Truly the Man of the Revolution:

A Study in the Historical Treatment of Samuel Adams

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History 400

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Introduction

John Adams once stated of his cousin, "Samuel Adams' [character] will never be accurately known to posterity as it was never sufficiently known to its own age."[1] John Adams could not have been more right. Even while Adams was alive there were varying perceptions about him. Key figures of Adams' time often disagreed over who Adams was in the same way that historians do now. Thomas Jefferson claimed that Samuel Adams was "truly the man of the Revolution,"[2] whereas Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson viewed Adams as his arch-nemesis who was responsible for the burning of his house. Since these initial disagreements over Adams' heroism, historians have continued the debate on into present day. The topic of Samuel Adams and his effect on the American Revolution has been well discussed by historians. To some he is violent, a radical agitator of the Revolution. To others he is a propagandist who cherished liberty but sought alternative means to violence. Then there are those historians who see Adams' supposed violence and radicalism as positive attributes and paint him as the ultimate patriot.

The portrayals of Adams differ wildly, often according to the historian's own view of the American Revolution. Because Adams' philosophy on the Revolution was always evolving, it is not difficult to find a Samuel Adams to fit whatever interpretation of the Revolution that one wants. Many historians use Adams to examine the Revolution and they accordingly impose their interpretations of the Revolution onto Adams. The corresponding interpretations of Adams and the Revolution form into three main schools

[1] Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, in the Jefferson-Adams Letters (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 54.
[2] John C. Miller, *Sam Adams: Pioneer in Propaganda* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1936), 343.

of thought: the Anti-Radicals, the Conservatives and the Radicals. The Anti-Radicals and the Radicals both believe that the Samuel Adams and the Revolution were radical. However, Radicals would argue that this was negative and the Anti-Radicals would argue it as positive. The Conservatives disagree with both camps completely and claim that both Adams and the Revolution were positively conservative. The three schools all use Adams as a way to express their interpretations of the Revolution and to express their value judgements of it in a historical context.

The Anti-Radicals

Hillar B. Zobel is an excellent example of a historian who uses Samuel Adams to show the Revolution to be negatively radical. In his book, *The Boston Massacre*, Zobel claims that the Massacre achieved a mythical status among the revolutionaries and even in modern day studies because of propaganda perpetuated by Samuel Adams. The Boston Massacre was the confrontation between British soldiers and Boston citizens on March 5th, 1770. The soldiers were part of the standing army posted in Boston to maintain order. The army had the opposite affect, instead provoking the Bostonians and becoming the object of their wrath, especially for Adams. The Massacre began when Boston citizens, led by Crispus Attucks, threw snowball and chunks of ice at the soldiers. They crowded the British soldiers and the soldiers retaliated by firing into the crowd. Four Bostonians, including Crispus Attucks, were killed. Zobel argued that Samuel Adams was the primary reason the Boston Massacre occurred. Zobel believed that Adams incited riots and other violent protests, as well as manipulated the Boston Mob, in order to manufacture a

conflict with the British soldiers. When Zobel comments on Adams's attempts to rouse Bostonians to action against the British, he notes that "Adams…was too skilful a mover of men to rely entirely on civilian antipathy to the military."[3] Inherent in this claim is the idea that Adams was able to control the population, a claim that most Adams historians make.

Furthermore, Zobel later makes the argument that the Massacre was not all it's hyped up to be and Adams is to blame. Essentially, Zobel's thesis is that the Boston Massacre is more myth than reality and this is because of radicals like Samuel Adams and their malicious propaganda. This claim is due in part to Zobel's background which makes him come down decidedly on the side of British rule. Zobel was both a lawyer and a judge in Massachusetts Superior Court, which gives him a strong respect for authority and written law. He was also a law professor at Boston College.[4] Given Zobel's background, it is not surprising that he writes his book from a legal standpoint. For example, when discussing the trials of the soldiers after the Massacre, Zobel cannot help but to editorialize about the legal decisions made: "Underlying both cases was the legal principle that, once the fact of killing had been proved, the killer bore the burden of convincing the jury that the homicide was legally justified."[5] Both his argument that the Boston Massacre was a myth created by radicals and his claim that the Massacre was inevitable stem from his legal training. He often attempts through to use the law to explain his argument: "His perception of Adams also grows out of his perceptions about

[3] Hillar B. Zobel, *The Boston Massacre* (New York: Norton, 1970), 145.
[4] Jesse Lemisch, "Radical Plot in Boston (1770): A Study in the Use of Evidence," *Harvard Law Review* 84, no. 2 (1970): 503.
[5] Zobel, 242.

authority and lawfulness. Throughout the book, it is evident that Zobel is deeply concerned with the need for obedience of authority in a society. Early on, he claims that "Resistance to authority pervaded the spirit of the times."[6] He will go on to show how this was a negative thing. He understands, if not approves, of the British decision to "draw from the colonies financial sustenance for Britain's still-active European war," calling it "commonsense".[7] Furthermore, Zobel centers much of his book on the Boston Mob, which he describes as "frequently intoxicated"[8] and "husky, willing, bully-boys".[9] For Zobel, he interprets the riots of the Boston Mob as "almost a ritual".[10]

Zobel's faith in authority and lawmakers can be seen through his selection of evidence. If Adams' story can be told by either Jefferson or Hutchinson, Zobel would come down firmly in the Hutchinson camp. He privileges evidence by Hutchinson, Governor Bernard, General Gage and John Adams. All men were, at the very least, arguing in defense of the British soldiers during the Massacre. Zobel makes heavy use of British evidence; he is much lighter on the rebel side. According to Jesse Lemisch's review of Zobel's book, "[Lieutenant Governor] Hutchinson speaks to us almost ten times as frequently as does Sam Adams, Governor Bernard, *who left Boston for England…fully seven months before the Massacre*, nonetheless outranks Adams by four to one."[11] For the most part, Lemisch's assessment of Zobel's work is thorough and well-argued and this section is one of Lemisch's best. Zobel's use of evidence is

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[6] Zobel, *The Boston Massacre*, 48-9.
[7] Ibid., 12.
[8] Ibid., 28.
[9] Ibid., 27.
[10] Ibid., 26.
[11] Lemisch, "Radical Plot in Boston (1770): A Study in the Use of Evidence," 501.

obviously in favour of British authority, which puts Samuel Adams at a noticeable disadvantage in Zobel's work. To deal with the problem of who is to blame for the events of the Massacre, Zobel turns to Samuel Adams. He portrays Adams as the leader and manipulator of the rebels involved in the conflict. Zobel calls Adams a "demagogic genius"[12] who "brewed aversion and bitterness".[13] In a further attempt to portray Adams in as a puppeteer seeking independence, he claims that Adams was the leader of the Loyal Nine, an incorrect allegation that conservative historian Pauline Maier questions.

However, Zobel has difficulty making his case about Adams' skills as an agitator. Zobel ends up using Adams' absence from the tumultuous events preceding the Revolution to indicate his guilt. To begin with, Zobel claims that "Sam Adams, by his very inaction, unmistakably conveyed the threat of violence."[14] Zobel goes on to state that Adams was "the real strength of the [Boston] committee" and he "was still so much behind the scenes that he had yet to be elected to a major office."[15] The evidence that Adams did not hold any office does not give any indication that Adams was instead working behind the scenes, but Zobel nonetheless draws this conclusion. Zobel's theory ends up being that Adams created the circumstances that caused the Massacre because he wanted to use the soldiers' violence as propaganda against the British and incite Revolution. He says that Adams did this by "staging"[16] riots, meetings and mass funerals which made "more of the…corpses than ever they could have been in life."[17] Zobel

[12] Zobel, *The Boston Massacre*, 78.
[13] Ibid., 146.
[14] Ibid., 214.
[15] Ibid., 18
[16] Ibid., 26.
[17] Ibid., 100.

attempts to show that Adams was willing to use any venue, even funerals, to push the people towards mutiny. This is not necessarily a new idea but it contains a new level of vehemence against Adams.

The over-arching thesis of Zobel's book is that the Revolution, viewed through the microcosm of the Boston Massacre, was an unlawful, radical, and possibly unnecessary war. If this were actually true, then Zobel's perception of Adams begins to make sense. Zobel wants to make the argument that the Revolution was negatively radical and that all those involved were simply lawless dissenters with too much influence. In this context, Adams takes on a whole new character. If Zobel was right and Adams was pulling the strings to make the Boston Massacre happen, then Adams is symbol for everything that was wrong with the Revolution. In Zobel's argument, Adam was a radical thinker, had no regard for authority and was far too powerful for the colonists' own good. If Adams had actually been able to exert enough influence over the Bostonians to make them rise up as a mob against the British soldiers, then Adams wouldn't be far off from being able to make all thirteen colonies rise up against Britain itself. Zobel's argument is thus an excellent example of how historians use Adams to suit what they believe to be true about the Revolution. Zobel thinks that the Revolution was negative, so he portrays Adams negatively. *The Boston Massacre* is an extreme instance of the pattern of historians' work on Adams since most of his argument against Adams is unfounded. His charge of propaganda is justified and easy to prove but for the most part Zobel relies on shadows and whispers to prove Adams guilt of being a violent manipulator.

A more persuasively presented example of how historians use the changes in Adams philosophy to fit their interpretations is John C. Miller's *Sam Adams: Pioneer in Propaganda*. His work makes a similar argument to Zobel, but he uses much more convincing evidence. Like Zobel, Miller seems to be particularly sympathetic to Britain's position. Both through implication and direct argument, Miller seems to believe that the British were legitimate victims in the Revolution. To begin with, he argues, "Because…the British Empire was on the verge of destruction, Adams believed he had little to fear from a government that was busy with both hands in keeping itself afloat."[18] Miller implies that Adams and the revolutionaries were preying on a weak Britain because the Empire was on the verge of destruction. It makes it seem as though the colonists were plotting revolution long before it actually happened; they were just waiting for their cue to strike. Miller also makes disparaging remarks about the Founding Fathers, making the reader think he finds the Revolution regretful. For example, Miller argues that,

> Because Sam Adams and other leaders of the American Revolution have handed down to posterity self-portraits in which they exhibit themselves as patient, peace-loving men driven to rebellion by intolerable British tyranny, the fact that they themselves made repeated aggressions upon the British government and did much to precipitate the Revolution is often overlooked.[19]

Miller appears disdainful of the Revolutionaries' motives. In addition, he undercuts the idea that the Revolutionaries only turned to violence as a last resort. Instead, he claims that the Founding Fathers were the antagonists in the Anglo-American conflict. To fortify his argument for the British, and thus against the colonists, Miller

[18] Miller, *Sam Adams: Pioneer in Propaganda*, 146.
[19] Ibid., 276.

asserts that when the British soldiers arrived in Boston "Hutchinson and his friends slept for the first time in years without dread of being turned out by a mob."[20] This claim exaggerates the mob activities of Bostonians. Miller gives the impression that mob attacks on households were frequent and Tories had to be ever vigilant. However, mob activities were relatively rare. In order to prove his point about the problems with the Revolution, Miller uses Adams. By portraying Samuel Adams as a radical and negative character, Miller is arguing that the Revolution was both radical and negative.

Miller's main case against Samuel Adams was that he was a puppeteer over Boston. To support this, he claims that the Boston Tea Party was a great triumph "which, by precipitating the American Revolution, deserves to rank as the masterpiece of Sam Adams's efforts to create an unbridgeable gap between Great Britain and her American provinces."[21] By claiming that the Boston Tea Party was Adams's "masterpiece", he is almost attributing the Revolution to Adams alone. This gross exaggeration of Adams's role in such a relatively radical event is symptomatic of Miller's view of the Revolution. By portraying Boston as a mindless mob controlled by one man, Miller is assuming that the Revolution was merely an unintelligent population blindly following a select elite group of Founding Fathers. This view of the Revolution seeks to show it as a negative thing, wrought from vanity and corruption.

Miller displays this vanity when he claims that "many colonies hoped to distinguish themselves in the struggle against British 'tyranny' by putting forward the most radical political doctrines or making the most violent resistance."[22] This is a loaded

[20] Ibid., 170.
[21] Ibid., 276.
[22] Ibid.

statement for Miller. To begin with, he claims that the colonies were willing to revolt in order to distinguish themselves, making hubris the origin of the Revolution. Additionally, he puts forth the assertion that there was no British tyranny; by his use of quotes around the word, Miller is showing his disbelief in the concept. He does not want this opinion of Britain's tyranny to be mistaken for his own. This is how he refers to tyranny through the entirety of the book. Finally, this statement also makes the claim that colonists were putting forth insurgent doctrines or resisting violently; which is essentially Miller's argument about the radicalism of the Revolution.

To emphasis the extremism of the Revolution, he portrays Samuel Adams as a fanatical person. He says that "by nature, Adams was passionate, excitable, and violent, but he rarely allowed these qualities to appear in public."[23] Miller at once makes the argument that Adams was violent and that he was also manipulative. Miller continues to make claims about Adams's extremist character throughout the book. He later states that "The crisis of 1768 caused him to throw off the 'serpentine cunning' which Tories dreaded more than the fire-eating of other patriot leaders, and to make a rash appeal to arms."[24] Miller is attempting to show that Adams was a dreaded and fearsome enemy of the Tories, thus implying that he was drastically violent. By using the phrase "serpentine cunning", Miller is claiming that Adams was snakelike in his manipulating of the Bostonians. Additionally, he argues that Adams wasn't always rational and occasionally made rash decisions. He alleges that Adams was making a call to arms as early as 1768, much earlier than conservative historians would place it. Indeed, it is much earlier than

[23] Ibid., 144.
[24] Ibid.

many of Adams's own writing would suggest. Even as late at 1776, Adams was writing to friends saying things like "Nothing can ruin us but our Violence."[25] This is an indication that Adams was hesitant about using violence much later than 1768.

Miller also suggests that Adams was a propagandist and a manipulator when he claims that Adams often fabricated stories about the British soldiers and "it was by such means that Adams brought the people to approve his schemes and pulled the wires that set the Boston town meeting in motion against royal government in Massachusetts."[26] This claim is a fair representation of Miller's approach to Samuel Adams overall. He implies that Adams was a propagandist, an agitator, a manipulator and a puppeteer of Boston politics. He specifically uses the phrase "pulled the wires" to give the reader the image of a figure looming over Boston, controlling all the events inside it (and out). To give his readers an example of Adams's power he claims that, "The Boston selectmen…took orders from Sam Adams" showing Adams to be a kind of commander in chief.[27] He also asserts, "Rather than provide barracks for the soldiers, Adams was resolved to let them freeze in their encampment on the Boston Common."[28] To shore up his argument that Adams was the one "pulling the wires" he claims that it was Adams who decided that Bostonians would not show the soldiers any hospitality and that all the townspeople heeded his decision.

Miller's argument has numerous flaws. To begin with, there are large gaps in his footnotes meaning that there are plenty of claims that are not backed up with a note about

[25]Adams to Benjamin Kent, Philadelphia, July 27, 1776 in Cushing, III, 289-90.
[26] Miller, *Sam Adams: Pioneer in Propaganda*, 152.
[27] Ibid., 154.
[28] Ibid., 166.

evidence. He will make reference to several obscure facts or Adams's quotes but their source appears nowhere in the footnotes. For instance, when Miller says "Adams rallied his followers reminding them of the sufferings their ancestors had undergone to establish liberty in the New World."[29] It is as though the reader is simply expected to trust Miller. Additionally, his arguments are contradicted by numerous historians who came after. Miller's analysis of Adams differs from Zobel's in that he uses actual primary source evidence to back his argument that Adams was a rabble-rouser, although he doesn't use Adams's own writings all that often. For instance when he claims, "The morning after the Liberty Riot, Adams was seen in the South End of Boston 'trembling and in great agitation' while he harangued a crowd of listeners to make a bold attack upon the royal government", he does not quote Samuel Adams; he quotes James Otis.[30]

A further problem for Miller is susceptibility to Maier, whose own argument often directly contradicts his. For example, Miller says, "[Adams's] career in Congress was marred by factiousness, intrigue, and broils; and, unlike Jefferson and John Adams, he failed to reveal traits of statesmanship."[31] Maier, however, argues that Adams's career in Congress was problematic because he was a man of another generation and he was too stuck in the past to be of real influence in post-Revolutionary politics. In contrast, Miller claims that Adams's career was difficult because of his own shortcomings. Maier's arguments often clash with Miller's ideas of Samuel Adams. Maier sees things much

[29] Ibid., 86.
[30] Ibid., 144.
[31] Ibid., 344.

differently than Miller; she believes that both Adams and the Revolution were positive and conservative. [32]

The Conservatives

Pauline Maier's "Coming to Terms with Samuel Adams" is a good representative of the conservative school of thought on Samuel Adams. Maier is a strong advocate that the Revolution was a positive event in American history and that Samuel Adams was an important, and conservative, influence on it. She often makes statements that directly contradict Zobel and Miller's point of view about the British. For instance, she states that "The colonists' demand that they be taxed only be their own representatives, even their resistance to the Stamp Act, seemed to [Adams] in perfect accord with British tradition." [33] This statement is in direct opposition to Zobel's argument that Adams and the revolutionaries were subverting British authority. Maier argues that they were actually only following precedent, at least in their minds.

She also attempts to rationalize Adams's conversion to independence by showing him to be conservative and traditional in his thought process. She says, "The arrival of British troops in Boston in the fall of 1768 was of particular importance; Adams was always a bitter foe of standing armies, when used against civilians in times of peace. He, like other Englishmen, considered it a major sign impending tyranny."[34] Maier does

[32] Ralph Volney Harlow, with his 1923 work, *Samuel Adams, Promoter of the American Revolution: A Study in Psychology and Politics*, in another Anti-Radical historian when he asserts that Adams was irrational, possibly even psychotic. He also has a negative view towards the American Revolution and he sees Adams as a negative radical.
[33] Pauline Maier, "Coming to Terms with Samuel Adams," *The American Historical Review* 81, no.1 (1976): 19.
[34] Ibid.

several important things in this statement. Rather than calling him a colonist, Maier identifies Adams as an Englishman, making his claims against governmental abuse seem more legitimate since he was a citizen under the government he was criticizing. She also aligns him with other Englishmen, rationalizing his dislike of standing armies by saying that any English citizen would be offended. Finally, Maier validates Adams, and the Revolution, by implying that England was becoming tyrannical. Furthermore, in contrast to Zobel, Maier attempts to show Adams's respect for authority. "Adams's disillusionment did not yet extend beyond the Parliament and ministry to the king or nation," she notes.[35] Maier depicts Adams as reluctant to go against the king, who is the ultimate British authority figure. This flies in the face of Zobel's argument.

Also, since Adams is Maier's chosen representative of the Revolution, she is making an argument that the king misrepresented himself and his government to the colonists. The revolutionaries, Maier argues, were reluctant to go to war with Britain; therefore, Britain must have left them no choice. One of Maier's most carefully developed arguments is that of the colonists' attempts to solve things peacefully. She states, "In effect, all peaceful means of preventing payment of the tea duty, and accepting all it implied, had been exhausted. Only then was destruction of property justified."[36] This is a foreshadowing of the rest of the Revolution in Maier's interpretation. She believes that the colonies tried all the peaceful measures they could before resorting to open rebellion and war. This is the crux of her conservative Revolution theory: violence was a last resort for the colonies.

[35] Ibid., 21.
[36] Ibid., 25.

In order to prove her point about a conservative Revolution, Maier must show her representative, Samuel Adams, to be conservative. Therefore, she spends a great deal of energy trying to prove that, while he was important to the American cause, he was not an instigator. For instance, she says that Adams was "A friend, if not a member, of the Loyal Nine, a club that became Boston's Sons of Liberty in the Stamp Act Crisis."[37] Maier is claiming that Adams was not an actual member of the Loyal Nine, meaning that while he was sympathetic to the movement he was not an active agitator at that point in time. This is a lead in to her argument that Adams was a fairly conservative revolutionary. She begins by claiming that Adams is an extremely important person for Revolutionary history: "Both in guiding Massachusetts through the decade before independence and in forging a durable intercolonial union, his importance was of the first rank."[38] However, while Maier attempts to claim that Adams was vital to the Revolution, she claims that this importance was in non-radical ways. She uses his exclusion from the Founding Fathers title to point out his non-radical nature. She says that because "he belonged to another era, continuing to wear the tricorn hat of Revolutionary days" he was "excluded from the Pantheon of Revolutionary leaders around which Americans were asked to rally in the early nineteenth century."[39] She makes an argument that Samuel Adams was excluded from the Founding Fathers pantheon primarily because he was too stuck in the pre-Revolutionary, conservative past.

Of course, Maier is not happy that Adams has been left out and shows this through her discussion of John Adams. "John Adams noted this neglect with

[37] Ibid., 12.
[38] Ibid., 13.
[39] Ibid., 14.

disapproval," Maier writes. "'If the American Revolution is a blessing, and not a curse,' he wrote in 1819, 'the name and character ought to be preserved.'"[40] Maier's use of this quote is telling since it contributes to another prong of her argument, which is that the Revolution was a positive event and Adams was an influential force on it. She further addresses the issue of Adams's exclusion from the Pantheon when she says,

> John [Adams] himself was taking on an issue that had only recently taken on importance: was or was not, Samuel Adams a suitable national hero? To a large extent that problem remains central in writings about him, and so historians have had to consider not only the human reality of their subject, but also his appropriateness as a model for modern Americans.[41]

Through this, Maier is making a judgement about other historians by implying that they consider who is a good role model when writing history. Furthermore, she claims that some historians do not see Adams as a relatable national hero in the same ways as John Adams or George Washington. She speculates about why historians tend to portray Adams negatively, and concludes that they don't see him as a model American in the modern context. But Maier will go on to make the argument that he is actually a very good model.

Another tack that Maier takes is that Adams was not really all that important to the British, so he could not be as radical as Zobel or Miller claim. She says that "Royal officials and loyalist writers had long ascribed the revolutionary movement to a faction of disaffected colonists, but Samuel Adams was only one of several Americans they cited for seditious activities."[42] Her argument is that Adams is important to the movement but she also tries to downplay his disobedience towards authority, thus downplaying his

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 14-5.
[42] Ibid., 15.

radicalism. By emphasizing that Adams was not the ringleader for "disaffected colonists" she shows that he was not necessarily the most radical of his contemporaries. Maier also disparages "The notion that Adams somehow 'manufactured' the Revolution by manipulating people."[43] In Maier's view, Adams was an active participant, and an important one at that, but he was not radical nor a manipulator.

Maier attempts to define Adams's role in the Revolution in more positive terms. She suggests that "Biographers agree that Samuel Adams took those steps [towards deciding upon independence] earlier than others."[44] Maier says that most think that he took the position of independence somewhere between 1765 and 1768. Maier goes on to contradict this, saying, "Nothing in Adams's writings before, during, or immediately after the Stamp Act crisis (1765-66) suggests a desire for independence."[45] This argument directly contradicts radical historian Mark Puls's statement that Adams began working for independence a decade before Lexington in 1775. To counter-act the early advocacy of independence argument, Maier makes the evidence-based and more accurate statement that "Adams's own writings suggest that his thinking on independence evolved more gradually and can best be described as occurring in three stages:…disavowal, to prediction or warning, to advocacy of American independence"[46]. Here, Maier is suggesting that Adams was not a radical revolutionary but rather one who carefully and thoughtfully arrived at the decision to advocate independence. A radical revolutionary

[43] Ibid., 16.
[44] Ibid., 19.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

seeks change quickly and violently. Maier shows Adams as conservative by emphasizing how slow he was to reach his conclusion about independence.

Furthermore, Maier claims that Adams was, in fact, wary of independence. This fortifies her argument about his conservatism by saying that he was cautious about changing governments. Through her language, Maier implies that Adams was almost forced into independence by the intensity of the events surrounding him. For example, she writes, "Under the force of these unfolding events, Adams moved toward predicting independence, warning that it was an increasingly possible outcome of the Anglo-American conflict."[47] She says that Adams predicted the Revolution, which undercuts the idea that he was an agitator, at least at this point in time. "Prediction, therefore, fell short of advocacy. Always Adam's forecasts of independence were contingent"[48]. Her statement that independence was "contingent" meant that Adams would only consider independence if Britain's tyrannical behaviour continued, which shows his conservatism.

Since Maier claims that Adams was conservative and did not want independence in 1765 or 1768, she comes to the conclusion that he decided upon independence "in November 1775, well after the war had begun."[49] This part of her argument is where Maier is most conservative. He wasn't even sure if independence was desirable until after Lexington so he certainly couldn't be the master manipulator behind Boston's participation in the war. Maier continues to strengthen her argument against her fellow historians by asserting that "The biographers' second argument, that Samuel Adams

[47] Ibid., 20.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 22.

manipulated colonies into independence, depends upon their assumption that he was long dedicated to separation from Britain. Adams could not consciously manoeuvre the population toward a goal he did not yet espouse."[50] By proving that Adams had not wanted independence early, she felt she had proved his non-radicalism.

Despite having proved her point, Maier had to deal with modern history's version of Samuel Adams. In order to shows the arbitrariness of the Founding Fathers Pantheon she describes an incendiary letter that John Adams wrote to a friend about independence and contrasting it to Samuel Adams's relatively conservative attitude towards a break with Britain. She then remarks, "Yet posterity remembers John Adams as conservative, dignified…in part, no doubt, because he had never been accused of effecting his anti-British feelings by pulling down the standing order."[51] Here Maier really shows that she is a student of conservative historian Bernard Bailyn's, who argued that the Revolution was absolutely not radical. She believes that Samuel Adams is accused of being a radical because he helped disturb the standing order of the time. Both Maier and Bailyn see the Revolution as relatively conservative and Maier believes Adams to be conservative also.

Historians believe he was radical because so many writings point to him as the instigator of change. Historians like Zobel are uncomfortable with change, seeing it as a subversion of authority. To counter this, Maier argues that, while Adams wanted change, it wasn't a radical, new world, kind of change he sought – at least, not at first. Considering Maier wrote her article after Zobel published his book, her argument

[50] Ibid, 23.
[51] Ibid.

occasionally seems designed to contradict Zobel. She insists that "Violence was not his cause. Samuel Adams was above all a master politician, organizer and coordinator who believed in constitutional government."[52] Zobel's idea of Adams is as an instigator, whereas Maier sees him as a cautious politician. By saying that Adams believed in constitutional government, she completely undermines Zobel's argument that Adams was attempting to subvert authority. [53]

The Radicals

The Anti-Radicals and the Conservatives do not have a monopoly on Adams theories, however. There is also the Radicals, who sit somewhere between Anti-Radical and Conservative. Like the Anti-Radicals, they claim both that the Revolution and Samuel Adams were radical. However, they also believe, like the Conservatives do, that the Revolution and Adams were positive forces in American history. Mark Puls in his book, *Samuel Adams: Father of the American Revolution*, illustrates the Radical standpoint well. To begin with, Puls attempts to interpret history from the colonists' point of view. He claims that, during the Boston Occupation before the Massacre, "the British soldiers- many young, bored, lonely, homesick and frustrated with inactivity in a remote post- were often unruly, and insulting toward residents."[54]

[52] Ibid., 25.
[53] John K. Alexander and his book, *Samuel Adams: America's Revolutionary Politician,* published in 2002 is a Conservative. He emphasizes Adams's legitimacy and conservativism by showing the legal venues that Adams used to express his opinions. Alexander's perception of Adams as conservative reflects his belief that the Revolution was legitimate and non-radical.
[54] Mark Puls, *Samuel Adams: Father of the American Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006), 99.

Puls's take on the British, specifically in the Boston Massacre, is the exact opposite of Zobel. He often obviously takes the colonists' side against the British, making the British soldiers seem antagonizing towards Bostonians. To begin with, he claims that the soldiers were prohibited from firing at the crowd, which demonstrates how the British soldiers went against orders. He goes on to say that "a group of agitators challenged them to shoot, knowing they were prohibited from doing so without orders from civil authorities."[55] He then points out that the soldiers shot at the crowd three times: "The soldiers fired on the crowd. A second and then a third discharge of arms followed." [56] This point makes the soldiers appear to be trigger-happy, putting the blame on them instead of the colonists.

Puls continues to write from the colonists' perspective when he discusses British authority. He notes, "[Lieutenant Governor] Oliver, Hutchinson's brother-in-law, proposed creating a colonial aristocracy that would pack the council with appointed loyalists and offset the power of the democratic assembly, the lower house of the legislature."[57] Puls's remarks about Hutchinson and Oliver tend to make the British government in the colonies appear to be corrupt. By giving this impression, Puls can discredit Hutchinson. Furthermore, Puls attempts to display Adams's perception of Hutchinson's corruption. "Adams, who did not accept Hutchinson's justification, saw great leeway for abuse if the governor could write off every decision as 'his majesty's pleasure.'"[58] Puls is clear in his derision towards Hutchinson.

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[55] Ibid., 102.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 137.
[58] Ibid., 108.

He gives no evidence that Adams was wary of Hutchinson's corruption, although he probably was, which makes the reader think that this is Puls speaking through Adams. "He questioned why the soldiers went to the scene with armed muskets…Or why their guns were loaded to fire if they lacked the requisite order from civil magistrates and never sought one. Most of all, he questioned why they fired on an unarmed populace."[59] Puls makes note of the multiple problems with the British soldiers' defence by stating that Adams questioned it. He is essentially drawing attention to the illegitimacy of the British soldiers' actions. Also, he implies that Adams was involved with the trials, thus underlining his importance. Basically, he is showing his readers that the British were the wrong side of the American Revolution.

Like Maier, in order to prove that the Revolution was a positive thing, Puls must prove that Adams was a positive, rather than menacing, influence on the Revolution. However, unlike Maier, he believes Adams to be radical and thus emphasizes his alleged early acceptance of independence. He alleges that "By the time the American Revolution began with the shots at Lexington in 1775, Samuel Adams had already spent a decade working to convince colonists young and old alike that independence could only be secured with a break from England."[60] Puls's assertion is not really correct considering that Adams wrote "So sensible are they [the House] of their happiness and safety, in their union with, and dependence upon, the mother country, that they would by no means be

[59] Ibid., 109.
[60] Ibid., 13.

inclined to accept of an independency, if offered to them"[61] in 1768; it is clear that Adams was not advocating independence in 1765, as Puls claims.[62]

However, despite its inaccuracy, he uses the familiar Anti-Radical argument to his advantage. Puls emphasizes how Adams was at the center of the build-up to Revolution. He says, "When in 1768 the British sent a battleship and regiments to Boston in response to Adams' strategies of civil disobedience, he shed any remaining doubts over his course of action and pledged within himself to precipitate a revolution."[63] However, Puls does not cite any evidence. He has no letters, articles, or diary entries. It is as though Puls is implying he has a direct connection with Adams's mind. This statement also implies that the British sent the military directly because of Adams, portraying Adams as invaluable to the American cause. Also, the phrasing he uses shows that Puls believes Adams to have been the catalyst for Revolution.

Puls believes that Adams was extremely problematic for the British and their supporters. In direct contrast to Maier, he states, "Hutchinson was concerned that opening the assembly on schedule in January 1770 would give Adams the opportunity to round up legislative support to have the troops removed from the city."[64] However, Maier claims that Hutchinson only noticed Adams after 1773 and only as "a particularly influential member of a political faction,"[65] rather than a man capable of rousing the colonies to revolution. Additionally, Puls claims that Adams is not only a problem for Hutchinson. He asserts that "When news of the withdrawal reached London, the name

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[61] Adams in Assembly letter to the Marquis of Rockingham, January 22, 1768, in Cushing, 1: 169.
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[63] Puls, *Samuel Adams: Father of the American Revolution*, 14.
[64] Ibid., 101.
[65] Ibid., 37.

that ministers whispered in hushed tones of exasperation was 'Samuel Adams,'" giving Adams a lot of importance in the eyes of the British.[66] However, Puls does not provide his readers with evidence of the British blaming Adams for anything. While Hutchinson did write about Adams, there's nothing to support Puls' claim that the British saw him as a threat to the Empire. Maier disagrees with Puls' assessment since she claims that Adams was barely on Hutchinson's register. Interestingly, Puls never explicitly denies that Adams was involved with the Boston Massacre, probably because that claim would make his point that Adams was a key leader in the Revolution and radical in his means. Instead, Puls makes note of Adams's outrage at the British soldiers and his attempts to rile the Bostonians up.

Puls's argument relies heavily on the idea that Adams was the principal decision maker for the Revolution. He implies that Adams was able to predict the conflict ahead and he steered the colonists in that direction. "Yet Adams believed colonists needed to continue their opposition to British authority…His fears were not unfounded."[67] Puls's argument is similar to Miller's in regards to when Adams decided independence was necessary. Both claim that Adams sought independence early on before all the other revolutionary leaders. This helps their arguments by showing that Adams was a vital part of the Revolution and that he was the first radical. Puls claims that Adams knowingly decided to use propaganda to make the colonists fearful of Britain when He states that "[Adams] would need to launch a one-man media blitz to convince readers that Britain continued to pose a threat and that ultimately their safety rested in an independent

[66] Ibid., 105.
[67] Ibid., 113

America."[68] Puls even goes so far as to credit Adams with developing an American national identity, by writing his articles and creating a clear sense of a shared enemy among the colonists. He then gives Samuel Adams' single-handed credit for sparking the Revolutionary spirit in Bostonians by claiming, "Nothing in the past year –event or crisis—could account for the mood shift except Samuel Adams' stream of published articles."[69]

Puls portrays Adams as a master manipulator when he describes Adams' plan to spark the fire of revolution in the colonists. He describes Adams deliberately drafting a letter requesting that the House reconvene as scheduled on December 2nd. Hutchinson replied that the decision to reconvene the Assembly was the king's and the town meeting could have no influence. Puls states that "Adams must have smiled when he read Hutchinson's reply", implying that Hutchinson had played right in to Adams's hands. According to Puls, "Hutchinson was, in effect, proclaiming that the king turned a deaf ear to his subjects in Massachusetts."[70] In Puls's assessment, Adams had orchestrated this to show the people that Revolution was necessary. "Samuel Adams felt it was time to make a call for America to unite…He sat down in his second-floor study and began to consider what steps the colonies should take."[71] He portrays Adams as being the decision-maker of the Revolution; Puls is claiming that Adams was the first to decide that a united America was necessary and to attempt to implement that. Within the same paragraph, he also claims that the Continental Congress was Adams's brainchild.

[68] Ibid., 114
[69] Ibid., 130
[70] Ibid., 127
[71] Ibid., 139

Puls agrees with Miller and Maier by saying that, though Adams was important in his own time, he was neglected by future generations. "While Adams was hailed as the 'Father of the American Revolution' in his own time, his role in the birth of the nation has been overshadowed by founders who went on to become U.S. Presidents or by men who rose to prominence during the inaugural federal government."[72] Puls agrees with Maier that this was a tragic misstep by modern historians since he believes Adams to have been simply overlooked rather than unworthy of significant post-Revolution politics. Of course, Adams did win the governorship of Massachusetts but Puls believes that Adams deserved more. In the same manner as Maier, Puls attempts to grapple with why Adams has come to be in a lowly position in the annals of American history. Puls claims, "Adams' reputation has suffered from several Revolution-era propaganda pieces that have been erroneously attributed to him."[73] Part of Puls's argument is that Adams's interpretation by historians is due to misunderstanding. He argues that historians are ignorant of Adams's true actions and thus mistakenly label him. This may be true in the case of Zobel. In the end, Puls is left to conclude that it is only because historians ignore the evidence and rely on hearsay that they find Adams to be a greedy and manipulative puppeteer. To Puls, Adams is just as radical as the Revolution and just as right. [74]

Conclusion

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[72] Ibid., 14.
[73] Ibid., 15.
[74] Cass Canfield could be called a Radical with his work, *Samuel Adams's Revolution*, published in 1976. Canfield begins his book with a direct statement about Adams being a law-abiding, incorruptible radical. He also goes on to claim without Adams there would have been no revolution. Canfield has apositive view of the Revolution, where he describes independence as freedom from Britain's despotic rule.

Considering the volume of Anti-Radical, Radical and Conservative work done on Samuel Adams, it is surprising that it seems as if no one has come up with an alternate interpretation. Considering Adams's mercurial historical character, it is possible to come up with any number of fresh ideas. For example, a historian could try to argue that the Revolution and Adams were negatively conservative. Or one could assert that the Revolution was not, but should have been, radical and that Adams was a positively radical force on. It seems this argument would paint Adams in an even better light than the Anti-Radical argument. With all these myriad ways to find a new take on Adams, it is astounding that most historians seem to fall neatly in to one of the three existing camps. Even more astounding, however, is how easy it would be to fit Adams into any given interpretation. His ever-changing ideology provides rich source material for whatever case about the Revolution a historian wants to make.

On the whole, historians tend to use Samuel Adams as their lens through which to view the Revolution, which results in them casting their interpretations of the Revolution onto Adams. Because Adams was such a complex individual, he easily fits any interpretation. Before reaching the conclusion of independence, Adams had to move through distinct phases, as Maier posits. At first, he did not want separation at all. Then he began to doubt the British government but he believed the King to be ignorant. Finally he came to believe that even the King was involved in, or at least indifferent to, the abuse of the colonies and that was when he chose to advocate independence. Because he went through so many stages, from conservative to radical, almost any argument about his nature can be made. Adams, however, never thought of himself as violent. As late as

1779, Adams stated in a letter to John Adams, "While I am in this world, I am resolved that no Vexation shall put me out of Temper if I can possibly command myself. Even old age . . . shall not prevail to make me peevish".[75] Adams's interpretation of himself is probably closest to the Conservative camp. The fact that historians can see him as radical and violent has more to do with the historian's view of the world than Adams's. It is easy to find anti-radical, conservative and radical interpretations for Adams. What is important is that historians seem incapable of separating him from his role in the creation myth of the American Revolution. Because he was so influential, he is inexorably tied up with the meaning of the Revolution and that is why historians use him to express their perception of the Revolution.

[75] 13. Adams to John Adams, March 9, 1779, in Cushing, vol. 4, 131-32.

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