

SAMUEL ADAMS 1722–1803

Quote/Unquote: From the day on which an accommodation takes place between England and America, on any other terms than as independent States, I shall date the ruin of this country.

At a Glance

An expert agitator and propagandist, Samuel Adams convinced fellow colonists to defy parliamentary policies in the 1760s and 1770s. Through speeches and newspaper essays, Adams kept the torch of colonial protest burning from 1764 to 1776. Through Committees of Correspondence, Adams spread his message of radical resistance to—and ultimately, independence from—Great Britain.

Samuel Adams was 42 years old in 1764, when the British Parliament passed the Sugar Act in an attempt to extract more money from its North American colonies. Adams led the protest against British action, and from that time to 1776, he never relinquished his position at the forefront of Patriot resistance.

Until that time, Adams had engaged in a number of unsuccessful careers and failed business ventures. The Sugar Act provided the floundering Adams a fresh opportunity for achievement. Adams attacked the new duties on sugar as an unreasonable law that violated every person's natural right to be taxed only by legally elected representatives. In shaping the protest argument as he did, Adams set the tone for colonial resistance to parliamentary policies.

When Parliament passed the Stamp Act in 1765, Adams expanded his protest activities. Through a steady stream of fiery newspaper essays, he inspired Massachusetts Patriots to hang stamp officials in effigy and even to rip apart the home of the royal governor. He also helped organize the

Sons of Liberty to oppose the obnoxious act.

Parliament's repeal of the Stamp Act temporarily ended colonial protests, but the Townshend Acts of 1767 revived resistance, giving Adams a new opportunity to agitate against taxation without representation. Adams seized the opportunity to organize an effective boycott of British-made goods imported into the colonies.

Repeal of the Townshend Acts in 1770 did little to relax Adams's rousing activities. He led the demand for the removal of British troops from Boston following the Boston Massacre. In 1772 he was instrumental in forming Boston's Committee of Correspondence to coordinate and communicate with Patriots in other locations. When Parliament passed the Coercive (Intolerable) Acts in response to the Boston Tea Party, Adams organized another boycott of British goods and called for an intercolonial congress.

A participant in both Continental Congresses, Adams by this time had become such a leading architect of anti-British activity that he—along with John Hancock—was singled out as exempt from any future amnesty.

With the achievement of independence, the country had little need for Samuel Adams's skills as a propagandist and protester. He remained active in public life, serving in the Massachusetts convention called to ratify the new Constitution and later holding the offices of lieutenant-governor and governor. But he never again found a role so well suited to him as the one he played as America's foremost agitator.

Reviewing the Portrait *Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.*

- 1. Remembering the Details** How did the Sugar Act of 1764, intolerable for most colonists, prove beneficial to Samuel Adams?
- 2. Understanding Information** How did the Stamp Act and the Townshend Acts further Adams' career as an agitator?

Thinking Critically

- 3. Drawing Conclusions** After the Revolutionary War, why did Adams never again find "a role so well suited to him as America's foremost agitator"?