

The Boston Port Act takes effect, June 1, 1774

On this day in history, June 1, 1774, the Boston Port Act takes effect, closing down Boston Harbor from all shipping and trade in punishment for the Boston Tea Party. Boston citizens had thrown 42 tons of tea into the harbor in December of the previous year, as an act of protest against unjust taxation. The colonists had no representatives in Parliament and they believed it was unlawful to be taxed by a body in which they had no representation. The Boston Tea Party was the culmination of many years of protests and strife regarding taxation and representation.

Parliament was outraged at this act of defiance and set about bringing the rebellious Massachusetts back to order. A series of acts, known as the Coercive Acts in Britain, were passed in 1774, which shut down all self-government in Massachusetts, limited town meetings and moved the trials of government officials out of the colony. Other measures required all the colonies to provide housing for government troops, extended the boundaries of British Quebec and granted Catholic Quebec residents the right to practice their own religion, which was seen by the colonists as strengthening the heavily pro-British Quebec right next door.

The piece of the Coercive Acts, or, as they were called by the colonists, the Intolerable Acts, that caused more outrage in the colonies than any other, however, was the Boston Port Act. This act closed down the harbor to all trade permanently until the ruined tea was paid for, the lost customs revenues paid and order restored in Massachusetts. It placed armed warships in the harbor to enforce a blockade and filled Boston with troops to help patrol the wharfs.

The Boston Port Act placed heavy fines on violators. If anyone was caught trying to sneak through the blockade, the ships, cargo and any other property, such as horses or wagons used to transport the goods, were to be forfeited to the government and a fine of three times the

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value of the cargo was levied. Also, anyone caught trying to bribe officials into letting goods through and any officials involved in taking such bribes, were heavily fined.

The Boston Port Act, and the other parts of the Coercive Acts, were really the spark that lighted the American Revolution. Colonists across America were outraged. They realized that if Parliament was willing to do this to Boston, they could do it anywhere in the colonies. All of the colonies joined in a boycott of British goods and a plan was made to convene the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia in September. The Congress was to plan a joint colonial response to the Coercive Acts and was the first joint action of the colonies against Great Britain.

The Boston Port Act did everything but bring Massachusetts back into submission. Instead, it united the colonies in their resolve to protect their freedoms. The Continental Congress remonstrated with Great Britain to correct its grievances, but also recommended to all the colonies that they begin stockpiling weapons and ammunition in the event of war. This stockpiling led directly to British General Thomas Gage receiving instructions to capture the rebel supplies at Concord, Massachusetts, leading to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War in April of 1775.