



250 years later, local experts consider the complex legacy of the Boston Tea Party

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A replica of a yellow colonial era boat sits docked into the water next to a museum in downtown Boston.

Paul Singer / GBH News

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Ashley Soebroto | December 08, 2023

In the 1760s, Massachusetts colonists began pushing back against the ever-tightening grip of British rule. The boiling tension erupted in violent episodes, few more shocking than the Boston Massacre in 1770 when five colonists were killed by British militia. Three years later, protesters publicly rejected the taxes on tea by dumping crates of tea from the British East India Company in the Boston harbor. This event would later become known as the Boston Tea Party.

“The Boston Tea Party doesn’t just come out of nowhere, there’s weeks of tension as the ships arrive and even before the ships arrive,” said Benjamin Carp, Brooklyn College history professor. “The goal is really to send the tea back to London, and this was technically illegal ... And so if someone would just agree to ship it



back, then maybe we can not have to have some kind of dramatic protest. But because people keep telling them no, this is what leads to the Tea Party ultimately.”

On December 16, Boston will observe the 250th anniversary of the Boston Tea Party, a momentous event leading up to the American Revolution.

“If you lived in Boston at that time, you were reading the letters, you were reading the pamphlets, the newspapers, people were gathered watching the event happen,” said Anjelica Oswald, an American Ancestors researcher working on the Boston Tea Party Descendants Program. “If your family member was here in Boston, it’s very likely that they had something they witnessed, something they read, something that brought their spirit into it, and maybe that’s why they were mustered in for the revolution later.”

Leading up to the Boston Tea Party’s anniversary, museums, schools and historical organizations across the state have come together to celebrate the significance of this historically pivotal event.

“We have an amazing opportunity as a city, as a commonwealth and as a nation to mark this 250th anniversary of this iconic moment in American history,” said Evan O’Brien, creative manager at the Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum. “And I think we have a great opportunity to make sure that we’re telling the story in a way that is as accessible to everyone from around the world.”

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