



Volume 20

Number 008

America's Revolution (79) – The Tea Act
(1773) – I

Lead: In the 1700s the United States broke from England. No colony in history had done that before. This series examines America's Revolution.

Intro: *A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts*

Content: By summer 1773, the brief abatement in active colonial resistance to British taxation which had ushered a time of political calm since early 1771 came to a

crashing end. Parliament, clearly incapable of political subtlety or of learning from its past mistakes, passed the Tea Act. This bit of economic pretense contrived to at the same time continue the revenue stream into governmental coffers at 3 pennies or pence per pound, aid the financially troubled East India Company which was given a monopoly on the tea trade to America, and most importantly signaled that it would have its way in the colonies regardless of native public opinion.

Ironically, Americans, for sure had been drinking a lot of smuggled tea, but for the two years prior to the Tea Act, with little resistance, had also consumed huge quantities of legal tea, paying the same 3 pence duty. The issue was how the colonials perceived the Tea Act. For them Parliament had thrown down the gauntlet and was determined to continue its program of

enslavement. To pay the tax would be to join forces with the slavers. At first, there was some confusion in the colonies as to whether under the new East India regime tea might be imported duty free, but by fall it was clear that Parliament was up to its old tricks. Not surprisingly, leadership for the resistance came from the Sons of Liberty, but in 1773 it came from Philadelphia and New York. There was little attempt to negotiate with Britain or engage in legal action, mass meetings demanded that the consignees give up their commissions or face physical retribution. One group, calling itself “The Committee for Taring and Feathering,” warned one Captain Ayers of *Polly*, a ship laden with East India tea, that unless he wanted “ten gallons of hot tar poured onto his head....with the feathers of a dozen wild geese laid over that to enliven his appearance...he should fly to the place from whence he came...without hesitation. Ayers

hailed anchor and sailed for England. Next time: New York and Charleston.

At the University of Richmond's School of Professional and Continuing Studies, I'm Dan Roberts.

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