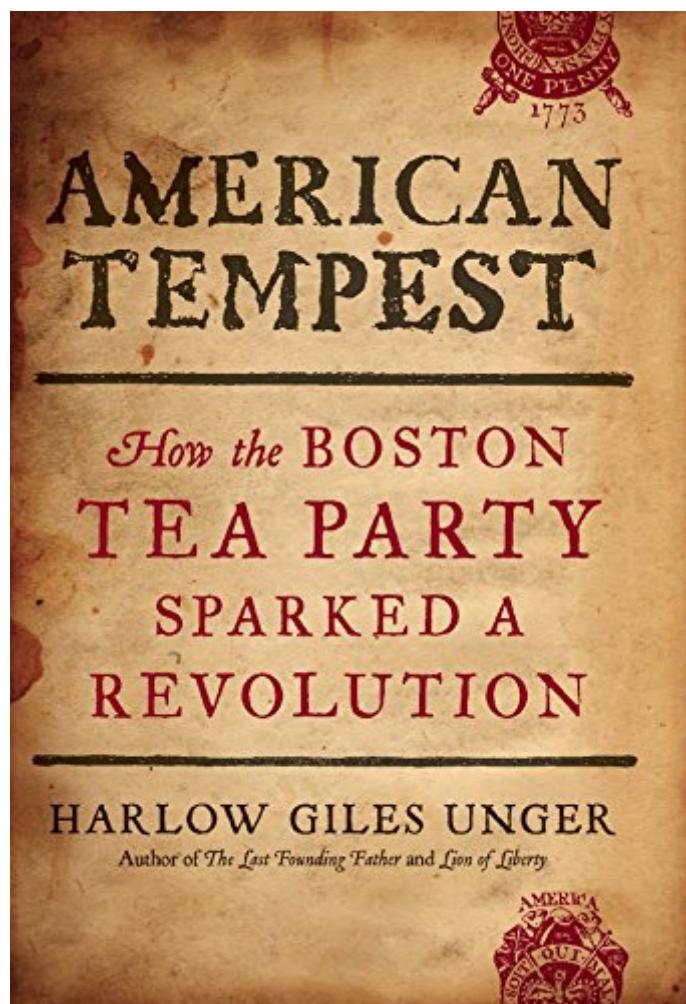


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American Tempest: How The Boston Tea Party Sparked A Revolution



Synopsis

On Thursday, December 16, 1773, an estimated seven dozen men, many dressed as Indians, dumped roughly £10,000 worth of tea in Boston Harbor. Whatever their motives at the time, they unleashed a social, political, and economic firestorm that would culminate in the Declaration of Independence two-and-a-half years later. The Boston Tea Party provoked a reign of terror in Boston and other American cities as tea parties erupted up and down the colonies. The turmoil stripped tens of thousands of their homes and property, and nearly 100,000 left forever in what was history's largest exodus of Americans from America. Nonetheless, John Adams called the Boston Tea Party nothing short of "magnificent," saying that "it must have important consequences." Combining stellar scholarship with action-packed history, Harlow Giles Unger reveals the truth behind the legendary event and examines its lasting consequence--the spawning of a new, independent nation.

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Customer Reviews

"American Tempest" follows the events of pre-Revolutionary Boston with an emphasis on the efforts of Sam Adams and John Hancock. Both of these patriots come across as somewhat complex

characters, which is a nice way of saying that author Harlow Unger makes them appear far more scheming, opportunistic and self-interested than many Americans would be comfortable knowing. Adams, the provocateur's provocateur, is a master of the mob, that rough-and-ready muscle always eager for a brawl or a riot in exchange for a pitcher of beer or a mug of grog. Adams is the last in his class at Harvard, not because of his grades or abilities, but because of the social rank of his brewer father (the real Sam behind today's brand), recently ruined by an economic downturn of Parliament's making. John Hancock, the rich and effete resident of a Beacon Hill mansion, rises into wealth and prominence as his rich uncle's ward, and inherits his thriving trade in goods. That Hancock, to maximize his profits by avoiding duties, was involved in smuggling, is the least of his sins, according to Unger. Hancock also regularly ignored the embargoes (to protest taxes) the he himself had pushed through the legislature. Unger makes the colonies' distaste for any form of taxation seem bizarre and ridiculous. Americans, we are told, and correctly, paid far fewer taxes than their British cousins. But they complained far louder. The tax that set off the famous Boston Tea Party was the minuscule remnant of a tax bill that had been dismantled after colonial protest. Furthermore, it was Sam Adams's behind-the-scenes efforts to foment an incident led to the infamous Boston Massacre, in which a harried groups of British soldiers fired upon a threatening mob. Explosive and vile, if true. One has to ask a number of questions.

This is a 'gritty' account of the events at Boston that led to the spark of the American Revolution. Gritty in that it is a rendition that is not often told - exposing a good bit of the selfish motivations and oafish methods of our forefathers. Why any of this surprises should be the surprise. American historiography probably got off to a bad start with the 'gushing' Parson Weems-style renditions so popular in the 19th century, placing the founders on a pedestal of reverence impossible to fully justify even with a cursory examination, and then it became the expectation. Author Harlow Giles Unger begins "American Tempest" with 'first principals': in this account, the founders are humans and decidedly not saints. The story exposes motivations - not always - but often led by economics, or personal power: no differently than today. The British quandary over American reaction to a relatively trivial tax, on a commodity unimportant in American society, for a purpose essential to American security can be understood. For the Americans, there was an essential indignity underlying the whole of the taxes that had less to do with economics than dignity. The colonies had matured to a point that their control by a parliament thousands of miles away, led by an effete class, in which they held no sway at all became the real ignitor for the conflagration that followed. A very recommended read, "American Tempest" treats an old topic in a modern light. Unger's writing style

is certain, urgent, and efficient. The story is relatively brief by today's standards, 240 pages plus afterward materials, which keeps it well paced and on-topic and told so compellingly that a 5th star is justified.

One of the most interesting areas of the American Revolution to me was the Tea party movement. I chose this book to gain a better understanding of the events that led up to the historical event. Harlow Giles, a colonial historian has set out to not only write about the act of dumping tea into the bay, but goes much farther in describing what led up to this event and what transpired after as well and introduces the reader to each of the men involved by allowing us to learn more about them and what their motivations were that drove them to eventually start the American Revolution. Mr. Giles has done a fairly good job in writing this book, however it is a bit repetitive in several places and that takes away from the reading experience. Several times I thought I had already read a chapter because I was reading the same information for a second time that he had already described in a previous chapter. I did find this book entertaining and although I was expecting to read mainly about rebellion of dumping tea to protest taxes, I gained a lot more information as I learned about the history of the founders of the tea party movement. While most people assume that the revolution was just people fed up with being taxed on tea, there were many taxes imposed prior to this. This was just a rally point that really set everything off. It seems that Mr. Harlow has attempted to portray these men as nothing more than greedy men that did not want to pay their fair share. He goes without saying it in as many words, but that is the feeling I get from reading this book.

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