On December 16, 1773, about 150 colonists dressed as Mohawk Indians boarded three British ships anchored in Boston Harbor. The ships were loaded with hundreds of crates of tea. The colonists began to destroy the cargo to protest the tax on tea.

On April 5, 1764, Parliament passed a modified version of the Sugar Act, which led to the Sugar Act (1733), which prohibited the sale of molasses to France. The First Lord of the Treasury, Lord Grenville, was trying to bring the colonies in line with regard to payment of taxes. The Sugar Act reduced the rate of tax on molasses from one shilling per gallon to three pence per gallon, while Grenville took measures to strictly enforce the act. The situation disrupted the colonial economy by reducing the markets to which the colonies could sell their goods, and the currency available to them for the purchase of British manufactured goods. This act, and the Currency Act, set the stage for the revolt at the imposition of the Stamp Act.