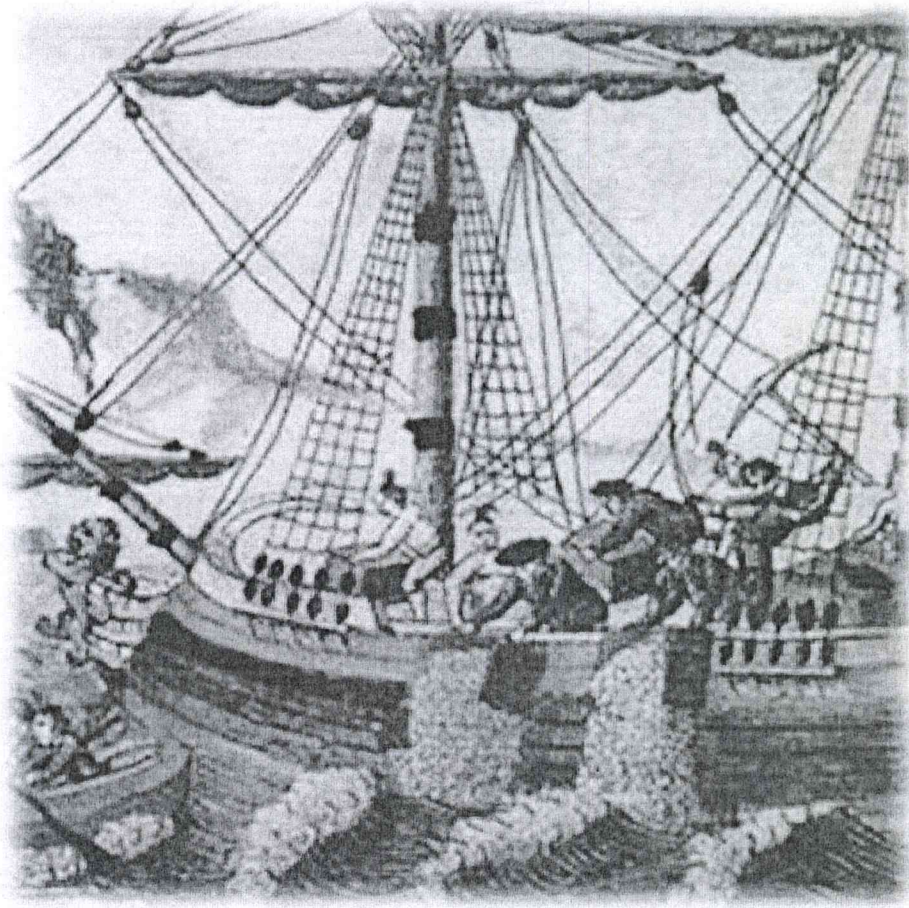


# Some Laws Are Intolerable

by W.M. Akers (Adapted by ReadWorks)



Have you ever heard the saying about the straw that broke the camel's back? This saying refers to a small act that seems harmless but has a big negative result. Well, in 1774, in the time leading up to the American Revolution, the British government decided to add one more straw to the backs of the British colonists in America. At that time British colonists were living in areas under British control called colonies. The British government passed four laws limiting the freedom of people in the colony of Massachusetts. The colonists hated the laws so much that they called them "The Intolerable Acts."

The laws were a response to an act of rebellion that took place on December 16, 1773. That night in Boston, a group of colonists called the Sons of Liberty had thrown 342 boxes of British tea into the ocean. This was a protest against a tax on tea that the colonists felt was

unfair and illegal. The tea thrown into the ocean was worth a lot of money, so the British government got angry.

The British felt that it was time for them to break the colonies' rebellious spirit. It seemed like this spirit of disobedience and fighting back was based in Massachusetts. So if the British broke the spirit of people in Massachusetts, the rebellion in America would die before it even began. The British government planned four acts, or laws, to get rid of the rebellious spirit in Massachusetts. People in the British government hoped that when the colony was punished, the other twelve would turn against it. They wanted the rest of the colonies to stay loyal to Great Britain. But they got a very different response from what they were hoping for.

The first act was called "The Boston Port Act," and it was passed in June of 1774. The act closed Boston Harbor to all trade, which was a disaster for the city. It made doing business very difficult for people in Boston. It punished every person in the city for the rebellious act of the Sons of Liberty.

The law said that the harbor would stay closed until all the tea that had been thrown into the ocean was paid for. Many people in the colony thought about paying for the tea. Even some people who supported the colonial cause were unhappy about the destruction of the tea. But the tea was never paid for, so the harbor stayed closed.

The next two acts were passed later that summer. These upset the people in the colonies even more. The first was the "Massachusetts Government Act," which had serious effects on everyone in Massachusetts. Since the colony was created, people in Massachusetts had been allowed to vote for their elected officials. Not all of the colonies had been given this right. The act took this right away. It gave the power to choose officials for Massachusetts to the British king. Suddenly, the people in Massachusetts had no say in who was running their government.

This act made many of the colonists very angry, but the "Administration of Justice Act" was even worse. It upset George Washington so much that he called it the "Murder Act." What could a law do to upset people so much? This act let British officials who were accused of a crime in Massachusetts go to trial in Britain. Back then, it could take as long as six months to get from America to Britain. So if some colonists saw a British official commit a crime, it would have been difficult for them to get to Britain and speak as witnesses at the trial. A British official could treat colonists badly and then return home to avoid justice. The official might even get away with killing them!

The fourth act was known as the "Quartering Act." While the other three acts only affected Massachusetts, this one affected all 13 colonies. It required colonies to provide housing to

British soldiers. The colonies had to either build housing for the soldiers, or let them sleep in empty houses or on public land. This act did not upset people as much as the first three acts, but it didn't help.

The British government might have been trying to single out Massachusetts, but passing a law that affected all the colonies was not the way to do it. Colonists thought all of these laws were dishonest and unfair. They thought the laws were trying to force colonists in Massachusetts to give in to the king. They did not turn on Massachusetts, as the British government had hoped. Instead, the other colonies supported Massachusetts. They sent food and supplies to the people of Boston. They also promised to find a way to get rid of these intolerable laws.

On September 5, 1774, colonists from 12 colonies came together in Philadelphia. They formed the First Continental Congress. This was the first step on the road to American independence from Britain. And it wouldn't have happened if it weren't for the Intolerable Acts -the straw that broke the camel's back.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why did Parliament decide to pass four new laws in the Massachusetts colonies in 1774?

- A. to cripple Boston's economy
- B. to get more money in taxes
- C. to stifle opposition in Massachusetts and maintain the loyalty of the other colonies to the crown
- D. to maintain the loyalty of Massachusetts to the crown and stifle opposition in the other colonies

2. The author describes the effects of different laws in the text. What was one effect of the "Massachusetts Government Act"?

- A. The people of the Massachusetts Bay Colony considered paying for the tea the Sons of Liberty tossed into the Boston Harbor.
- B. The people of the Massachusetts Bay Colony could not elect their officials.
- C. The people of the Massachusetts Bay Colony had to house British soldiers.
- D. The people of the Massachusetts Bay Colony became more loyal to the crown.

3. Parliament did not succeed in isolating Massachusetts from the other colonies. What evidence from the text supports this conclusion?

- A. Colonists in other colonies sent food and supplies to the people of Boston.
- B. Colonists in other colonies were angered by the "Quartering Act".
- C. Colonists in other colonies were forced to give in to the crown.
- D. George Washington spoke out against the "Murder Act".

4. Why might the "Administration of Justice Act" have allowed British officials to "get away with murder"?

- A. It allowed British officials to legally commit murder in the colonies.
- B. It allowed British officials to avoid having a fair trial for their crimes.
- C. It prohibited colonists from testifying in trials in London.
- D. It required colonists to house British soldiers.

5. What is the main idea of this text?

- A. Passing laws against all of the colonies was not smart of Parliament.
- B. The "Administration of Justice Act" angered the colonists the most.
- C. The Intolerable Acts paved the way for the colonists' road to independence.
- D. If the spirit of the Massachusetts Bay colony had been crushed, Parliament would have been successful.

6. Read these sentences from the text:

They thought that if they crushed the spirit of [Massachusetts], the rebellion would die before it even began. Parliament planned a series of four acts, or laws, intended to stifle opposition in Massachusetts. They hoped that when the one colony was punished, the other 12 colonies would turn against it and remain loyal to the crown.

As used in the text, what does the word "stifle" most nearly mean?

- A. put down
- B. increase
- C. encourage
- D. leave alone

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

The Sons of Liberty protested the Tea Act by tossing 342 chests of British tea into the Boston Harbor; \_\_\_\_\_, the lawmakers in Parliament planned a series of four acts to stop opposition in Massachusetts.

- A. on the other hand
- B. for instance
- C. meanwhile
- D. as a result

8. Describe the "Boston Port Act" and its effect on Boston.

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9. The British Parliament had hoped the other colonies would turn on Massachusetts and remain loyal to the British crown. Instead, what did the other colonies pledge?

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10. Explain how the Intolerable Acts "broke the camel's back." Use information from the passage to support your answer.

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