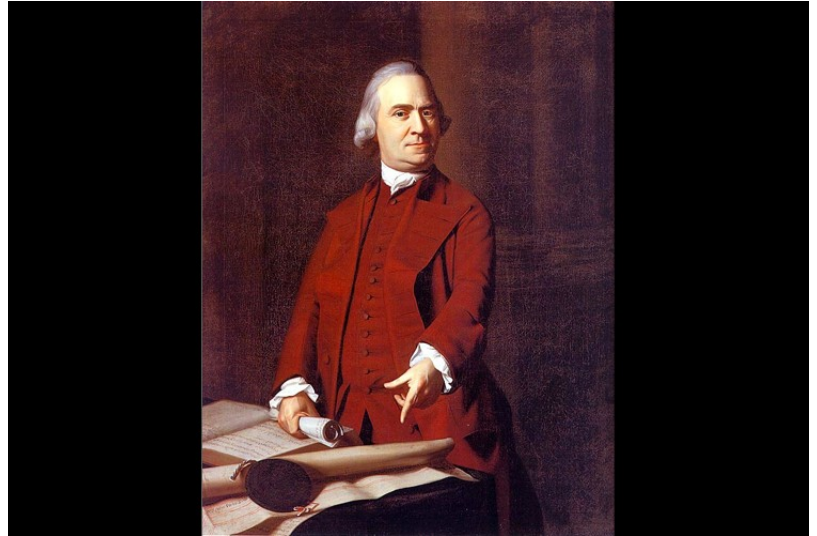




Samuel Adams: “Truly the Man of the Revolution”

“His mind was replete with resources that dissipated fear, and extricated in the greatest emergencies. Thus qualified, he stood forth early, and continued firm, through the great struggle, and may justly claim a large share of honor, due to that spirit of energy which opposed the measures of administration, and produced the independence of America. Through a long life he exhibited on all occasions, an example of patriotism, religion, and virtue honorary to the human character.”

— Mercy Otis Warren on the character of Samuel Adams, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* (1805)



John Singleton Copley/Public Domain

Samuel Adams was born on September 27, 1722 to a family who, by the time he was born, had been opposing tyrants for 100 years. Adams’ ancestor, Henry Adams, fled the despotism and religious bigotry of King Charles in 1632, settling in Massachusetts with many other Puritans seeking similar freedom from oppression.

On his mother’s side, Samuel Adams was related to the renowned Massachusetts Mathers — his maternal grandmother, Maria Mather, was the daughter of Increase Mather and the sister of Cotton Mather, both of whom were powerful and influential clergymen.

With that pedigree in mind, it is easy to see why Samuel Adams’ cousin John (the second president of the United States) said that his cousin was “born a rebel.”

For his part, though, Samuel Adams did not consider himself a rebel. A rebel was someone working to overthrow the Constitution, and Adams spent his life working to uphold the protections of liberty enshrined in England’s Magna Carta and Bill of Rights. It was the crown and the Commons that were bent on rebelliously depriving Adams and all British Americans of those rights that were theirs by inheritance.

Samuel Adams was the fourth of the 12 children born to Samuel and Mary Adams. Of those 12 children, only three survived past the age of two. Little is known of Mary Adams, but Samuel Adams the Elder (as Samuel Adams’ father was known to avoid confusion) made a prosperous living selling malt to breweries and operating a small malt house in his own backyard. This business is the inspiration for the Sam Adams Ale sold today.

There is so much that could be written about Samuel Adams’ life, from his strict religious upbringing to his seminal role in the events leading up to the Shot Heard Round the World in 1775. In this brief article, though, rather than rehearse biographical facts that anyone can look up on Wikipedia, I prefer sharing with our readers some of this ardent patriot’s own words, words that are both timeless and timely for Americans facing our own threats to the liberty secured by the sacrifices of Samuel Adams



and his generation.

From a letter written by Adams in the name of the Massachusetts House of Representatives to Dennys de Berdt, 12 January 1768:

The Utopian schemes of leveling and a community of goods are as visionary and impracticable, as those which vest all property in the Crown, are arbitrary, despotic, and in our government unconstitutional.

Now, what property can the colonists be conceived to have, if their money may be granted away by others, without their consent?

From one of the letters written by Adams under the pseudonym Candidus, 14 October 1771:

I believe that no people ever yet groaned under the heavy yoke of slavery, but when they deserved it. This may be called a severe censure upon by far the greatest part of the nations in the world who are involved in the misery of servitude: But however they may be thought by some to deserve commiseration, the censure is just. Zuinglius, one of the first reformers, in his friendly admonition to the republic of the Switzers, discourses much of his countrymen's throwing off the yoke: He says, that they who lie under oppression deserve what they suffer, and a great more; and he bids them perish with their oppressors.

The truth is, all might be free if they valued freedom, and defended it as they ought. Is it possible that millions could be enslaved by a few, which is a notorious fact, if all possessed the independent spirit of Brutus, who to his immortal honor, expelled the proud tyrant of Rome, and his "royal and rebellious race?"

If therefore a people will not be free; if they have not virtue enough to maintain their liberty against a presumptuous invader, they deserve no pity, and are to be treated with contempt and ignominy.

And if a minister shall usurp the supreme and absolute government of America, and set up his instructions as laws in the colonies, and their governors shall be so weak or so wicked, as for the sake of keeping their places, to be made the instruments in putting them in execution, who will presume to say that the people have not a right, or that it is not their indispensable duty to God and their country, by all rational means in their power to RESIST THEM.

The liberties of our country, the freedom of our civil constitution are worth defending at all hazards: And it is our duty to defend them against all attacks. We have received them as a fair inheritance from our worthy ancestors: They purchased them for us with toil and danger and expense of treasure and blood; and transmitted them to us with care and diligence. It will bring an everlasting mark of infamy on the present generation, enlightened as it is, if we should suffer them to be wrested from us by violence without a struggle; or be cheated out of them by the artifices of false and designing men.

Of the latter we are in most danger at present: Let us therefore be aware of it. Let us contemplate our forefathers and posterity; and resolve to maintain the rights bequeathed to us from the former, for the sake of the latter.

Instead of sitting down satisfied with the efforts we have already made, which is the wish of our enemies, the necessity of the times, more than ever, calls for our utmost circumspection, deliberation, fortitude and perseverance. Let us remember, that "if we suffer tamely a lawless attack upon our liberty, we encourage it, and involve others in our doom." It is a very serious consideration, which should deeply impress our minds, that millions yet unborn may be the miserable sharers in the event.

From his speech "American Independence," 1 August 1776:



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on September 28, 2020

We have explored the temple of royalty, and found that the idol we have bowed down to, has eyes which see not, ears that hear not our prayers, and a heart like the nether millstone. We have this day restored the Sovereign, to whom alone men ought to be obedient. He reigns in Heaven, and with a propitious eye beholds his subjects assuming that freedom of thought, and dignity of self-direction which He bestowed on them. From the rising to the setting sun, may His kingdom come.

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Ye darkeners of counsel, who would make the property, lives, and religion of millions, depend on the evasive interpretations of musty parchments: who would send us to antiquated charters, of uncertain and contradictory meaning, to prove that the present generation are not bound to be victims to cruel and unforgiving despotism, tell us whether our pious and generous ancestors bequeathed to us the miserable privilege of having the rewards of our honest industry, the fruits of those fields which they purchased and bled for, wrested from us at the will of men over whom we have no check?

And, finally, from that same speech, I close with what is perhaps the most famous and fearless statement ever made by Samuel Adams, one which we would do well to read and to heed:

If ye love wealth better than liberty, the tranquility of servitude than the animated contest of freedom — go home from us in peace. We ask not your counsels or arms. Crouch down and lick the hands which feed you. May your chains sit lightly upon you, and may posterity forget that you were our countrymen!

*Joe Wolverton II, J.D., is the author of the books *The Real James Madison* and “What Degree of Madness?": Madison’s Method to Make America STATES Again. His latest book — *The Founders’ Recipe* — provides selections from the 37 authors most often quoted by the Founding Generation. He hosts the YouTube channel “Teacher of Liberty” and the Instagram account of the same name.*



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