, the path to revolution was assured. Tons of tea were thrown out, and the whole course of colonial history was changed that night.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What did the British government and the East India Company agree on in a deal made in the early 1700s?
 - A. The East India Company would lower the price of tea in Britain and its colonies.
 - B. The East India Company would standardize the price of tea in Britain and its colonies.
 - C. Only the East India Company was allowed to sell tea in Britain and its colonies.
 - D. Britain would not tax the East India Company on tea sold in Britain and its colonies.

2. One of the main causes of the high price of tea in the American colonies was the monopoly held by the East India Company. What was the effect?
 - A. The East India Company sold more tea.
 - B. The British started buying less tea.
 - C. The East India Company grew less tea.
 - D. Colonists bought tea from Dutch smugglers.

3. The colonists' major issue with the Townshend Acts was *not* the higher cost of tea. What evidence from the passage best supports this conclusion?
 - A. Colonists had to spend more money on other goods such as paper.
 - B. Colonists still would not buy British tea after the price was lowered.
 - C. Colonists dumped 342 chests of British tea into the Boston Harbor.
 - D. Colonists did not have representation in the British Parliament.

4. Why did Parliament pass the Tea Act of 1773?
 - A. to try to get the colonists to buy British tea again
 - B. to raise the profits the British government made on tea taxes
 - C. to give the East India Company a monopoly on tea
 - D. to allow the East India Company to sell tea in the colonies

5. What is this passage mostly about?
 - A. why the British love high-quality tea
 - B. the beginning of the Revolutionary War
 - C. the development of the East India Company
 - D. the lead-up to the Boston Tea Party

6. Read the following sentences: "It was more than two years after the Boston Tea Party that the Declaration of Independence was signed, but once that tea went into the harbor, the path to revolution was **assured**. Tons of tea were thrown out, and the whole course of colonial history was changed that night."

As used in the passage, what does "**assured**" mean?

- A. dangerous
- B. guaranteed
- C. popular
- D. unlikely

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

_____ the East India Company was able to charge high prices for tea, it was losing hundreds of thousands of pounds per year by the 1760s.

- A. Even though
- B. Ultimately
- C. For instance
- D. In the end

8. What did the Townshend Acts do?

9. Why did the colonists think that taxation by the British was unfair?

10. The colonists were outraged after the Townshend Acts, which are best remembered for raising the price of tea. Why were the colonists not pacified by the discounted cost of tea after the Tea Act of 1773?
