

SONS OF LIBERTY

Introduction

Sons of Liberty, a six-hour miniseries on HISTORY®, follows a defiant group of men including Sam Adams, John Adams, Paul Revere, John Hancock, Ben Franklin and Dr. Joseph Warren as they band together to help spark the American Revolution. This dramatic series powerfully depicts the slow evolution of grievances against the British crown in the 1760s which simmered into a full-scale rebellion by 1776. Rather than a comprehensive look at the dawning of the revolution, this series is an intimate take on a handful of men who dared to fight for independence and eventually forge a new nation.

Please note: *Sons of Liberty* is a dramatic interpretation of events that sparked a revolution. It is historical fiction, not a documentary. The goal of the miniseries is to capture the spirit of the time and convey the personalities of some of the key players and events that have shaped our past. Our hope is that this gripping and powerful form of storytelling will inspire people to learn more about all aspects of the American Revolution and the profound ways this era shaped the United States and the world.

Curriculum Links

Sons of Liberty connects with History, Politics, and Media courses. Due to some adult content we do not recommend this series for students under the age of 14. *Sons of Liberty* is rated TV-14 (V-S-L). The series is not intended to be an exhaustive look at the onset of American Revolution, but episodes and scenes can provide an opportunity to explore key characters, events, and issues at the core of the Revolutionary era. This guide gives educators and students related resources to explore this important time period.



Sons of Liberty: Episode 1: A Dangerous Game

Sons of Liberty opens in 1765 when new taxes on the American colonies enacted by the British government have started to stir major unrest among citizens. Cousins John and Sam Adams, and John Hancock, one of the richest men in Boston, are among those who become very concerned about the consequences of these policies. Anger among Bostonians reaches a breaking point. Governor Thomas Hutchinson's mansion is ransacked by angry citizens. Hancock is infuriated when his sloop *Liberty* is confiscated by officials. Bostonians are left in shock in February 1770 when a young boy named Christopher Seider is killed after a protest escalates into chaos. Weeks later, tensions explode, leading to a bloody confrontation later known as the Boston Massacre.

Discussion Questions

1. Why were Sam Adams and John Hancock frustrated with government policies in the mid-1760s? Why was John Adams nervous about the escalating protests in Boston?
2. The character Kelly tells a story in this episode about his family's loss of property. How do you think these changes in economic status affected colonists like Kelly?
3. What were some of the reasons tensions in Boston escalated between 1765 and 1770? By 1770, do you think anyone would have predicted that revolution was inevitable?

Terms to Define

Using a dictionary or an encyclopedia, students may want to define or explain the significance of the following terms from this program. Students can also keep their own list of terms to define as they watch.

Customs Duties

Prudent

Lucrative

Inevitable

Tory

Loyalist

Boycott

Further Connections

1. **Sons of Liberty.** This series introduces important patriots including Sam Adams, John Adams, Paul Revere, Benjamin Franklin, Dr. Joseph Warren, and George Washington and British leaders such as Lord North, Governor Thomas Hutchinson and General Thomas Gage. Learn more about these leaders at www.history.com/shows/sons-of-liberty/articles/historians-view or search their names at History.com or other sources. Students can write short essays or presentations about one of these important leaders and their roles in the American Revolution.
2. **The Stamp Act.** This episode opens in 1765, the year the Stamp Act was passed in the colonies, leading to enormous protest. But what did the Stamp Act actually say? Visit www.chnm.gmu.edu/7tah/unitdocs/unit11/lesson2/stampactexcerpt.pdf to view an excerpt from the Stamp Act and further explore this primary source.
3. **The Dawn of Revolution.** The Massachusetts Historical Society features an excellent online site with primary source documents related to many of the key events covered in *Sons of Liberty*. Visit www.masshist.org/revolution/index.html to view this interactive and learn more about these events through original sources. Students may be particularly interested in the story of Christopher Seider, the young boy who is noted as the first casualty of the Revolutionary era.



Just a few weeks after the Boston Massacre, Paul Revere created this engraving, which was based on a similar drawing by artist Henry Pelham.

Primary Source:

"The bloody massacre perpetrated in King Street Boston on March 5th 1770 by a party of the 29th Regt."

– Engraving by Paul Revere

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Digital ID: www.hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.01657

Visit www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661777/ to view a larger version of this image.



Revere's words beneath the graving read:

“

Unhappy BOSTON! see thy Sons deplore, Thy hallowe'd Walks besmear'd with guiltless Gore:
While faithless—and his savage Bands, With murd'rous Rancour stretch their bloody Hands; Like fierce
Barbarians grinning o'er their Prey, Approve the Carnage, and enjoy the Day.

If scalding drops from Rage from Anguish Wrung If speechless Sorrows lab' ring for a Tongue, Or if a
weeping World can ought appease The plaintive Ghosts of Victims such as these; The Patriot's copious
Tears for each are shed, A glorious Tribute which embalms the Dead.

But know, FATE summons to that awful Goal, Where JUSTICE strips the Murd'rer of his Soul: Should
venal C-ts the scandal of the Land, Snatch the relentless Villain from her Hand, Keen Execrations on this
Plate inscrib'd, Shall reach a JUDGE who never can be brib'd.

The unhappy Sufferers were Messs. SAM. L GRAY, SAM. L MAVERICK, JAM. S CALDWELL, CRISPUS
ATTUCKS & PAT. K CARR Killed. Six wounded two of them (CHRIST. R MONK & JOHN CLARK) Mortally

”

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the words on Revere's engraving? What is his main message?
2. Why do you think Revere created this engraving?

Find more resources about this engraving from the Gilder Lehrman Institute for American History at:

www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/road-revolution/resources/paul-revere%E2%80%99s-engraving-boston-massacre-1770

Sons of Liberty: Episode 2: The Uprising

Despite the concerns of John Hancock and others that protests in Boston were going too far, Sam Adams, Paul Revere, Dr. Joseph Warren and others continue to mobilize against the unfair policies of the British government. At the “Boston Tea Party” in December 1773, colonists risk their reputations and safety, destroying hundreds of crates of British tea in Boston Harbor to show their profound discontent. In response to this act of insubordination, the king escalates military presence. The Sons of Liberty know this means only one thing: they must unite the colonies against the British oppression. Representatives from the colonies meet at the First Continental Congress, including the military leader George Washington. Meanwhile, a silversmith named Paul Revere has joined the fight for liberty. The story of his courageous ride to Lexington to warn John Hancock and Sam Adams that British troops were coming to arrest them would make him a legend.

Terms to Define:

Insubordinate
Tyranny

Billet
Due Process

Oppression
Munitions

Activities

- 1. The Quartering Act.** The ramifications of the 1765 Quartering Act unfolded in the colonies for years after it was passed. Sam Adams wrote many powerful articles during the years leading up to revolution. Read his views on quartering here: www.press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendills2.html and write a short synopsis of what he says about the dangers of this policy.
- 2. Committees of Correspondence.** The First Continental Congress started in September 1774 in Philadelphia. But how did the colonies communicate? Read about the Committees of Correspondence on History.com to learn more: www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/committees-of-correspondence. Students can also do further research and write a short essay about communication during the onset of the revolution.
- 3. African Americans during the Revolutionary era.** In *Sons of Liberty* viewers learn about Crispus Attucks and Peter Salem, two African American soldiers who joined the patriot cause. Visit www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/volume5/images/reference_sheet.pdf to learn more about blacks during the Revolutionary era. Students interested in this topic can choose one African American soldier to research further.
- 4. Paul Revere's Ride.** *Sons of Liberty* portrays Paul Revere's dramatic ride to warn Sam Adams and John Hancock that authorities were coming to arrest them. Visit The Paul Revere House online at www.paulreverehouse.org/ride/virtual.html to view a map and virtual tour of the routes of Revere, William Dawes and Samuel Prescott on their Midnight Ride. You can also view Revere's first person account of his ride, recorded in a letter years later at www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=99.

Primary Source:

Right after the Boston Tea Party John Adams wrote to his friend James Warren, recording his view of the protest.

To James Warren

Boston Decr 17 1773

Dr Sir

The Dye is cast: The People have passed the River and cutt away the Bridge: last Night Three Cargoes of Tea, were emptied into the Harbour. This is the grandest, Event, which has ever yet happened Since, the Controversy, with Britain, opened!

The Sublimity of it, charms me!

For my own Part, I cannot express my own Sentiments of it, better than in the Words of Coll Doane to me, last Evening—Balch Should repeat them—The worst that can happen, I think, Says he in Consequence of it, will be that the Province must pay for it. Now, I think the Province, may pay for it, if it is burn'd as easily as if it is drank—and I think it is a matter of indifference whether it is drank or drowned. The Province must pay for it, in Either Case. But there is this Difference. I believe, it will take them 10 Years to get the Province to pay for it. If so, we shall Save 10 Years Interest of the Money. Whereas if it is drank it must be paid for immediately. Thus He—However, He agreed with me that the Province, would never pay for it. And also in this that the final Ruin, of our Constitution of Government, and of all American Liberties, would be the certain Consequence of Suffering it to be landed.

Governor Hutchinson and his Family and Friends will never have done, with their good services to Great Britain and the Colonies! But for him, this Tea might have been Saved to the East India Company. Whereas this Loss if the rest of the Colonies Should follow our Example, will in the opinion of many Persons bankrupt the Company. However, I dare Say, that the Governors, and Consignees, and Custom House Officers, in the other Colonies will have more Wisdom than ours have had, and take effectual Care that thier Tea shall be sent back to England untouched. If not it will as surely be destroyed there as it has been here.

Threats, Phantoms, Bugbears, by the million, will be invented and propagated among the People upon this occasion. Individuals will be threatened with Suits and Prosecutions. Armies and Navies will be talked of—military Execution—Charters annull'd—Treason—Tryals in England and all that—But—these Terrors, are all but Imaginations. Yet if they should become Realities they had better be Suffered, than the great Principle, of Parliamentary Taxation given up. The Town of Boston, was never more Still and calm of a Saturday night than it was last Night. All Things were conducted with great order, Decency and perfect Submission to Government. No Doubt, we all thought the Administration in better Hands, than it had been.

Please to make Mrs Adams's most respectfull Compliments to Mrs Warren and mine.

I am your Friend,

John Adams

Discussion Questions

1. Based on this letter, do you think John Adams approved of the Boston Tea Party? Why or why not?
2. What does Adams think the consequences of the Tea Party might be?

Sons of Liberty: Episode 3: Independence

As the rebels face off against the Redcoats at Lexington and Concord in April and Bunker Hill in June 1775, war is starting to seem like the only viable path to liberty. The British lock down the city and prepare for all-out war. What started as a series of protests in Boston is evolving into a revolution against British power. Key leaders of the rebellion travel to Philadelphia for the Second Continental Congress, hoping to convince the rest of the colonies that the time is now to rally for independence. George Washington is made head of the Continental Army while British General Gage sends for additional warships and troops. For Sam Adams and the rest of the Sons of Liberty, it is now or never. The fate of the country comes down to one final vote during the summer of 1776. It is a vote that changes everything: a vote for independence.

Terms to Define:

Treason

Alleviate

Colonist

Militia

Stalemate

Trepidation

Additional Activities

1. **Join or Die.** In *Sons of Liberty* viewers see a flag bearing the powerful message “Join or Die.” What is the history of this imagery? Visit www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/volume5/november06/primsources.cfm to learn about the original image believed to be the work of Ben Franklin, and also to view a version of the image used during the onset of the revolution.
2. **Infographic.** View an infographic about the *Sons of Liberty* at History.com: www.history.com/shows/sons-of-liberty/infographics/sons-of-liberty Create your own infographic or visual documenting any aspect of the American Revolution.
3. **Declaring Independence.**
Sons of Liberty culminates with the signing of the Declaration of Independence during the summer of 1776. Visit the Library of Congress to view Thomas Jefferson’s original “rough draught” of the Declaration as well as the final version. www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/declaration/preparation.html



Primary Source : Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams

Throughout their lives, Abigail and John Adams exchanged hundreds of letters. In this letter written on June 18, 1775, Abigail Adams discusses the death of Dr. Joseph Warren and the battle of Bunker Hill.

Dearest Friend

Sunday June 18 1775

The Day; perhaps the decisive Day is come on which the fate of America depends. my bursting Heart must find vent at my pen. I have just heard that our dear Friend Dr. Warren is no more but fell gloriously fighting for his Country-saying better to die honourably in the field than ignominiously hang upon the Gallows. great is our Loss. He has distinguished himself in every engagement, by his courage and fortitude, by animating the Soldiers & leading them on by his own example -- a particular account of these dreadful, but I hope Glorious Days will be transmitted you, no doubt in the exactest manner.

The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong -- but the God of Israel is he that giveth strength & power unto his people. Trust in him at all times ye people pour out your hearts before him. God is a refuge for us. --Charlstown is laid in ashes. The Battle began upon our intrenchments upon Bunkers Hill, a Saturday morning about 3 oclock & has not ceased yet & tis now 3 o'clock Sabbath afternoon.

Tis expected they will come out over the Neck to night, & a dreadful Battle must ensue Almighty God cover the heads of our Country men, & be a shield to our Dear Friends. how [many ha]ve fallen we know not-the constant roar of the cannon is so [distre]ssing that we can not Eat Drink or Sleep -- may we be supported and sustaind in the dreadful conflict. I shall tarry here till tis thou[ght] unsafe by my Friends, & then I have secured myself a retreat at your Brothers who has kindly offerd me part of his house. I cannot compose myself to write any further at present -- I will add more as I hear further—

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 18 - 20 June 1775 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society.
www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/popup?id=L17750618aa&page=L17750618aa_1

Discussion Questions

1. How does Abigail Adams describe Dr. Joseph Warren in her letter?
2. How does she describe what life was like in Boston after the Battle of Bunker Hill?
3. Based on her letter, how would you describe her feelings about the onset of the war?

Additional Resources

Watch short videos and learn more about *Sons of Liberty* and the era of the American Revolution:
www.history.com/shows/sons-of-liberty/articles/historians-view

Timeline from the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History:
www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/american-revolution-1763-1783

Independence Hall National Historical Park:
www.nps.gov/inde/index.htm

Museum of the American Revolution:
amrevmuseum.org/

Maps from Archiving Early America:
www.earlyamerica.com/maps/

A Few Suggested Readings

Bailyn, Bernard. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. (Belknap Press, 1993).

Berkin, Carol. *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence*. (Vintage, 2006).

Gross, Robert. *The Minutemen and Their World*. (Hill and Wang; 25th Anniversary Edition. April 30, 2001).

Morgan, Edmond S. and Helen M. *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution*. (University of North Carolina Press, 1953).

Nash, Gary. *The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolution* (Harvard Univeristy Press, 2006).

Wood, Gordon. *Radicalism of the American Revolution*. (Vintage, 1993).