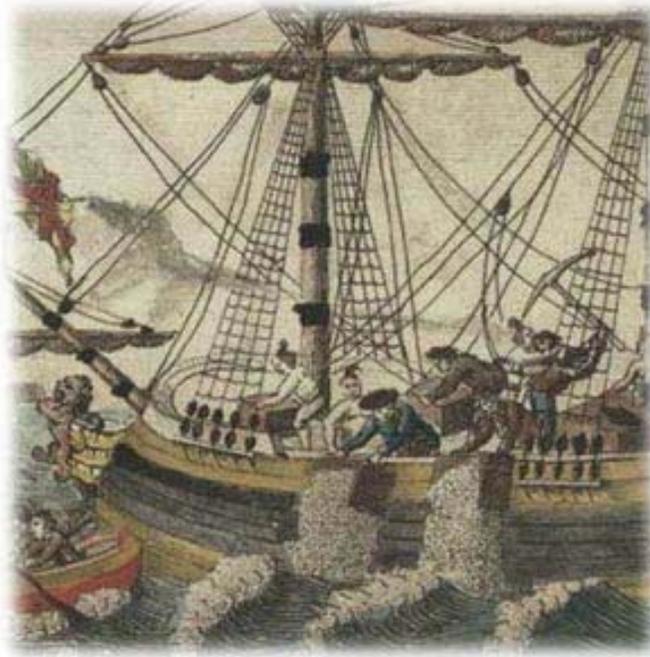


Some Laws are Intolerable

W.M. Akers



Have you ever heard the expression about the straw that broke the camel's back? This is used to talk about a big negative consequence of a seemingly innocuous act. Well, in 1774, during the buildup to the American Revolution, the British government decided to pile on one more straw. Four laws were passed that year limiting the freedom of colonists in Massachusetts. American patriots hated them so much they called them "The Intolerable Acts."

The laws came in response to the night of December, 16, 1773, when a patriot group called the Sons of Liberty tossed 342 chests of British tea into Boston Harbor. This was a protest against the Tea Act, a tax on tea which the colonists considered unlawful. The cost was huge—around \$1 million in today's money—and the British government responded angrily.

From the perspective of the British, the time had come to stamp out the colonies' rebellious spirit. As far as they could tell, this rebelliousness was rooted in Massachusetts. Crush the spirit of that colony, and 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 twelve would turn against it and remain loyal to the crown. The lawmakers in Parliament got more than they bargained for.

The first act passed on June 1, 1774. Called "The Boston Port Act," it closed Boston Harbor to all commerce—a disastrous blow to a waterfront city. This had a crippling effect on Boston's economy, punishing every person in the city in response to the act of a few Sons of Liberty.

The port would remain closed, the law said, until the East India Company was compensated for all of the tea that had been destroyed. Many in the colony strongly considered paying for the tea. Even among those who supported the colonial cause, some were upset by the destruction of property. But despite the debate, the tea was never paid for and the port's closure went on.

The next two acts were passed later that summer and upset the colonists even more. The first was the "Massachusetts Government Act," which had profound effects on everyone in the colony. Since the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, citizens in the region had been allowed to vote for their elected officials—a right not given to all the colonies. This Act took that right away allowing the king to make appointments as he pleased. Suddenly, the people of the colony had no say in who was running their government.

This enraged many of the colonists, but not quite as much as the "Administration of Justice Act" which upset George Washington so much he renamed it the "Murder Act." What could a law do to upset people so much? The Administration of Justice Act allowed for British officials accused of a crime in Massachusetts to stand trial in Great Britain. In those days, it could take as long as six months to cross the Atlantic, meaning it would be almost impossible for any colonial witnesses to come and testify in London. A British official could harass colonists however he pleased and then return home to avoid justice. In theory, an employee of the crown could actually get away with murder!

The fourth act was known as the "Quartering Act." While the other three affected only Massachusetts, this applied to all 13 colonies. It required colonies to provide housing to British soldiers. If they could not build them a barracks, they had to allow them to sleep in abandoned houses or on public land. Although this did not upset people quite as much as the first three acts, it certainly didn't help.

If Parliament's goal had been to isolate Massachusetts, passing a law affecting all the colonies was not the way to do it. Patriots considered all of these laws unconstitutional, since they were designed to force colonists in Massachusetts to give in to the crown. (This is known

as "coercion" and is why the Intolerable Acts are also sometimes known as the "Coercive Acts.") Despite Parliament's hope, the other colonies did not turn on Massachusetts. Instead, patriots in other colonies pledged support, sending food and supplies to the people of Boston and pledging to find a way to reverse these intolerable laws.

On September 5, 1774, patriots from 12 colonies came together in Philadelphia to form the First Continental Congress. This was the first step on the road to the Declaration of Independence, 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. 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 Patriots in other colonies sent food and supplies to the people of Boston.
- B Patriots in other colonies were angered by the "Quartering Act".
- C Patriots in other colonies were forced to give in to the crown.
- D George Washington spoke out against the "Murder Act".

4. How can the "Administration of Justice Act" best be described?

- A an act that allowed British officials to commit murder
- B an act that didn't ensure British officials stood a fair trial for crimes
- C an act that prohibited colonists from testifying in trials in London
- D an act that required colonists to house British soldiers

5. What is the main idea of this passage?

- 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 the following sentences: "Have you ever heard the expression about the straw that broke the camel's back? This is used to talk about a big negative consequence of a seemingly **innocuous** act."

As used in the passage, what does the word "**innocuous**" mean?

- A harmless
- B positive
- C offensive
- D destructive

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.

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?

10. Explain how the Intolerable Acts “broke the camel’s back.” Use information from the passage to support your answer.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 1070

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

Suggested answer: The "Boston Port Act" closed Boston Harbor to all commerce, which was a disastrous blow to the waterfront city. Parliament would not allow the port to reopen until all of the destroyed tea was paid for. This had a crippling effect on Boston's economy, punishing every person in the city in response to the act of a few Sons of Liberty. Some people considered paying for the tea, and even colonial cause supporters were upset by the destruction of property.

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?

Suggested answer: The other colonies pledged their support to Massachusetts, sending food and supplies to the people of Boston, and pledged to find a way to reverse the intolerable laws.

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

Suggested answer: Answers may vary and should be supported by the passage. Students should indicate that the laws restricted the freedoms of the colonists and damaged the economy of Boston. The colonists were outraged by these laws and ultimately united against the crown in order to reverse these intolerable laws. The patriots from the 12 colonies came together to form the First Continental Congress, which was the first step on the road to the Declaration of Independence. Thus, the series of laws offended the colonists so much that the colonists began to break away from the crown, which was a big negative consequence from the perspective of the British. Thus, the laws "broke the camel's back."