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Tea Troubles: The Boston Tea Party

It was a cold December night in Boston in 1773. The three British ships, the Dartmouth, the Eleanor, and the Beaver, were sitting in Boston Harbor, their holds full of tea that wasn't being unloaded because the angry residents of Boston were threatening not to buy or use the tea.

Tea, Anyone?

Monopoly:
Exclusive control by
one group to produce or
sell a good or service.

The anger was directed at the government of Great Britain, which in May 1773 had passed the Tea Act, a law that almost guaranteed that the American colonists would buy tea from the East India Company. Why? The Tea Act imposed no new taxes on the colonies, but the law lowered the price on tea sold by the East India Company so much that it was way below the price charged by other tea companies. The Tea Act granted the British East India Company an unfair **monopoly** on tea sales in the American colonies. Most American tea sellers would be put out of business.

Why did this law come about? The East India Company wasn't doing well financially and the British government wanted to help the company get back on its feet. The Tea Act was not intended to anger American colonists; instead, it was meant to help the British East India Company get out of massive amounts of debt.

Above:
**The Destruction of
Tea at Boston Harbor,
1773.**



The Sons of Liberty

As relations with Britain worsened, a secret society of patriots decided to start taking action. In Boston in early summer of 1765, a group of shopkeepers and artisans who called themselves The Loyal Nine began preparing for **agitation** against the Stamp Act. This group, led by Sam Adams, came to be known as the Sons of Liberty. Members of this secret organization were not the leading men of Boston, but rather workers and tradesmen. The idea found success in many colonies, after the initial organizations in Boston and New York. By the end of 1765, the Sons of Liberty existed in every colony. After the Stamp Act was repealed a year after it was passed, the Sons of Liberty disbanded. But the patriotic spirit and the name remained. Groups of men, such as the ones who dumped the tea into Boston Harbor, were called Sons of Liberty.

This painting by F.A. Chapman shows the raising of a liberty pole in a village center on a festive occasion. There are many spectators, including some disgruntled loyalists. In the background, several men are removing a sign bearing the image of King George III.

Agitation: The act of attempting to stir up public opinion for or against something.

Other tea companies weren't happy about the Tea Act, of course, but the American colonists viewed it as another example of "taxation without representation." In effect, the Tea Act was putting a tax on tea sold by companies other than the East India Company. As with the Stamp Act and other unpopular taxes, they were all voted in by Parliament, which was thousands of miles away, and the American colonists had no way to influence the law or speak out against it while it was being debated in government.

From Anger to Action

So the colonists were angry. They wanted to do something else to let the British know about the unhappiness that the Tea Act was causing. Some people wanted to keep things nonviolent; others wanted bloodshed. The result was somewhere in the middle.

A group of colonists determined to make things change was the Sons of Liberty. Led by such impassioned patriots as Samuel

Adams and John Hancock, the Sons of Liberty had secret meetings at which they discussed how best to get their message across to Great Britain, that the American people wanted more of a role in governing themselves. Christmas was approaching in the year 1773, and the colonists faced another year of unopposed and unrepresentative taxes. The Sons of Liberty decided to take action.

Tea Overboard

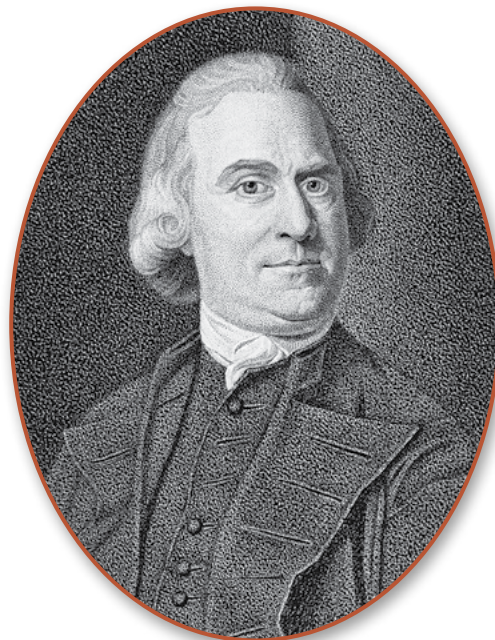
On a chilly night of December 16, 1773, over 8,000 people gathered at the Old South Church in Boston. They came to hear fiery Sam Adams speak. He dared the crowd to take action. Later that evening, a large group of the Sons of Liberty disguised as Mohawk Indians stormed aboard those three unsuspecting British ships and dumped 342 crates full of tea overboard. These crates happened to be jammed full of tea, and so the companies that made that tea lost a lot of money that night.

Because the Sons of Liberty were disguised as Native Americans, they could claim that they were not guilty of dumping the tea. The British government knew better, of course, and grew angrier than ever at what it saw as Americans' ingratitude. The very next year saw the passage of what came to be called the Intolerable Acts, one of which closed the port of Boston entirely.

The Boston Tea Party was a symbolic act, an example of how far Americans were willing to go to speak out for their freedom. Two short years later, Americans were willing to give their lives for their freedom, as shots rang out on Lexington Green, signaling the start of the American Revolution.

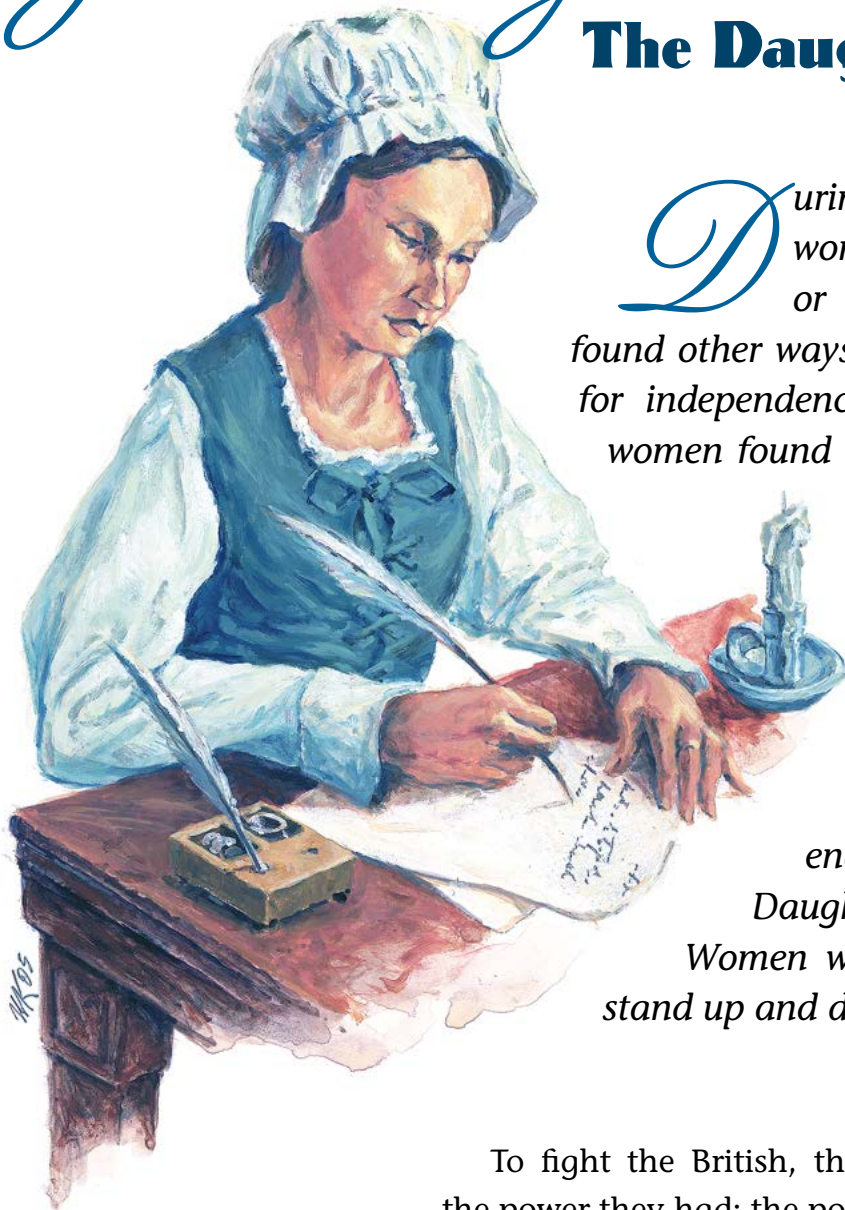
Above: As a politician in colonial Massachusetts, Samuel Adams was a leader of the movement that became the American Revolution.

Right: The Old South Church, Boston.



Just Say No!

The Daughters of Liberty



During the American Revolution, women were not allowed to vote or fight in the army. But they found other ways to support the colonial fight for independence. For the first time, many women found a political voice. Some wrote letters and poems about politics, sending them anonymously to local newspapers. One writer criticized colonial men for not doing more to oppose unfair British laws. Her poem ended with the line, “Let the Daughters of Liberty nobly arise.”

Women were calling on each other to stand up and do their part.

To fight the British, these “daughters of liberty” used the power they had: the power to choose what not to buy.

The Stamp Act was one of the unfair laws women fought. To raise money, the British government passed a law saying that colonial citizens had to pay a tax on every piece of printed paper they used. Everything—from newspapers and marriage licenses to playing cards—was taxed. Many colonists felt that this Stamp Act tax was unfair.

Many women—among them, those calling themselves “daughters of liberty”—agreed to boycott British goods to protest the Stamp Act. These women refused to use

To **boycott** is to refuse to do or buy something as a protest.