

Research Essay

“The Propaganda of Samuel Adams and its Influence on
the Outbreak of the American Revolutionary War”

Russell J Lowke, May 11th, 2000.

The principal cause of the French Revolution was a famished population. France had the largest populace in Europe and couldn't feed it adequately. This problem was augmented by a terrible harvest in 1788, causing the food issue to reach its climax. Infuriated peasants were acutely aware of their situation and became less and less inclined to support the anachronistic and oppressive feudal system.¹ Similarly, a leading cause of the Russian Revolution was riots due to the scarcity of food in Petrograd, the capital. Governmental corruption and inefficiency was rampant, the Tsar periodically dissolved parliament, and ill-equipped, poorly led Russian armies suffered catastrophic losses against the Germans.² Both the French and the Russian Revolutions were driven by a population neglected to the point of starvation.

The American Revolution, also known as the War of Independence, is intriguing on the world stage as, unlike the French or Russian Revolutions, prior to its outbreak the authorities (Britain) showed little open aggression against the people of the colonies. The population wasn't stressed to the point of starvation, nor was there any alarming discrepancy between rich and poor. Christopher Hibbert, in his recent book *George III*, tells us that British taxes on the populace were so relatively slight that an American paid not more than sixpence a year, as opposed to the average English taxpayer's twenty-five shillings.³ James H. Stark in his book *The Loyalists of Massachusetts* expresses that the "colonial Americans in 1775 were far better off than were the men of Kent, the vanguard of liberty in England" and that there "was more happiness in Middlesex on Concord, than there was in Middlesex on the Thames."⁴

¹ J.M. Roberts, *History of the World*, (New York: Oxford, 1993): 583.

² J.M. Roberts: 717.

³ Christopher Hibbert, *George III*, (Great Britain: Viking, 1999):122.

Concerning British pre-decimal coinage: "the basic unit of currency was, and still is, the pound, or the pound sterling. There were twenty (20) shillings per pound. The shilling was subdivided into twelve (12) pennies. There were therefore two hundred and forty (240) pennies per pound. The penny was further sub-divided into two halfpennies or four farthings (quarter pennies)." - from Chard Coins website <<http://www.24carat.co.uk/denominations.html>>

The colonial tax of Sixpence is about a 1/50th of the average English taxpayer's tax of twenty-five shillings.

⁴ James H. Stark, *The Loyalists of Massachusetts*, (New Jersey: Kelley, 1972): 5

Various studies have attempted to analyze the extent of economic and social inequality in Boston, as it was the center of agitation for the Revolution. In 1976 G. B. Warden was the Fellow in Law and History at Harvard Law School and Research Fellow in the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, Harvard University. Warden wrote a paper called “Inequality and Instability in Eighteenth-Century Boston: A Reappraisal.” The piece conclusively dispels the notion that a motivation for the American Revolution was social inequality. Prior to Warden’s Work there had been a view that Boston might be a model for interpreting unrest. Warden also compares the economic situation between Massachusetts and Britain confirming that “in eighteenth-century England only 20 percent of the adult males had sufficient property to vote, compared with 70 percent in eastern Massachusetts” and that “New England wages were 100 percent higher and food 50 percent cheaper than what laborers earned and spent in England at the time.”⁵ The prosperity the colonies enjoyed was summed up by Benjamin Franklin, who in 1772 reflected: “the happiness of New England, where every man is a freeholder, has a vote in public affairs, lives in a tidy, warm house, has plenty of good food and fewel, with whole cloaths from head to foot, the manufacture perhaps of his own family...”⁶

The flash point of the American revolution was a 3d⁷ per pound tax on tea, which had just been reduced from 12d per pound, resulting in the Boston Tea Party.⁸ The colonial plight was a complicated argument over taxation without representation, the offending tax having been diminished and undercutting influential American merchants. There was none of the legendary tyranny of history that has so often driven desperate people into rebellion. Yet the principal cause

⁵ G. B. Warden, “Inequality and Instability in Eighteenth-Century Boston: A Reappraisal,” *Interdisciplinary Studies of the American Revolution*, ed Jack P. Greene, (London: 1976): Vol 31, 60.

For a more accurate comparison between rural Massachusetts and rural England, see M. W. Bailey, “Farmhouses and Cottages, 1500-1725,” *Economic History Review*, Vol 8 (1955), 293; Peter Mathia, “The Social Structure in the Eighteenth Century: A Calculation by Joseph Massie,” Vol 10 (1957), 42-45.

⁶ Benjamin Franklin, *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, Ed. Albert Henery Smyth, (New York: 1907), Vol 5, 362-363.

⁷ “The ‘d.’ stands for the Latin ‘denarius’, which evolved to the French ‘denier.’ The British penny descended from both, so that the ‘d.’ means penny.” - Chard Coins website <<http://www.24carat.co.uk/denominations.html>>

⁸ Francis D. Cogliano, *Revolutionary America 1763-1815*, (New York: Routledge, 2000): 46.

for rebellion is commonly thought of as British Tyranny. The Americans were not an oppressed people, and they knew they were probably freer and less burdened with feudal restraints than any part of mankind in the eighteenth century. It was, wrote Peter Oliver, the Chief Justice of Massachusetts, “the most wanton and unnatural rebellion that ever existed... The Annals of no Country can produce an Instance of so virulent a Rebellion, of such implacable madness and Fury, originating from such trivial causes, as those alleged by these unhappy People.”⁹ America’s social realities of the time barely justified a war.

It is due to this imbalance between the cause and the effect of the American revolution that there has been so much debate about what specifically caused the revolution. To this day there are clashing opinions. There are Patriot, Loyalist, Nationalist, Imperialist, Progressive, Marxist and Republican interpretations, to name but a few.¹⁰ Many argue that the seeds of revolution had been planted long before the fatal “shot heard around the world” in April of 1775. The purpose of this essay is not to reason why the revolution occurred, but rather to clarify and to make evident strategies that brought the revolution into being. What is evident about these strategies is that they were all cleverly brought into effect through judicious use of timing and propaganda by the protagonists, the founding fathers - in particular Sam Adams. Some of the events are themselves simply exercises in propaganda.

There were three pivotal events that sparked the revolution. These are the Stamp Act congress (October 1765), the Boston Massacre (March 5, 1770), and finally the Boston Tea Party (Dec. 16, 1773). These events, together with the establishment of patriotic Committees of Correspondence, paved the way and directly brought about the Revolution. All three of these events were principally coordinated by the patriot Samuel Adams and in each case they were somewhat unjust attacks on the British system. In each case Sam Adams used rallying tactics and printed propaganda to ensure that the woes of the colonials would be highly exaggerated for the maximum

⁹ George Athan Billias, *The American Revolution*, (Clark: Dryden, 1990): 81-82.

¹⁰ George Athan Billias, vii.

effect. This essay shall outline the occurrences of these events, their aftermath, and to illuminate the exact instances where the events came into effect because of the timely actions and propaganda of Adams.

Today, historians are acutely aware of the power of the written and spoken word during any conflict, particularly when the conflict concerns a communist or fascist element. As such, it is intriguing how frequently the initiating events of the revolution, are excused or glossed over. Perhaps this is why Sam Adams is one of the least known of America's Founding Fathers, yet one of the most important. A revolutionary extremist and genius of propaganda, it has been said of him that he was able "manufacture public opinion with a pen."¹¹ Francis Bernard, the British Governor before Thomas Hutchinson, exclaimed about Sam Adams that "Every dip of his pen stung like a horned snake."¹² He wrote using such a variety of names that few of his contemporaries knew many of his identities and to the present day it is not possible to learn all of them. He would even quote instances from other identities of if his own as evidence in a piece. His descendant, William V. Wells, listed a number of them in his *Life of Samuel Adams*, these are: Determinatus, Principis Obsta, T.Z., A Layman, A. B., Cedant Arma Togae, E. A., A Bostonian, A Tory, Populus, An Impartialist, Alfred, Candidus, Vindex, A Chatterer, An American, A., Valerius Poplicola, A Son of Liberty, Shippen, Z., Observation, Sincerus, A Religious Politician. It was estimated by John Adams that Sam Adams had used fifty to one hundred different pseudonyms during his life as an author for various periodicals. As an old man Sam Adams one day confessed that he himself had forgotten most of them. But it did not matter, he said as "they served their purpose."¹³

By definition a revolution is "a fundamental change in political organization; especially: the overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler,"¹⁴ though one of the most baffling aspects of the American revolution is that proceeding to and at the onset of revolution the American people

¹¹ Pauline Maier, *The Old Revolutionaries*, (New York: Knopf, 1980): 11.

¹² Cass Canfield, *Samuel Adams's Revolution*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976): 1.

¹³ Paul Lewis, *The Grand Incendiary*, (New York: Dial, 1973): 27.

¹⁴ "Revolution," Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online. <<http://www.m-w.com>>

had great faith the abilities of the English King - George III. When a group of Bostonians gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the repeal of the Stamp Act, they offered a toast “May the British Empire be always happy in a patriot King of the House of Brunswick.”¹⁵ Blame for the duties was not placed on George III, but rather on Parliament. People felt dismay at their mob violence and disrespect for their King, who was even mistakenly given credit for the repeal.¹⁶ From 1767 to 1773 nearly every anti monarchy article concerning the colonies originated in England. In America, right up through to the end of 1775 almost all published condemnations of loyalty to the king showed remarkable restraint, with no significant inclusion of the king in charges against the ministry.¹⁷ Even George Washington was known to rise in the officers’ mess at his New England headquarters - to toast the King. He even did this after the battle of Bunker Hill. Independence, George Washington said initially, was not desired “by any thinking man in all North America.”¹⁸ In June of 1775, when Charles Lee started openly and repeatedly speaking against the monarchy and denouncing George III as a tyrant, he met with disfavor from the other congressional delegates. Few Americans were ready as yet to advocate these views.¹⁹

The Stamp Act Congress was congress established to oppose British parliamentary attempts to raise revenue through direct taxation of all colonial commercial and legal papers. The Stamp Act (and Sugar Act) was put into effect to pay for the administration cost of maintaining the vastly increased territories gained in North America owing to the Seven years war, the French and Indian War, and Pontiac's War on the frontier settlements. In Britain it was felt only proper that at least part of the cost of maintaining a force of ten thousand men in America should be met by the American colonists themselves.²⁰ To this end the Stamp Act was introduced.

The Stamp Act was met in the colonies by outright refusal to use the stamps, as well as with

¹⁵ Paul K Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1988):186.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jules Archer, *They Made A Revolution*, (New York: St. Martin's, 1973): 95.

¹⁹ Paul K Longmore, 166.

²⁰ Christopher Hibbert, 122.

riots, stamp burning, and intimidation of colonial stamp distributors. This came as a great surprise to the Crown as it was nothing unusual by British standards and was a perfectly legal piece of legislation. It was barely even mentioned in lengthy correspondence with the King. When English public opinion and English newspapers were forced to take notice of it all, they were quite satisfied as to its fairness and propriety.²¹

Sam Adams was not the only voice to cry out against the Stamp Tax, but his was the most vocal. At the time of the Stamp Act Tax businessmen, mechanics, and laborers in New England were complaining that they had fallen upon difficult times due to postwar difficulties. The colonies were short of ready funds and the Stamp Act struck at vital points of colonial operations, affecting trade and many of the most articulate and influential people in the colonies - lawyers, journalists and bankers, as such. Sam Adams started campaigning against the tax by making the rounds of the Green Dragon, the Bunch of Grapes and other taverns. These local rallies were directed at persuading the people that economic fault was all England's. He called the Stamp Act a crisis for Americans that cried out for resistance and subsequently won election to the Massachusetts House of Representatives to fight it. Within two weeks he was on every important committee.²² In the summer of 1765 he organized a society called the Sons of Liberty, a name taken from a speech given in the British Parliament by Isaac Barré. Connected to the Sons was an amalgamation of Boston's existing North and South end gangs with an executive body called the Loyal Nine, young radicals with little comprehension of the dangers involved.²³ Cultivated for objectionable work was one Andrew McIntosh, an illiterate thug. Sam Adams maintained control as best he could and sat at the reigns of this society that was dedicated to sabotaging enforcement of the Stamp Act and harassing British tax collectors.

In September of 1765, Sam Adams issued an "Instructions of the town of Boston to the

²¹ Christopher Hibbert, 123.

²² Jules Archer, 13.

²³ Clifford K. Shipton, "Biographical Sketches of Those Who Attended Harvard College in the Classes 1736-1740," *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, Vol 10 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1958), 428. This details Samuel Adams.

representatives of the general court.” It began with:

At a Time when the British American Subjects are every where loudly complaining of arbitrary & unconstitutional Innovations, the Town of Boston cannot any longer remain silent, without just Imputation of inexcusable Neglect. - We therefore the Freeholder's & other Inhabitants, being legally assembled in Faneuil Hall, to consider what Steps are necessary for us to take at this alarming Crisis, think it proper to communicate to you our united Sentiments, & to give you our Instruction there upon. It fills us with very great Concern to find, that Measures have been adopted by the British Ministry, & Acts of Parliament made, which press hard upon our invaluable Rights & Libertys, & tend greatly to distress the Trade of the Province by which we have heretofore been able to contribute so large a Share towards the enriching of the Mother Country. But we are more particularly alarmd & astonishd at the Act, called the Stamp Act, by which a very grievous & we apprehend unconstitutional Tax is to be laid upon the Colony.²⁴

There was nothing unconstitutional about the tax as the colonists were subjects of the British empire and the Stamp Tax was a regular instance of British legislation. Protecting the rights and liberties of the colonials during the French and Indian War (Seven Years War) had been costly and there was the continued expense of defending the empire against both the Indians and any possible French attempt at reconquest,²⁵ it was justified that the colony contribute.

On August 14th, 1765, Sam Adams managed the Stamp Act riot, and those which followed it, using his private army of the Sons of Liberty and McIntosh's gangs. Consummate proof is lacking as all the papers of the leaders were discreetly edited in later years.²⁶ John Adams describes a graphic picture of Samuel Adams in Philadelphia flinging batches of correspondence into the fire or, in summer, cutting papers into shreds using a pair of scissors and throwing the fragments to the wind. “Whatever becomes of me,” he explained, “my friends shall never suffer by my negligence.”²⁷ British intelligence was confident that he ran the riots. The headquarters of the Stamp Act was smashed by a mob who hung an effigy of Andrew Oliver, the Crown official, on an oak known as the Liberty Tree. The effigy was then taken down, carried to Oliver's house and beheaded. The Sons then broke in and vowed to kill him, Oliver fled in panic. He resigned the next day.²⁸ Andrew Eliot, an ardent patriot at the time withdrew his activity as he could not stomach

²⁴ Samuel Adams, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, (New York: Knickerbocker, 1904): Vol 1, 8.

²⁵ Wallace Brown, *The Good Americans*, (New York: Cornwall, 1969), 24.

²⁶ Clifford K. Shipton, Vol 10, 428.

²⁷ Stewart Beach, *Samuel Adams - The Fateful Years 1764-1776*, (New York, Cornwall, 1965): 11.

²⁸ Jules Archer, 14.

such violence stating: “Every succeeding night witnessed the rage of an infatuated populace, and no man in any office whatever was safe in his habitation. If a man had any pique against his neighbor it was only to call him a few hard names, and his property would certainly be destroyed, his house pulled down and his life in jeopardy.”²⁹

Mob rule reigned in Boston for three days. At Sam Adams’s instigation a mob broke into and looted the house of Governor Hutchinson, who was Oliver’s brother-in-law. Adams urged the mobs on, using such lies as that during the plundering of Hutchinson’s house there were found letters proving him the author of the Stamp Act. When some of the ringleaders of the mob were arrested Adams used intimidation to coerce their release. In general he dismissed the riots as “the diversion of a few boys in the street,” or “the common amusements of children.”³⁰ If the drunken violence could not be glossed over he stated that it was the act of vagabond strangers, then tried to distract attention by jeering at Hutchinson’s flight.³¹

This Town has always been very careful during the late Times of Calamity to preserve as much as possible Good order among its Inhabitants, of which they gave an Early Proof when a dangerous Mob arose and some Outrages were committed by Persons as yet unknown.... however after all the Exaggerations the whole Damage is short of £4000... Yet the Inhabitants were far from being inactive in their Endeavors to suppress [it] immediately... A number went to the Governors’ House to take his Excellency’s Orders but he was not in town... but the Inhabitants were left to do the best they could.³²

By the end of 1765 Adams held firmly in his hand the leash of the mob. He had shown to Americans, not only in Boston but throughout the colonies, that they could defy the King, Parliament, and all tax laws. Nine of thirteen colonies took the cue and organized the Stamp Act Congress that branded the Stamp Act as illegal “taxation without consent,” and demanded its repeal. Their “Declaration of Rights and Grievances” had sympathizers in Parliament and the act was revoked.³³ The Stamp Act protests throughout the colonies contributed a great deal to a unified

²⁹ Clifford K. Shipton, Vol 10, 428.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Clifford K. Shipton, Vol 10, 429.

³² Samuel Adams, Vol 1, 92-3.

³³ Jules Archer, 5.

organization, which proved to be a necessary prelude for the struggle of independence a decade later.³⁴

Once the Stamp Act issue had been concluded the colonies celebrated and Adams, unlike everybody else, was actively willing to continue the fight against British Administration, which he dubbed “The Enemy.” He distributed radical pamphlets to taverns of the colonists and feverently wrote political essays for publication in the *Boston Gazette*. Using more than twenty five pen names he published emotional outbursts that did not in any way clarify the issues involved. To keep up political fires Adams organized parades, festivals and shows of fireworks to celebrate such happy anniversaries as the August 14th riot.³⁵ Adams began supplying the printers of New York, Philadelphia, and London with a propaganda campaign that was usually published under the heading of “Journal of Events.” It told of stories of Red Coat atrocities of such lies that they could not be published in Boston for fear of being laughed at. In England the conduct of garrison troops had been so bad that it made these stories seem probable and several took them as truth.³⁶

When taxes were finally levied under the Townshend Acts compelling the colonists to pay duties on glass, lead, paper, and tea, Sam Adams organized the Sons of Liberty to pressure the American merchants into signing a pledge of non-importation. Eight merchants broke the pledge and it was decided to make an example of one of them. On February 22, 1770 a mob gathered in front of the store of Theophilus Lilly with a big wooden hand mounted on a pole pointing at the storefront accusingly. A suspected customs informer and friend of Theophilus tried to wrest the pole away and was beaten for his efforts.³⁷ Enraged he acquired his musket and fired into the rioting crowd, killing an eleven-year-old boy, Christopher Seider. Sam Adams and his Sons of Liberty promptly arranged a public funeral, attended by 5,000 Bostonians. It was very much a political demonstration.³⁸ Inscribed upon the coffin were the words “Innocence itself is not safe,”

³⁴ "Stamp Act" Encyclopædia Britannica Online. <<http://members.eb.com>>

³⁵ Clifford K. Shipton, Vol 10, 431.

³⁶ Clifford K. Shipton, Vol 10, 434.

³⁷ Jules Archer, 16.

³⁸ Francis D. Cogliano, 45.

while in the Boston Gazette Adams described the child as “the first martyr to American liberty.” Sam Adams was creating disturbances and then making display of the mishaps, taking a dreadful fatality and turning it into exemplary piece of propaganda against the British. Agitating retaliation and then publicizing that retaliation as tyranny was a technique he would soon use again to full effect.

Sam Adams chose his setting with care. In the North End of Boston there was a battalion of the Twenty-ninth Regiment that had been established near a cluster of ropewalk (ship-rigging) factories. The rope-makers were faithful Sons of Liberty and followers of Sam Adams. On March 2, 1770, a heavy barrage of snowballs filled with stones was used to knock the helmets off several soldiers. The soldiers tried to ignore the matter. The antics were repeated again on the third and fourth of March, each time with larger numbers of workers throwing stones and ice. The waterfront mob began wielding clubs and homemade spears while taunting, cursing and shouting at the troops. The *Gazette* duly noted the occasions calling them skirmishes and treating them as engagements between unruly soldiers and peace-loving townspeople. The scene was repeated on March fourth, only as they couldn't tease the troops into retaliating the mob rushed them and two soldiers were battered by clubs - one sustaining a broken arm and the other injuries to the face.³⁹

On March 5th taunting of the Redcoats continued outside the Boston Custom House on King street, now known as State street. The riot was evidently premeditated and this time was conducted in the presence of a large crowd of bystanders. At first the rioters repeatedly challenged the soldiers to fire and threatened to kill them, while hurling stones, ice, snowballs and coal. Again the rioters charged the infantry line and engage in hand-to-hand combat, the leader being Crispus Attucks, a half native American and half African American. He knocked down one of the soldiers and took possession of his musket at which point the soldiers open fire, killing Attucks and three others, while wounding six. There is no evidence that the Captain of the soldiers ordered the

³⁹ Paul Lewis, 107.

firing.⁴⁰ Within two weeks one of the wounded died from his injuries. The five men killed by the soldiers that day were: Crispus Attucks, James Caldwell, Samuel Maverick, Patrick Carr and Samuel Gray. Immediately after the shootings public order in Boston threatened to totally break down. A crowd of at least one thousand swarmed through the streets. The soldiers were jailed immediately, in part for their own safety. As with Christopher Seider, the funerals of the dead became occasion for mass political demonstration.⁴¹

A special edition of the *Gazette* was published stating that a great many citizens had been killed or wounded, although no clear figure was indicated. Samuel Adams gave it the name that posterity has called it and a heavy black headline appeared proclaiming: BOSTON MASSACRE! The crowd went to Faneuil Hall and a special town meeting was held. A committee of fifteen was elected calling upon Governor Hutchinson demanding that the both the twenty-ninth and fourteenth regiments be withdrawn to fort William immediately. Sam Adams was named the chairman of the committee. The crowd followed their spokesperson to the governors house, where Hutchinsons attempt to address the crowd was drowned out by jeers and insults, so the committee was admitted inside and negotiations commenced. Adams emphasized the point that he couldn't guarantee the keeping of the peace if the troops remained in the city. Some of the radicals had been talking of arming themselves and driving the troops into the sea, while conversely the eight Royal Navy ships in the harbor had readied for action, which was unsettling for both sides. In the name of preserving the peace it was agreed that the regiments would be withdrawn to Fort William that day and in return there would be no assaults made on the troops. Thanks to the Boston "Massacre" the troops had been removed from the city and with the unexpected bonus that the customs commissioners wouldn't remain in Boston without troop protection, so they too retired to the castle where they stayed for the next nine months.⁴² Adams had won a great victory and the radicals seized their chance, the Sons of Liberty encouraging military drills in the name of self

⁴⁰ James H. Stark, 44.

⁴¹ Francis D. Cogliano, 45.

⁴² Paul Lewis, 108.

defense.

Worth noting is the British army regiments had a very honorable record. The 14th Regiment fought under William III in Flanders and also formed one of the squares at Waterloo, breasting the charges of the French cuirassiers. The 29th Regiment was at Marlboro and with Wellington; bearing a heavy part in wresting Spain from Napoleon.⁴³ Their withdrawal from Boston would have been very humiliating. The patriot leaders desired a quick trial but the Superior Court delayed the hearing until autumn. On December 4th, 1770 two of the soldiers were found guilty of manslaughter and had their thumbs branded, the other six were acquitted. The patriots John Adams and Josiah Quincy defended the soldiers and as such it is remarkable that they got off so lightly, all Sons of Liberty had been carefully weeded from the jury. The deciding testimony in the case was that of the celebrated surgeon, John Jeffries, who attended Patrick Carr, an Irishman, fatally wounded in the conflict. It is as follows:

He said he saw many things thrown at the sentry; he believed they were oyster shells and ice; he heard the people huzza every time they heard anything strike that sounded hard. He then saw some soldiers going down towards the custom-house; he saw the people pelt them as they went along. I asked him whether he thought the soldiers would fire; he said he thought the soldiers would have fired long before. I then asked him if he thought the soldiers were abused a great deal; he said he thought they were. I asked him whether he thought the soldiers would have been hurt if they had not fired; he said he really thought they would, for he heard many voices cry out, "Kill them!" I asked him, meaning to close all, whether he thought they fired in self-defence or on purpose to destroy the people; he said he really thought they did fire to defend themselves; that he did not blame the man, whoever he was, that shot him. He told me he was a native of Ireland; that he had frequently seen mobs, and soldiers called to quell them. Whenever he mentioned that, he called himself a fool; that he might have known better; that he had seen soldiers often fire on people in Ireland, but had never in his life seen them bear so much before they fired.⁴⁴

The court verdict incised Sam Adams, making him all the more resolute to gain a propaganda victory and ensuring that the "Massacre" would not be forgotten. He promoted a viewpoint that British soldiers were slaughtering Americans on their own streets. From December 10th through to January 28th he wrote ten articles to the Boston Gazette all signed Vindex, extracts from the first three articles follow:

⁴³ James H. Stark, 45.

⁴⁴ James H. Stark, 46.

...we are bound to submit to every band of soldiers we may meet on the street, and in what instances we may venture to interpose and prevent their murdering those whom we think to be innocent persons without being liable... if we escape with our lives...we should fall victims to their rage and cruelty.

[soldiers] arm'd with musquets, and bayonets fix'd, presuming that they were cloath'd with as much authority by the law of the land, as the Posse Comitatus of the Country with the high sheriff at their head...

...[a supposed witness] saw ice or snow balls thrown, but did not apprehend himself or the soldiers in danger... the soldiers were to all appearance meditating the death of people by loading their guns... One would think that they intended to assassinate those, who they had no reason to think had the least inclination to injure them

...[a supposed witness] swore, that after the firing, he saw the soldiers drawn up and heard Officers say "Damn it, what a fine fire that was! How bravely it dispersd the mob!"... one of them speaking of the Slaughter, swore by God it was a fine thing & said you shall see more of it.⁴⁵

After Adams's had so liberally spread propaganda through the gazette his pseudonym

"Vindex" started to receive accusations that he was lying. Adams's fourth article opened with the following ardent reply:

To the Printers.

Somebody, in Mr. Draper's paper of Thursday last, charges me with *Partiality*, in my two first performances on the subject of the late Trial - *I deny the Charge, and desire he would explain himself*. He also says, I freely charge *Partiality* on others: *I utterly deny that also; and call upon him to point out one Instance*. He desires the publick would not be influenced by any remarks made by me on the laye Trials: *With regard to that, the publick will do as they please*. He *insinuates* that I have cast the most *injurious* reflections upon Judges, Jury and Witnesses: *Again, I deny it*.⁴⁶

Sam Adams is in blatant denial for his overt actions, protesting and refusing to take responsibility for them. His response is worthy of Queen Gertrude's comment from Shakespeare's Hamlet (Act III, SC II, line 242) "The lady protests too much, methinks." The "somebody, in Mr. Draper's paper" thereafter became silenced, there was no forthcoming rebuttal. Adams proceeded to write another seven lengthy articles on the "Massacre" to be printed in the gazette - fully aware of the coercing effects on the public.

In the early spring of 1770 the British administration repealed the Townshend Acts, they being a total failure due to non importation agreements sparked by Sam Adams. At the personal insistence of King George III, a tax was still levied on imported tea,⁴⁷ his own words being "There

⁴⁵ Samuel Adams, Vol 2, 77-98.

⁴⁶ Samuel Adams, Vol 2, 98.

⁴⁷ Paul Lewis, 115.

must always, be one tax to keep up the right. And as such I approve of the tea duty.” Americans then depended upon tea about as much as they depend on coffee today and foreign tea continued to be smuggled into Atlantic ports. There were still violent disturbances whenever an official insisted on carrying out instructions to the letter.⁴⁸

A temporary calm followed the Boston Massacre and the repeal of the Townsend acts. Patriot leaders took advantage of the quietude and in September of 1771 the Boston Town Meeting, at the behest of Samuel Adams, formally created a committee of correspondence to communicate grievances to the towns of Massachusetts, the mainland colonies, and the British Isles. There was a call for towns to create their own committees of correspondence and over half of those in Massachusetts followed suit. The movement was so successful that in 1773 the Virginia House of Burgesses advised that every colony implement a committee of correspondence to insure the rapid distribution of information and unified response in the event of a crisis. The committees served as the propaganda and information-gathering locations for the patriots,⁴⁹ and had spread throughout the colonies in spite of the ridicule they initially inspired in their early stages. Once they had assembled it only remained for the British to create an issue and the committees established in the spring of 1773 would not have long to wait before they took action.

The issue that ignited the revolution was caused by the decline of the British East India Company, a privately run organization that was so large that it effectively ruled the subcontinent of India and was the largest single mercantile company on earth. It's success or failure played a significant role in the British economy and the company had thus achieved quasi-official standing.⁵⁰ In May, 1773, Parliament passed the Tea Act. This Act designed to save the company from bankruptcy by shifting the way that British tea was sold in the colonies. Tea duties were to be paid directly to the company and tea was to be sold only by chosen representatives. This allowed the company to sidestep colonial middlemen and undersell competitors, even smugglers. The end

⁴⁸ Christopher Hibbert, 141-2.

⁴⁹ Francis D. Cogliano, 46.

⁵⁰ Paul Lewis, 153.

result was inexpensive tea for American consumers which was half the price being charged in Britain.⁵¹

The result was ironic. Since the repeal of the other Townshend Duties many Americans had been drinking tea and paying the duty on it. Despite this the Tea Act had been designed to save the East India Company and was not trying to demand sovereignty over the colonies. Regardless it rejuvenated the dispute over taxation. In November 1773, the British ship Dartmouth entered Boston harbor with a cargo of tea from India, to be sold in America by agents of the East India Company. Soon after their arrival unknown persons tacked notes to the doors of the houses rented by the agents demanding them to appear thirty six hours later at the Liberty Tree to publicly resign their commissions. Church bells rang summoning citizens and the town crier spent the morning announcing the event as he made his rounds. Neatly printed notices, posted everywhere, read:

TO THE FREEMAN OF THIS AND THE NEIGHBORING TOWNS

Gentlemen,- You are desired to meet at the Liberty Tree this day at twelve o'clock at noon, then and there to hear the persons to whom the tea shipped by the East India Company is consigned to make a public resignation of their offices as consignees upon oath; and also to swear that they will reship any teas that may be consigned to them by the said Company, by the first sailing vessel to London.

Boston, November 3, 1773

O.C, Sec'y

SHOW ME THE MAN THAT DARE TAKE THIS DOWN!⁵²

Sam Adams arrived shortly before noon at the Liberty Tree, accompanied by other Boston legislative representatives. They received a wild applause from a crowd estimated of around one thousand people. At no point during the occasion was it mentioned who O.C, Sec'y was nor of what organization he was the secretary of. The East India Company agents never arrived and a furious crowd marched on Clark's warehouse, where they had established offices. Sam Adams presented the agents with a prewritten resignation. The mob almost lost control when word was passed that they refused to sign, but the leaders wanted no bloodshed and they were persuaded to disperse. With these problems eventuating, Governor Hutchinson decided to keep the merchant tea

⁵¹ Francis D. Cogliano, 46.

⁵² Paul Lewis, 173.

ships below the castle instead of in Boston, this way they could be sent back to England without clearance. Adams however saw to it that the ships were brought up to the town so that the duty would legally have to be paid.

Secret meetings were held by the colonial leaders over the next few days although no details of the identity of those that participated have been uncovered the colonial leaders decided at these meetings that the landing of East India tea would be opposed by force and it was recognized that a direct confrontation with Britain would be a consequence. On November 28th an unsigned essay appeared in the *Massachusetts Spy*, indicating that the radicals did not intend to permit landing of tea. On December 16th, after three tea laden ships had dropped anchor in Boston a mass meeting was held at the Old South Church. The thousands who attended affirmed their resolution not to permit the landing of tea and that the ships and cargo must sail away forthwith. When it became clear that Governor Hutchinson continued to refuse the ships clearance until the tea was unloaded Sam Adams immediately rose and declared, "This meeting can do no more to save the country!" This was a signal of some sort for immediately war whoops were heard outside the church and a party of forty to fifty men disguised as Mohawks, with faces darkened by soot and representing symbols of oppressed America, marched down to Griffin's Wharf. As they rushed to the waterfront they cried "Boston Harbor a teapot tonight!"⁵³

Boarding the ships they proceeded to carry cases of tea from the hold to the deck then broke open the chests with tomahawks and flung their contents into the water, destroying 342 chests of tea worth approximately £10,000. The original group was augmented by others in similar camouflage and as many as one hundred and forty persons took part in the raid that lasted for three hours. The ships themselves were intentionally left unscathed, no property other than the tea being destroyed, nor was a single participant injured although afterwards an obtrusive customs official who had already been tarred feathered in Maine was dragged out of his house, tarred and feathered again, and paraded through the streets in a cart which was halted from time to time so that he could

⁵³ Paul Lewis, 184.

be beaten.⁵⁴ No troops were summoned by the governor from Fort William as Hutchinson knew that Redcoats in Boston at this time would trigger a formidable revolt, also their numbers had been drastically reduced from the two full regiments to three weak half-battalions.⁵⁵ Sam Adams, John Hancock, and other radical leaders did not venture to the waterfront that night, instead returning to their homes and ensuring that reliable witnesses could confirm their whereabouts for the entire evening. Complete secrecy was maintained regarding the participants until the end of the War of Independence, after which a number named Adams as the principal instigator.

Parliament was absolutely furious at this open challenge to its authority and willful destruction of private property. British opinion was outraged, and America's friends in Parliament were immobilized. American merchants in other cities were also disturbed. Property was property. Charles Van, a parliament member actually proposed that Boston should be destroyed like Carthage. "I am of the opinion," he said in the House, "you will never meet with that proper obedience to the laws of this country until you have destroyed that nest of locusts."⁵⁶ In the spring of 1774, with hardly any opposition, Parliament passed a series of measures called the Coercive Acts that were designed to reduce Massachusetts to order and imperial discipline. By these acts the port of Boston was closed until the destroyed tea should be paid for, the colonial government was placed under direct royal control, and the holding of town meetings became prohibited unless approved of by the Governor. Sam Adams termed the Coercive acts as the Intolerable Acts.

Samuel Adams wanted conflict with Britain, desiring nothing less than a head to head confrontation. He was determined to prevent any reparation for the tea. In his capacity as Clerk of the House he sent a letter to Arthur Lee in London claiming that the destruction was the "Art and Cunning" of the Governor who out of his "inveterate hatred of the people had both encouraged and provoked the people to destroy the Tea"; therefore he, if anyone, should have to pay for it.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Christopher Hibbert, 141-2.

⁵⁵ Paul Lewis, 182.

⁵⁶ Christopher Hibbert, 144.

⁵⁷ Samuel Adams, Vol 3, 79.

The merchants of Boston quickly became apprehensive and would gladly have paid the damages, only Sam Adams managed to block the action by packing the town meeting and stating in the House to the country Representatives that their associates should not pay for the work of the Boston mob.⁵⁸

One Loyalist present during the Boston Tea party was privy to the actions of Adams and in horror started his own counter propaganda campaign entitled *Massachusettensis*. The loyalist was Daniel Leonard, a graduate of Harvard and a lawyer who initially had been on the side of the patriotic cause, serving on various political committees with Sam Adams, John Hancock and James Warren. He was also on the Committee of Correspondence and had made ardent speeches in the House against Great Britain.⁵⁹ Like many of his countrymen he became alarmed at the mob outrages and drifting of the country towards rebellion, particularly the Tea Party. Daniel wisely kept his identity well hidden and *Massachusettensis* was mis-attributed to Jonathan Sewall for more than a generation. Dated between December 1774 and April 1775, *Massachusettensis* argued that the government was founded on law and reason; that the colonies had no substantial grievance and being part of the British empire they were properly subject to its authority. It was published three times in its initial year: first in the *Massachusetts Gazette and Post Boy*, next in a pamphlet form, and last by Rivington, in New York.⁶⁰ *Massachusettensis* was one of the most effective Loyalist pieces, attracting rebuttals from John Adams under the pseudonym Novanglus. Daniel knew that hidden workings were afoot, as the following extract clearly shows:

When I became satisfied, that many innocent, unsuspecting persons were in danger of being seduced to their utter ruin, and the province of Massachusetts Bay in danger of being drenched with blood and carnage, I could restrain my emotions no longer; and having once broke the bands of natural reserve, was determined to probe the sore to the bottom, though I was sure to touch the quick - [Daniel Leonard], *Massachusettensis*, Jan 9th, 1775.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Clifford K. Shipton, Vol 10, 443.

⁵⁹ Clifford K. Shipton, "Biographical Sketches of Those Who Attended Harvard College in the Classes 1756-1769," *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, Vol 14 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1958), 641. This details Daniel Leonard.

⁶⁰ James Stark, 326.

⁶¹ Janice Potter, *The Liberty We Seek*, (Cambridge: Harvard, 1983): 1.

It is very evident from the above passage that Daniel was aware of the impending danger and the definite possibility that the colonies would be plunged into war with Britain; also apparent was that the matter had been wrought of conscious instigation by a party intentionally trying to bring about war. As such Daniel dedicated himself to averting the Revolution and one of his methods of doing this was by use of the *Massachusettensis* letters.

After the Tea Party, Britain recalled Governor Hutchinson and appointed a new military governor for the colony, General Thomas Gage, who was also the commander in chief of British forces in North America. Both sides started preparing for war and when Gage attempted to march on Lexington and capture an arsenal of cannon, shots were exchanged and the Revolutionary war begun. Sam Adams succeeded in his dream of bringing about open conflict and thereafter was content to step back and play a lesser role.

The American revolution was the first rebellion in modern history where the battle of words was of particular importance. For the first time a large and literate population was involved that was well served by newspapers, pamphlets, and orators. Newspapers were the most important medium of the war of words and from the start the majority of papers were controlled by the patriots. As the crisis deepened printers came under increasing pressure to banish Loyalist and even neutral viewpoints. Loyal editors faced violence and boycott with commissioners claiming later that the printers' trade was more dangerous than the sword. In 1774 only Boston and New York had anything resembling a Loyalist press and by the end of 1775 only New York remained.⁶² Patriot suppression of the freedom of expression along with intolerance of minority views was particularly galling when contrasted with the freedom of expression afforded such views in Britain, the nation that Patriots claimed was so corrupt and tyrannical.

Victory in the War of Independence, being a people's revolution, was highly dependent on the loyalties of the American people. Many point out that it really was a civil war. To successfully

⁶² Wallace Brown, 91.

win it was as important, if not more important, to acquire the allegiance of the people than it was to win individual battles. The war of pamphlets and propaganda rose to a climax between 1775 and 1777, just prior to and after the tea party. It is thought that in July 1776 less than the majority of Americans had undergone the transformation of consciousness to the patriot side. A sizable minority of influential identified themselves as loyalists while the great majority of the population remained uncommitted. Despite the opening bloodshed at Lexington and Concord, from the summer of 1774 through the early fall of 1775 the majority of Americans clutched at the hope that George III would have a change of heart and there would be a possible pardon by Britain. Washington even avoided implicating the monarch and carefully labeled British forces as “Ministerial Troops.”⁶³ John Shy describes “the great middle group of Americans,” as “Dubious, afraid, uncertain, indecisive,” and that they felt “nothing at stake could justify involving themselves and families in extreme hazard and suffering.”⁶⁴

The two documents that swayed the population were the pamphlet *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine and the *Declaration of Independence* by Thomas Jefferson. *Common Sense* was the piece that decisively won the propaganda duel, swinging the population and paving the way for the *Declaration of Independence* to be passed. Both pieces are fine examples of patriotic writing and are each deserving of a case study as such. They are worth mentioning in this essay as they illustrate the full effect of propaganda being used to secure victory against the British.

Common Sense was a bold, passionate yet reasoned appeal for revolution to all Americans. Thomas Paine was an Englishman and like Adams was a radical hater of the king. He argued that the cause of America should not just be a revolt against taxation and questioned how Americans could pretend to be loyal to the crown while fighting his troops on American soil. If they broke with England now, France would give them the foreign aid they needed to win their freedom.⁶⁵

Common Sense turned the sentiment of the people irrecoverably against King George telling the

⁶³ Paul K Longmore, 187.

⁶⁴ Paul K Longmore, 202.

⁶⁵ Jules Archer, 138.

American colonists, in unforgettably scorching language, how completely he “rejected the hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh of England,” how thoroughly he disdained “the wretch, that with pretended title of Father of his people can unfeelingly hear their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood upon his soul.”⁶⁶ Most important of all he clearly identified independence as the correct objective. The fifty page pamphlet came off the press on Jan. 10, 1776 and sold more than 500,000 copies within a few months, more than any other single publication of the time. No pamphlet had ever made such an impact on colonial opinion.

The *Declaration of Independence* was fundamentally a direct attack on King George, accusing him of “injuries and usurpations” and refusing to consent to “wholesome and necessary laws,” that of “obstructing the administration of justice... He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burned our towns and excited domestic insurrections among us.” Public opinion would swing violently against the King and Monarchy. The symbol of George the III would be replaced with that of George Washington. Washington Irving’s famous tale, *Rip Van Winkle* who shows us admirably the change of common thought. The main character, Rip Van Winkle, awakes after twenty years sleep and finds the old inn he knew so well renamed the Union Hotel and the sign out front now showed “the ruby face of King George, under which he had smoked so many a peaceful pipe; but even this was singularly metamorphosed. The red coat was changed for one of blue and buff, a sword was held in the hand instead of a scepter, the head was decorated with a cocked hat, and underneath was painted in large characters, GENERAL Washington.”⁶⁷ When pressed to disclose his identity Rip declared “I am a poor quiet man, a native of the place, and a loyal subject of the King, God bless him!” to which there is “a general shout burst from the by-standers-- ‘A Tory! a Tory! a spy! a refugee! hustle him! away with him!’”⁶⁸

By the end of the revolution in 1781 the total indoctrination of patriot ideals had prevailed and those who did not conform were pushed out of the country by mobs and forced to flee, usually

⁶⁶ Kenneth Lynn, *A Divided People*, (London: Greenwood, 1977): 63

⁶⁷ Washington Irving, *Rip Van Winkle*, (New York: Penguin, 1994): 19.

⁶⁸ Washington Irving, 20.

to Canada or England. The future America would be exposed to four generations of patriot saturated literature and the original instigation's of Sam Adams lost in a sea of ideology. When reviewing the revolution as a whole, the words of an outraged British officer, W. G. Evelyn, should not be forgotten: "Would you believe it, that this immense continent from New England to Georgia is moved and directed by one man... who by his abilities and talent for factional intrigue, has made himself of some consequence." Thomas Jefferson put it quite differently, calling Samuel Adams "truly the Man of the Revolution."⁶⁹ Today the image of Adams has lost meaning as a founding father, most do not know his significance in the conflict. He is best recognized as a brewer of beer, which is in itself a lie, he was a maltster - not a brewer.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Jules Archer, 26.

⁷⁰ Clifford K. Shipton, Vol 10, 420.

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