

# AMERICAN HISTORY PLAY







# THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

A 1773 tax on tea sparked outrage in the 13 Colonies. Revolution soon followed.

## Characters

Samuel Adams, *a champion of American independence*

John Adams, *his cousin (and a future U.S. President)*

Richard Clarke, *a pro-British tea merchant*

Jonathan Clarke } *his sons, also*  
Isaac Clarke } *tea merchants*

Joshua Winslow } *tea*  
Benjamin Faneuil Jr. } *merchants*

1st voice from outside

2nd voice from outside

Thomas Hutchinson Jr., *another tea merchant*

Samuel P. Savage, *moderator of a mass meeting*

\*Ethan Simmons, *meeting attendee*

Francis Rotch, *owner of the Dartmouth, a tea ship*

Voices in the crowd

\*Caleb, 14 } *schoolboys*  
\*Silas, 14 }

Paul Revere, *a silversmith and a messenger for the Sons of Liberty*

Narrators A-E

*\*Indicates a fictional or composite character. All others were real people.*

## PROLOGUE

**Narrator A:** In the 1700s, Britain fought several costly wars. To help pay for them—and for the British soldiers stationed in North America—Parliament passed a

series of taxes on its American colonies. The Stamp Act of 1765, for example, required colonists to pay a tax on printed materials like newspapers, magazines, and playing cards.

**Narrator B:** American colonists, who had no representatives in Parliament, began to resent being taxed by a government in which they had no voice. Many did not want to be ruled from afar. “No taxation without representation” became their rallying cry. Soon, relations between Britain and its American colonies began to sour, especially in Massachusetts and the port city of Boston.

## Words to Know

- **customs** (*n*): taxes or fees paid to a government when goods are imported or exported
- **delegation** (*n*): a group of people chosen to vote or act for someone else
- **tyranny** (*n*): oppressive power exerted by a government

Colonists dump tea from the East India Company into Boston Harbor.

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## SCENE 1

**Narrator C:** One evening in December 1772, at his home in Boston, Samuel Adams talks with a visitor—his cousin John.

**Samuel Adams:** We're being treated like second-class citizens. We have no one to speak for us in London. Britain does whatever it likes. If we complain, it sends troops to keep us in line—which the Stamp Act forces us to pay for!

**John Adams:** It's not *that* bad.

**Samuel Adams:** I guess you don't mind being treated like a slave!

**John Adams:** Come on, Sam! We're far from being slaves.

**Samuel Adams:** We need to stir people up, to remind them of Britain's **tyranny!**

**John Adams:** What about the tax on tea? People hate it. Tea is as popular here as it is in England.

**Samuel Adams:** True, but almost everyone avoids the tax by drinking tea smuggled from Holland. We need something else to get people riled up.

## SCENE 2

**Narrator D:** As it turns out, Samuel Adams was wrong: Tea ends up getting the people of Boston plenty riled. With so many colonists buying smuggled tea, Britain's Parliament isn't getting the tax money it was counting on. Neither is the British East India Company, the government-backed importer of tea and spices from Asia. So in May 1773, Parliament passes the Tea Act. This law allows the East India Company to sell tea in the colonies at prices low enough to undercut the smugglers—even with the hated tea tax added on.

**Narrator E:** Only seven merchants approved by the British are

allowed to sell tea in Boston. On November 17, 1773, Jonathan Clarke's fellow tea merchants welcome him home from London.

**Richard Clarke:** What's the news from the Mother Country?

**Jonathan Clarke:** Gentlemen, the tea shipments will soon arrive.

**Joshua Winslow:** It will be the cheapest tea ever sold here in the colonies. That should drive the smugglers out of business!

**Benjamin Faneuil Jr.:** The Sons of Liberty aren't pleased.

**Jonathan Clarke:** Samuel Adams and that group of rabble-rousers who hate Parliament and the King?

**Richard Clarke:** While you were gone, they sent us a letter demanding that we refuse to sell the East India Company's tea. It reads, "Fail not, upon your peril!"

**Isaac Clarke:** They even sent a **delegation** to our warehouse. But our workers fought them off.

**Faneuil:** We must never surrender to the threats of a lowly mob.

**Narrator A:** A rock crashes through the window.

**1st voice:** Come out, cowards!

**2nd voice:** Resign, you dogs!

**Thomas Hutchinson Jr.:** Never! All of you will drink British tea!

**1st voice:** Never!

## SCENE 3

**Narrator B:** The first tea ship, the *Dartmouth*, arrives in Boston Harbor on November 28. The next day, more than 5,000 people attend a meeting led by the Sons of Liberty. They decide to send 25 armed men to keep the tea from being brought ashore.

**Narrator C:** By December 14, two other tea ships have arrived and are moored beside the *Dartmouth*. On December 16, 7,000 people gather

The Boston Tea Party has inspired a number of antitax protests in the U.S. over the years. The political movement known as the Tea Party emerged in 2009, after the inauguration of Barack Obama as President.

Since then, activists have organized "tea party" rallies to protest what they see as excessive government spending. Some people were angry back in 2008 during the financial crisis, when Congress voted to spend billions of dollars to rescue banks. Others opposed Obama's health-care plan.

at Boston's Old South Church.

**Samuel P. Savage:** By law, all ships must be unloaded within 20 days of arrival. Tomorrow will be the *Dartmouth's* 20th day in port.

**Ethan Simmons:** Mr. Rotch, you own the *Dartmouth*. Can we persuade you to sail back to England without unloading the tea?

**Francis Rotch:** The Royal Governor has British Navy ships blocking the harbor. The captain can't sail without his permission.

**Narrator D:** The group sends Rotch to try to get an exit permit from the Governor. The meeting is adjourned until 6 p.m. That evening, before another big crowd . . .

**Savage:** What did the Governor say, Mr. Rotch?

**Rotch:** He won't let my ship leave until the tea has been unloaded. And tomorrow is the deadline.

**Savage:** So you'll unload the tea?

**Rotch:** If the **customs** officials order me to do it, I'll have no choice. They have British troops backing them up.

**Samuel Adams** (*calling out to the crowd*): This meeting can do nothing more to save the country!



# TEA PARTY

The Tea Party isn't actually a party. It's more of a movement of like-minded people. Tea Party members have exerted a powerful influence on national politics. Republican candidates who want to run against Obama next year are now seeking Tea Party support.

Would the tea partiers of 1773 agree with those who have taken their name today? Samuel Adams was glad that his "tea party" led to the founding of the Continental Congress. But for today's Tea Party activists, Congress isn't the solution—it's part of the problem.



A 2009 Tea Party protest on Tax Day (April 15), when income taxes are due

**Narrator E:** His words seem to be a signal. The sound of Indian war whoops erupts as a group of white men dressed as Indians enters.

**Voices in the crowd:** To Griffin's Wharf! Boston Harbor will be a teapot tonight!

## SCENE 4

**Narrator A:** That evening, 116 men and boys—some dressed as Indians—board the three tea ships. They unload the cargo—by breaking open tea chests and dumping the contents into the water.

**Caleb:** Whew, this is hard work!

**Silas:** It's for a good cause. But what if British troops show up?

**Caleb:** We'll be OK. They're at the fort out in the harbor. Even if they do come, they'll never get through that crowd on the wharf. There must be hundreds of people cheering us on!

**Paul Revere:** Get busy, you two! Let's make sure that not an ounce of tea is left to be sold ashore.

**Narrator B:** When they're done . . .

**Revere:** A harbor full of tea. Not bad for three hours' work!

**Silas:** But what excuse will I give

my parents for getting home late?

**Revere:** Tell 'em you've been to a party—the Boston Tea Party.

## SCENE 5

**Narrator C:** In January, news of the Boston Tea Party reaches Britain. Parliament is outraged. It passes a series of laws known as the Coercive Acts. The laws put a military Governor in charge of Massachusetts and close the Port of Boston to all trade until the town pays for the destroyed tea.

**Narrator D:** The naval blockade means that Boston is under siege. Although many Bostonians rely on shipping for their livelihoods, they refuse to give in. Soon afterward, at the home of Samuel Adams . . .

**John Adams:** Well, Sam, you wanted something that would get people riled up, and you got it.

**Samuel Adams:** It's clear to everyone that these harsh new laws are just revenge. People are calling them the Intolerable Acts—and support for Massachusetts is growing throughout the colonies.

**John Adams:** If Parliament had been more reasonable, folks might

still be thinking of themselves as citizens of Britain or of various colonies, rather than as Americans.

**Samuel Adams:** Virginia and New York have called for a Congress, where representatives from all the colonies can discuss what's happening. Americans are finally pulling together.

## EPILOGUE

**Narrator E:** On September 5, 1774, delegates from 12 of the 13 colonies met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It was the opening session of the First Continental Congress. Among the delegates representing Massachusetts were Samuel Adams and his cousin John. John Adams became one of the strongest voices for independence (and, in 1797, the second President of the United States).

**Narrator A:** Massachusetts remained the center of rebellion against Britain. On April 19, 1775, the first shots of the American Revolution were fired just outside Boston, at Lexington and Concord. It was Paul Revere who alerted the colonists.

—Jim Forsht & Kathy Wilmore