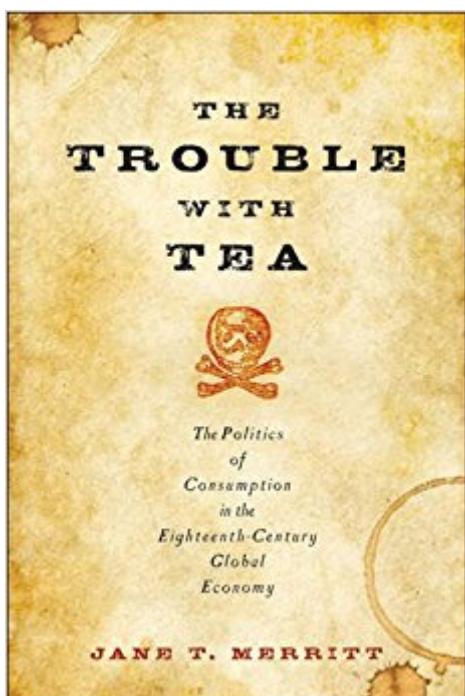


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# The Trouble With Tea: The Politics Of Consumption In The Eighteenth-Century Global Economy (Studies In Early American Economy And Society From The Library Company Of Philadelphia)



## Synopsis

Americans imagined tea as central to their revolution. After years of colonial boycotts against the commodity, the Sons of Liberty kindled the fire of independence when they dumped tea in the Boston harbor in 1773. To reject tea as a consumer item and symbol of "taxation without representation" was to reject Great Britain as master of the American economy and government. But tea played a longer and far more complicated role in American economic history than the events at Boston suggest. In *The Trouble with Tea*, historian Jane T. Merritt explores tea as a central component of eighteenth-century global trade and probes its connections to the politics of consumption. Arguing that tea caused trouble over the course of the eighteenth century in a number of different ways, Merritt traces the multifaceted impact of that luxury item on British imperial policy, colonial politics, and the financial structure of merchant companies. Merritt challenges the assumption among economic historians that consumer demand drove merchants to provide an ever-increasing supply of goods, thus sparking a consumer revolution in the early eighteenth century. *The Trouble with Tea* reveals a surprising truth: that concerns about the British political economy, coupled with the corporate machinations of the East India Company, brought an abundance of tea to Britain, causing the company to target North America as a potential market for surplus tea. American consumers only slowly habituated themselves to the beverage, aided by clever marketing and the availability of Caribbean sugar. Indeed, the "revolution" in consumer activity that followed came not from a proliferation of goods, but because the meaning of these goods changed. By the 1750s, British subjects at home and in America increasingly purchased and consumed tea on a daily basis; once thought a luxury, tea had become a necessity. This fascinating look at the unpredictable path of a single commodity will change the way readers look at both tea and the emergence of America.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"By tackling a commodity we think we already know in its political, economic, and cultural dimensions, Jane T. Merritt demonstrates that the true story of tea is more complex and global than readers might expect. The Trouble with Tea is a surprising and detailed look at how the long-term moral debates over tea overlapped with and offered a vocabulary for the politicized debates of the Revolutionary War era." (Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, author of *The Ties that Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America*) "Long before Bostonians dumped tea overboard, tea was trouble: as trading companies pushed it and consumers sipped it, tea sparked debates over free trade and dangerous luxuries. With her wide-ranging command of global commerce and domestic politics, Merritt tells a vital tale about how tea shaped our world." (Benjamin L. Carp, author of *Defiance of the Patriots: The Boston Tea Party and the Making of America*) "Merritt has produced an elegant commodity history, one that embeds the American Revolution in its global context and prompts a reconsideration of the early republic's political economy. Americans famously dumped their tea en route to independence, but Merritt tells the surprising story of how hard they worked to get it back in the wake of nationhood." (Seth Rockman, coeditor of *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*) "Merritt's remarkable study of the political economy of tea reveals that this quintessential commodity of eighteenth-century commerce has a great deal to tell us about the relationship between consumer desire, imperial rule, and revolution. Impressively researched and elegantly argued, *The Trouble with Tea* uses a global framework to investigate how the trade and consumption of tea first united and then divided the British Empire, and how these same forces later led restive Tea Partiers to become nation-building taxpayers. You might think you know where to find tea in the history of America and Britain; this book is here to show you that you need to far deeper than the bottom of Boston's harbor to get the full story." (Dael A. Norwood, Binghamton University) "While tea has long been a symbol of the American Revolution, *The Trouble with Tea* situates the commodity within broader economic and cultural contexts, persuasively demonstrating its role in the expansion of imperial trade and creation of complex consumer rituals long before and after 1776." (Michelle Craig McDonald,

Jane T. Merritt is an associate professor of history at Old Dominion University. She is the author of At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700–1763.

An excellent book. It is a well-written study of the intricate details of the trade system within which tea was produced and traded by the East India Company.

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