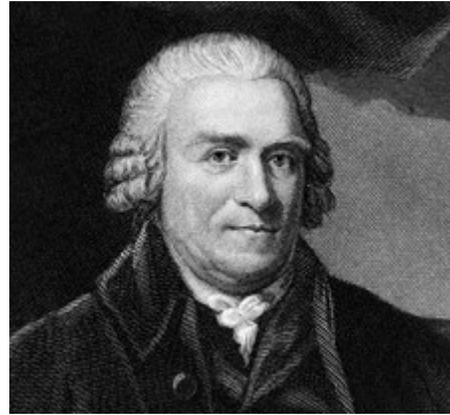


Circular Letter of Samuel Adams

This letter, in response to the Townshend Acts, was drafted by Samuel Adams and sent by the Massachusetts House of Representatives to the other colonies' legislative bodies.

A speaker at a meeting the night of the Boston Tea Party, he later helped form the Committees of Correspondence that coordinated American protests. Later, he was also part of the Massachusetts Compromise in the ratification of the Constitution.



Province of Massachusetts Bay, February 11, 1768.

[H]is Majesty's high court of Parliament is the supreme legislative power over the whole empire; that in all free states the constitution is fixed, and as the supreme legislative derives its power and authority from the constitution, it cannot overleap the bounds of it, without destroying its own foundation; that the constitution ascertains and limits both sovereignty and allegiance, and, therefore, his Majesty's American subjects, who acknowledge themselves bound by the ties of allegiance, have an equitable claim to the full enjoyment of the fundamental rules of the British constitution; that it is an essential, unalterable right, in nature, engrafted into the British constitution, as a fundamental law, and ever held sacred and irrevocable by the subjects within the realm, that what a man has honestly acquired is absolutely his own, which he may freely give, but cannot be taken from him without his consent....

This House [the Massachusetts House of Representatives] further are of opinion, that their constituents, considering their local circumstances, cannot, by any possibility, be represented in the Parliament; and that it will forever be impracticable, that they should be equally represented there, and consequently, not at all; being separated by an ocean of a thousand leagues. That his Majesty's royal predecessors, for this reason, were graciously pleased to form a subordinate legislature here, that their subjects might enjoy the unalienable right of a representation....

[It is] also submitted to consideration, whether any people can be said to enjoy any degree of freedom, if the Crown, in addition to its undoubted authority of constituting a Governor, should appoint him such a stipend as it may judge proper, without the consent of the people, and at their expense; and whether, while the judges of the land, and other civil officers, hold not their commissions during good behaviour, their having salaries appointed for them by the Crown, independent of the people, hath not a tendency to subvert the principles of equity, and endanger the happiness and security of the subject....