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Script for US Experience to 1877

Professor Baumgartner

(Intro Music)

December 16, 1773, upset with the taxes on Tea, colonists dressed as Native Americans and threw barrels of tea into the Boston Harbor. Was the Boston Tea Party a positive step for the people of Boston and of the colony of Massachusetts? Or was it an overreaction to a reasonable act enacted by the British? Did the colonists really have it that bad that a revolution needed to be started? Was it worth the establishment of the Coercive Acts? Hello, I am Joseph Gilmore, and today I will be talking about the Boston Tea Party.

(Music)

The Boston Tea Party, although a clear act of revolution, was a complete overreaction by the colonists, resulted in a negative outcome for the people involved, and led to the Coercive Acts. Prior to the Boston Tea Party, the British established the Tea Act. The Tea Act, as explained by Benjamin Woods Labaree in his book The Boston Tea Party, was not intended to raise revenue in the American colonies, and in fact imposed no new taxes. It was designed to prop up the East India Company which was financially unsound and burdened with eighteen million pounds of unsold tea. This act was opposed because the merchants who acted as the middleman and sold the tea would more than likely lose their jobs.

In response to the Tea Act, the men and women of Boston showed that they were willing to use violence to stop the act. Many newspapers in 1773 reported such violence: The Boston News-Letter, 18 November 1773 showed the people of Boston destroying stores that sold tea,
while The Massachusetts Spy, 2 December 1773, gives an example of a sign posted around Boston to have people create a resistance against the East India Company.

On the night on December 16, 1773, the people of Boston proceeded with the Boston Tea Party. The founding fathers saw the Tea Party as a needed revolutionary act. John Adams stated in his diary that the destruction of the tea was a necessary act on the British. Benjamin Franklin stated the act was a result of cruel and oppressive acts, right, and just in his Letter on Parliament’s deliberation for the Boston Tea Party.

As a result of the Boston Tea Party, the British enacted the Coercive Acts, or the Intolerable Acts, on the people of Boston. These acts include the shut-down of the Boston Harbor until the debts to the East India Company was paid, the placement of the Massachusetts government under the control of the British, the ability of British officials to be tried outside of Massachusetts for a crime, and the Quartering Act, that let British troops be placed into unoccupied housing.¹ In a letter to his brother, Boston merchant John Andrews worried about the threats that the British had created. In his letter, he explains that many loyalists, those who supported the British, saw the Coercive Acts as a warning. The patriots, on the other hand, saw the Intolerable Acts as a spark for Independence.

Loyalist Peter Oliver described the state of Massachusetts as a “wildfire.” In response to the new laws, many of the common men in Boston armed themselves. This caused many people to take sides: patriot or loyalist. Those who were loyal to the crown were shunned and driven out of Boston.

In his novel, The Shoemaker and the Tea Party, Alfred Young described the role of the common man in the Boston Tea Party in his assessment of George Hewes. The revolutionary

acts led to the death of many people in the American Revolution. The Boston Tea Party also did not change much in the lives of the common Boston citizens who were a part of the revolution. Leaders did not want to give the common man too much credit so they would not rise against the fragile government.

The Boston Tea Party was an overreaction by the people of Boston that resulted in the Intolerable Acts and eventually war. After this war, there was very little change within the lives of these citizens. Thank you for listening. For more information on the primary sources used in this podcast please visit the National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox website.
Bibliography


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"Intolerable Acts." In *World Encyclopedia*. : Philip's,

