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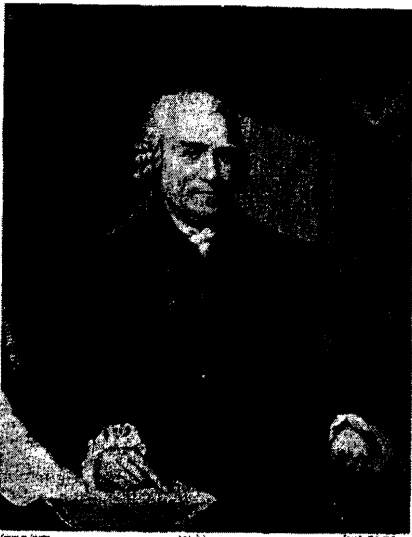
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Bachelor of Arts

*Reputation in Revolutionary America: A Case Study of Samuel Adams
and Thomas Hutchinson*

*Beth Anderson
History Honors Thesis, Spring 2007*



Sam^d Adams



Tho^s. Hutchinson

In July 1774, having left British America after serving terms as Lieutenant-Governor and Governor of Massachusetts, Thomas Hutchinson met with King George III. During the conversation they discussed the treatment Hutchinson received in America:

K. – In such abuse, M^r H., as you met with, I suppose there must have been personal malevolence as well as party rage?

H. – It has been my good fortune, Sir, to escape any charge against me in my private character. The attacks have been upon my publick conduct, and for such things as my duty to your Majesty required me to do, and which you have been pleased to approve of. I don't know that any of my enemies have complained of a personal injury.

K. – I see they threatened to pitch and feather you.

H. – Tarr & feather, may it please your Majesty; but I don't remember that ever I was threatened with it.¹

In this conversation, Hutchinson is attempting to salvage in King George III's eyes the reputation he had already lost in America by telling a slanted story. Although the attacks he suffered in Massachusetts were based mainly on differences in events, Hutchinson tries to cover them up to save his image in Great Britain rather than admitting to the behavior of his opposition, particularly Boston patriot Samuel Adams.

Political reputation was an important concept in eighteenth-century British North America, and Thomas Hutchinson's experience in Massachusetts showed how attacking public actions was enough to ruin someone's political life. As historian Joanne Freeman points out in *Affairs of Honor*, mere words could tarnish a person's reputation and career irreparably. However, all the attacks centered on Hutchinson's behavior as a public figure, and as he claimed, did not question his personal or moral character. Hutchinson

¹ Peter Orlando Hutchinson, ed., *The Diary and Letters of His Excellency Thomas Hutchinson, Esq.*, Vol. I. (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1883), 164-167.

seemed to be downplaying the abuse he incurred, for the language Adams used in reference to him did attack him quite directly, from his adherence to British policy to the ambition that Adams felt accompanied this loyalty.. This shows the power of public criticism to damage someone's reputation. Freeman discusses honor in early America in *Affairs of Honor*, arguing how vital "personal honor" was to gentlemen of the era because "reputation was at the heart of this personal form of politics."² Gentlemen were expected to have qualities such as stoicism and integrity, and reputation included traits like rank, fame, credit, character, name, and honor. These qualities were so important that to discredit a man's reputation even verbally could undermine his entire public image. So called "fighting words" could even go so far as to prompt a duel. Freeman argues that "words could stab at a man's character and destroy his influence."³ Therefore, politics played out in words, spoken and written, in speeches and newspapers. She argues that gaining political power meant keeping one's own reputation as intact as possible while attacking the name of others.

The era of tensions between Britain and the colonies leading up to the American Revolution has been well documented and researched by historians such as Freeman. Scholars have taken many different angles. For example, Bernard Bailyn wrote from an intellectual viewpoint in *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, whereas T.H. Breen related events by looking at economics in *The Marketplace of Revolution: How*

² Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xvi.

³ *Ibid.*, xxi.

Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence.⁴ The British view saw the colonies as subservient and merely useful, while the colonial view regarded the British government as interfering with their rights. My thesis will contribute to this field in several ways. First of all, it takes a personal angle but approaches the time period in a different way than a pure biography because I look at both Samuel Adams and Thomas Hutchinson and their interactions as a microcosm of the effects one political figure can have on the reputation of another. However, I also do not disregard the larger picture because I look at these two men as representative of the opposing viewpoints they embraced. No historian has directly addressed these two men specifically. Most scholars either focus on one person or many in a broader analysis. I believe that my thesis will be unique in addressing primarily two actors in the events as well as because of the specific people I have chosen to study. A study of these particular men is beneficial because of the roles they played in Massachusetts in the 1760s-1770s. Thomas Hutchinson's ancestors were long-time residents of New England, and he became influential in Massachusetts as the Lieutenant-Governor and then Governor. Samuel Adams also came from a long-standing family of New England, but his political activity primarily centered on promoting anti-British sentiment in Massachusetts. And Massachusetts was the center of political radicalism in 1765-1775: war broke out there in 1775, and Sam Adams joined his cousin and Boston's leading politician, John Adams, in pushing for Independence in 1776.

⁴ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

In this thesis, I also aim to explore how the process of public criticism occurred, the impact such criticism had on men's reputations, and how leaders used words to organize opposition. This focus on reputation forms an integral part of my paper and will make a valuable contribution to the historiography of the period. Adams and other Patriot leaders successfully employed the tactic of censuring men such as Hutchinson before focusing their ire at the king to gain public support. Therefore, an investigation of this topic is an important part of understanding the pre-revolutionary period.

This paper will show how Adams made Hutchinson a scapegoat for the increasing British tyranny that he perceived. I combine the idea of the importance of reputation with an analysis of several events in the lives of Adams and Hutchinson. These events include the Stamp Act, the increase of troops in Boston, Hutchinson's crown pension, the location of the General Court, the Boston Tea Party and letters Hutchinson wrote to Thomas Whately. Throughout this sequence, Hutchinson became more involved in carrying out British policies, and Adams wrote more vehemently about his actions. By doing this, over the years 1765-1775 Adams was able to discredit Hutchinson and ruin his political reputation.

Even before the Stamp Act, Sam Adams and his contemporary James Otis, a Boston lawyer who played a leadership role in city politics in the 1760s, were concerned about how much power Thomas Hutchinson was accumulating in the government. However, from the beginning the antagonism ran both ways. As one of Hutchinson's biographers explained, "Thomas Hutchinson made it abundantly clear that he stood for everything that Sam Adams opposed: the rule of a few, well-born gentlemen over the lower classes; the suppression of colonial radicalism; the placing of loyalty to Crown and

Empire above local patriotism; and the existence of a privileged aristocracy barred tightly against Sam Adams and his kind.”⁵ Fixed attitudes such as these allowed for little compromise and laid the foundation for an extraordinary conflict. Personality, situations, and politics would determine the outcome.

After the period of “Salutary Neglect” ended with the Proclamation of 1763 and the end of the French and Indian War, the British government became ever more involved in regulating the North American colonies. One of the earliest taxes, the Stamp Act, agitated colonists because the British government implemented it to raise revenue rather than solely to stabilize the economy. Early in the year 1765, Parliament decided to pass the act, which would go into effect November first of the same year. The tax would require a special stamp to be placed on all paper products, such as newspapers, legal documents, playing cards, and pamphlets. Therefore, unlike previous taxes, it impacted all people rather than simply merchants and related professions. The Stamp Act crisis laid the ground for the beginnings of colonial unity, fostered the discussion of virtual and actual representation, and provoked a debate around the question of who would enforce the act for the British.⁶

In instructions to the representatives of the Boston General Court in September 1765, Samuel Adams asserted that the Stamp Act would set an ominous precedent of taxation without consent; thus, it was the representatives’ duty to declare their opposition openly but respectfully.⁷ This and other writings, public and private, clearly reveal

⁵ John C. Miller, *Sam Adams: Pioneer in Propaganda* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1936), 26-27.

⁶ Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995 reprint).

⁷ Instructions to the Town of Boston to its Representatives in the General Court. *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, Harry Cushing, ed. (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968), vol. 1: 7-12.

Adams' distaste for the Stamp Act as well as for its broader violation of rights and principles many of the British colonists deeply valued. Adams' writing repeatedly shows his conviction that the Stamp Act, and in fact all Parliamentary taxation, was illegitimate because it stripped away the rights of the colonists as British citizens. The fundamental right to representation arose from the natural right that a man could not have his property taken from him without his consent. Adams, along with many of his contemporaries, expressed the opinion in mid-1765 that the English theory of virtual representation was no representation at all because the men in Parliament were simply too far away to understand colonial concerns. He even went so far as to opine that the Stamp Act "annihilates" this right, conveying his strong feeling on the subject.⁸ He also argued that the tax was unfair because it was intended to pay for the debt from the French and Indian War, and he considered the amount imposed on the colonies to be over-proportioned. Adams also invoked an argument against the tax using the colonial charters, which had established governments founded in compact with the king and gave locals the right to legislate and levy taxes in their own government. The Stamp Act negated this charter by infringing on these two powers and leaving the North Americans "not upon the footing of subjects."⁹ According to Adams, then, the Act violated many important ideals.

Adams claimed that if the colonists did not protest the Stamp Act, their acquiescence would set a precedent of tolerating taxation without consent. The Massachusetts House, of which Adams was a member, perceived the act to be unjust particularly because of their lack of representation in the body that passed it. The House

⁸ Samuel Adams to Dennys de Berdt, 20 December 1765, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 1: 65.

⁹ Samuel Adams to Reverend G__W__, 11 November 1765, *The Writings of Samuel Adams* 1: 30.

also claimed to have too high a view of justice to seek redress unconstitutionally and disapproved of reported violence. Adams did describe some of the disturbances in Boston, such as stigmatizing collectors, burning effigies, persuading Andrew Oliver to resign, and attacking and looting houses of royal officials, including Thomas Hutchinson. Adams did not publicly take credit for these actions and averred that they were only used after many legitimate petitions had been ignored, but his involvement in the extralegal activities of the Sons of Liberty shows that he was willing to resort to other means.

Like many others, Adams emphasized the loyalty of the colonists as British citizens. He insisted on his affinity for the mother country because of the great liberty conferred by the British system. When Parliament repealed the Stamp Tax, he praised King George, for now protecting the well-being of his subjects. Adams was not considering independence in 1765 but was angry and frustrated with the way the British government was treating his people, the citizens of Massachusetts. He felt that they deserved all the inherent rights of British citizens, which the Stamp Act had severely impeded. At this time, respect for the king remained almost untouchable, and independence was not yet a consideration yet. Though the latter would change drastically over the coming years, the former would remain strong until 1776. Even as Adams maligned Hutchinson's reputation, he spoke of the king with respect, considering him the rightful ruler of Britain and her colonies, making an interesting juxtaposition.

For Thomas Hutchinson, then the Lieutenant-Governor of Massachusetts, the Stamp Act Crisis began a long road of the patriots targeting him as a hated symbol of British tyranny. Although Hutchinson actively opposed the act and made his opinion known to the British government, he was still lumped into the category of those opposed

to the recognition of colonial rights and liberties by Samuel Adams and others of his ilk.¹⁰ Samuel Adams and James Otis spread the rumor that Hutchinson had been involved in the planning and execution of the Stamp Act even as that story turned out to be untrue. Once word arrived that the Stamp Act had passed, the colonial leadership conveniently ignored Hutchinson's position and viewed him and his fellow British officials with loathing. Even then Hutchinson retained his composure and principles and rallied for the act's repeal. However, though Hutchinson supported the same viewpoint that the colonists did, he did so for different reasons. The colonists complained that they were being unfairly taxed, while Hutchinson upheld Parliamentary supremacy and maintained that the people in British North America were among the most free in the world.¹¹ He also opposed the claim that dependence on the overseas central government was commensurate with that government being arbitrary.

Hutchinson's firm belief in the unquestionable justice of British authority and the colonies' beneficial and invaluable relationship with the mother country underlay the main source of conflict between him and the Massachusetts colonists led by Sam Adams. Between 1763 and 1775, increasing numbers of colonists saw continual violations of their perceived rights, but Hutchinson remained loyal to his duties to the crown and assiduously followed the orders given him. This increased patriot contempt toward him because his actions represented the power of the crown visible to them in the colonies.

Patriot leaders defined Hutchinson as the "other," and they targeted him in newspapers and with ritualized violence. For example, colonists destroyed the houses

¹⁰ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 36.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

Andrew Oliver, another official, and Hutchinson, and they only received compensation later. In these attacks we can see the beginnings of colonial unity. Everyone felt the effects of the Stamp Act, and everyone could see and read about the attacks on the “outsiders.”

The Stamp Act became a model of how the British government would interact with the colonies as well as how Adams and Hutchinson would interact. The colonials such as Sam Adams clearly showed their disdain for the actions of Parliament and with those charged with executing them. Adams directed his anger more at the act itself than at Hutchinson at this early date, writing that “nothing could have given greater Disgust than the Stamp Act.”¹² However, the attack on Hutchinson’s house clearly linked him to the perceived horrors of the Act. Therefore, this exchange between British officials and colonists and the targeting of Hutchinson set the tone for later debates.

A second major point of contention that emerged in the mid-1760s centered on the aftermath of the French and Indian War. And again in this instance—in Adams’ view—Hutchison symbolized imperial corruption. Britain began sending troops to the colonies to regulate and protect the new land they had acquired after the French and Indian War. Beginning in 1768, the colonists were required to pay for the troops’ expense of coming to and residing in British North America. The Massachusetts governor at the time, Governor Bernard, insisted on the quartering of troops in the homes of the Massachusetts residents against the wishes of his council. Just as he had asserted the impropriety of the Stamp Act, Adams wrote in a public article at the end of the year

¹² Samuel Adams to G__ W__, 13 November 1765, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 1: 35.

that troops sent to the colonies and quartered during peacetime violated British law and rights.¹³

Over the next year, the British ministry sent more and more troops to the colonies. On March 5, 1770, a crowd composed mostly of merchants and artisans began taunting the soldiers in front of the Customs House, and after hearing someone yell “Fire!” the soldiers fired on the crowd, killing five people, including Crispus Attucks. The incident, sensationalized by a drawing by Paul Revere, intensified anti-troop and anti-British sentiment. Even though the incident had not been a “massacre,” that became the common name for it, and British troops were vilified. In August 1770, the Massachusetts House wrote a response to Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson that listed infringements on the colony’s charter, which included the troops sent from the mother country and the resulting “Boston Massacre.” However, this complaint did not seem to have much effect on the British leadership. In a letter to Benjamin Franklin, Adams claimed that Hutchinson had said that he had “authority over the King’s troops in that province” and that he (Hutchinson) had asked the troops to go to Castle Island after the Boston Massacre.¹⁴ This shows that Hutchinson took the command he had been given and extended it. In contrast to his attitude toward the Stamp Act, Hutchinson actually supported the British policy on troops and used his appointment to carry it out and concurrently increased his own power. Therefore the censure he received due to this action was more justified in Adams’ eyes. Whereas before he was just carrying out policies because it was his duty, by advocating the troops and sending them to Castle

¹³ Article signed “Vindex,” 5 December 1768, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 1: 57.

¹⁴ Samuel Adams to Benjamin Franklin, 6 November 1770, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 45-56.

Island, he now actually expanded on the power he had received. This changing behavior greatly worried the colonial radicals because of spreading theories of increasing power and tyranny of the British government.

As Massachusetts debated the troops' actions, Adams continued to malign Hutchinson's reputation. The Massachusetts House told Hutchinson that he had surrendered Castle-William to the British and reflexively paid a "sacred regard to instructions." They also reiterated that the Lieutenant-Governor did not have authority over British troops in Boston.¹⁵ Adams personally felt that Hutchinson had betrayed them because he was a Massachusetts native who had received honors from other citizens and claimed strong ties to the "native Country & the most tender feeling for its Rights." Comparing him to Caesar, Adams went on the same letter to point out that though Caesar refused the crown thrice, Hutchinson was "every day panting after & without the Possession of which his Ambition & Lust of Power will perpetually torment him."¹⁶ Finally, Adams accused Hutchinson of making "his incessant Claim as *Lord of the Soil*."¹⁷ These letters contain extremely strong language that attacked Hutchinson's reputation because he saw Hutchinson usurping colonial rights out of duty to the Crown while also pursuing personal aggrandizement. Adams objected because he thought that Hutchinson should display the disinterestedness of a dutiful gentlemen rather than a power-hungry tyrant. This opinion from Adams would only continue as more issues arose.

¹⁵ Article signed "A Chatterer," 3 December 1770, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 71-72.

¹⁶ Samuel Adams to Stephen Sayre, 23 November 1770, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 67.

¹⁷ Samuel Adams to John Wilkes, 28 December 1770, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 101.

A third matter that Adams used to criticize the operations of the government dealt with the movement of the Massachusetts Court to Cambridge from Boston, where it had long met. This move occurred in 1770, and Samuel Adams' personal and public correspondence reflected rancor toward the relocation. The House maintained that the people had more right to resolve a dispute between the Governor and the House than did King George. The reasoning followed both that the king was less proximal to the actual situation than the people and also, since the Assembly was the people's branch of the government, they should be the ones to settle issues involving it. In a letter to Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson, Adams wrote on behalf of the House "But your House must be very sensible that the Illegality of holding the Court in any other place besides the Town of Boston is far from being the only Dispute between your Honor & this House: we contend, that the People & their Representatives have a Right to withstand the abusive Exercise of a legal & constitutional Prerogative of the Crown." One of the main concerns that the House offered about this move was that Hutchinson failed to show any evidence that the Cambridge General Court provided any more benefit the colony. Furthermore, the move appeared to be part of a design to change the government without the people's consent or start an arbitrary one. Their justification for their concern was that they believed that the Massachusetts House had the same rights in Massachusetts as the House of Commons in England, and they wanted the court to return to Boston¹⁸

A year later in 1771, after Hutchinson had become Governor and the Assembly still was meeting in Cambridge, Adams published an article stating that Hutchinson had claimed that he was "restrained from holding the court in its ancient[sic], usual and most

¹⁸ House to the Lieutenant-Governor of Massachusetts, 3 August 1770, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 20-31.

convenient place without his Majesty's express leave." But Adams insisted that the movement to Cambridge "was consider'd as a GRIEVANCE by the people *in general* in the province."¹⁹ Adams and his allies in the House wrote to Governor Hutchinson in April that since there was not much business, it would have been better if the session had been called to an end rather than lingering, and they also hoped that he would not repeat the "Indignity & a Grievance so flagrant" as not moving back to Boston.²⁰ A list of violations of rights written in late 1772 included the instructions to the Governor to move the Court to Cambridge.²¹

During this time of strong opposition on the part of Samuel Adams, one of the main complaints lodged against Hutchinson was that though he had been bred in the colonies, he betrayed them by siding with the British. Adams wrote that they had the "most *sanguine* expectations as being *born* and *educated* among us, and who we are told accepted the government with *great reluctance*."²² Because Adams and others had assumed this, they were shocked by Hutchinson's assiduous completion of British policies. Hutchinson continued to defend his actions through 1772, when he gave a speech arguing that Massachusetts had not been given permission by King George to move the Court back to Boston. However, the House thought that the Governor rather than the King had the right to convene the General Assembly and expressed their strong

¹⁹ Article signed "Candidus," 10 June 1771, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 172-174.

²⁰ House to the Governor of Massachusetts, 24 April 1771, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 169.

²¹ A List of Violations of Rights, 20 November 1772. *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 365.

²² Article signed "Candidus," 10 June 1771, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 174.

desire to return to Boston, which Adams referred to as the “centre of American politicks.”²³

Adams blasted Hutchinson’s administration for being “disgustful and odious” and later compared him to the hard-hearted Pharaoh, saying that “We are in a State of perfect Despotism.”²⁴ By the time Adams wrote these things, the combination of Hutchinson’s actions and Adams’ persuasive interpretation of these actions had made Hutchinson *persona non grata* in Massachusetts.

The struggle over the definition of the relationship between Britain and her American colonies and the assaults on Thomas Hutchinson as a symbol of English corruption began in 1767-68 when discussion began in Britain about giving the Governor and other crown officials in British North America pensions paid by the crown. This raised complaints in the colonies, particularly apparent in Adams’ writing after Hutchinson became governor in 1771. The ideological basis of these complaints raised about the crown pensions was that the financial independence of these officials from the representative government would lead to tyranny. In 1768, the Massachusetts House wrote letters that expressed concern about the legality of the pensions. They worried about the actual amount to be paid and insisted that the British Crown should not be allowed to change the method of payment for colonial judges without that body’s consent. This created a vicious circle because the colonists objected that the taxation was not only unfair but also being used to strip power away from them because they no longer paid the Governor’s salary.

²³ Article signed “Vindex,” 20 April, 1772, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 330.

²⁴ Article signed “Candidus,” 19 August 1771, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 199; Samuel Adams to Arthur Lee, 27 September 1771, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 231-233.

At this early date, these concerns melded with various other issues and had not really come to a critical point yet. Colonial discussion on the topic of crown pensions remained on a low level for three years after the initial dialogue. However, once Hutchinson was appointed Governor in 1771 following the departure of Governor Bernard, Adams and the Massachusetts Assembly seized on the topic. Early in 1771, Adams noted Hutchinson's gubernatorial appointment and called his future Governor Crown salary "perfect Despotism."²⁵ These strong words formed only the beginning of a spout of writings that would intensify in the coming years.

The shift from a salary paid by the Assembly to one paid by the Crown represented a loss on the check on Governor Hutchinson's power, which concerned the House members greatly. They claimed this represented the plot to annihilate liberty in the American colonies. In a personal letter to Arthur Lee, Adams wrote, "It seems then that we are in effect to be under the absolute Govern^t of one Man – ostensibly[sic] the Governor of the province but in Reality some other person residing in Great Britain, whose Instructions the Gov^r must punctually observe upon pain of forfeiting his place."²⁶ Here Hutchinson became the scapegoat for colonial troubles, a recurrent theme of Adams' correspondence. Even though Hutchinson had not requested the method of payment, Adams and others still very much blamed him for it.

As with other measures of the British government, Hutchinson served as the implementer rather than the initiator, but Adams criticized him rather than the king or the other leading figures in the mother country for several reasons. First, Hutchinson was a

²⁵ Samuel Adams to Stephen Sayre, 12 January 1771, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 134-135.

²⁶ Samuel Adams to Arthur Lee, 19 April 1771, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 166-7.

visible target, whose actions everyone in the colony of Massachusetts could observe. Also, the respect continually showed to the king called for criticism to be directed elsewhere. Finally, the colonists felt betrayed by Hutchinson because he carried out British policies despite being a native North American and being “born and educated among us.”²⁷ Adams repeated this phrase throughout his correspondence, displaying how appalling it was for the colonists to see one of their own turn on them.

The ominous plan that Adams and other colonists accused some of Great Britain’s leaders of formulating involved the governor becoming independent of colonial checks on power and then the military being used as tools to subvert liberty. Thus, they saw the Crown pensions as a first step in this process culminating in tyranny. As this line of thinking became more lucid, Adams wrote about and propagated it more and more often. By mid-1771, he commented that every day Massachusetts citizens were seeing the effects of arbitrary government in the form of an independent governor.²⁸ This association of Hutchinson with an imperial plot was a clever method with which to sway the general public into distrusting Hutchinson. The year 1772 brought about the most intense criticism in Adams’ writing for Hutchinson’s crown pension. He considered Hutchinson to be self-serving and oblivious to the needs of the people. The issue also became linked to the ever-present issue of tyranny due to the colonists’ lack of representation in Parliament. The Committees of Correspondence that Adams founded in 1772 also aided this spread of ideas by allowing the colonial leaders to stay abreast of

²⁷ Article signed “Candidus,” 10 June 1771, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 174.

²⁸ Samuel Adams Arthur Lee, 31 July 1771, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 190.

events in other colonies and led to increased unity in the face of perceptions of this increasing tyranny.

Adams seized on Hutchinson's home as a symbol of his complicity in the plot to deny British Americans their rights. Adams and the House wrote to Governor Hutchinson in July 1772 that although the Province House was to be the Governor's residence when they, the General Assembly, paid him, they did not think the General Assembly should now have to pay for the Province House since they at the time did not pay the Governor's salary.²⁹ They did not begrudge paying for him to live in the town, since that would be in the best interest of everyone involved. However, they did not feel that they could do this while the king paid his salary instead of them. This issue once again shifted the focus from the decision makers in London to Hutchinson, nearby in Boston. His was the house in contention and his was the salary, the privilege of paying taken from the House. Paralleling the more generalized argument that the British government could not take an individual's personal property without his being represented in the taxing body, the House felt that they should not be required to provide benefits to Hutchinson, the representative of the British government. Adams depicted Hutchinson as representing all the tyrannical tendencies of the British government, reaping rewards for carrying out their corrupt policies. These charges only intensified negative public perceptions of Hutchinson's character.

Adams persistently used language to degrade Hutchinson's reputation during the pension issue. A 1772 article by Adams in the *Boston Gazette* stated, "Is it not enough, to have Governor, an avowed Advocate for ministerial Measures, and a most assiduous

²⁹ To the Governor of Massachusetts, 14 July, 1772, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 331-332.

Instrument in carrying them on...totally independent of the people over whom he is commissioned to govern, and yet absolutely dependent upon the Crown...paid out of a Revenue establish'd by those who have no authority to establish it.”³⁰ As if this article did not clearly express Adams’ feelings, in a personal letter to Andrew Elton Wells, he succinctly clarified why the pensions troubled him and others like him. He claimed that it seemed to be the “determination of the ministry to enslave the Colonies, and the Governors are to be the Instruments.”³¹ These harsh words both described the depth of feeling Adams had for the issue as well as his skill in persuasive writing.

The extension of Crown salaries to Superior Court Judges in November of that year heightened fears over the next few months. However, the tone of the attacks did not change and if anything only intensified. For example, Adams derided Hutchinson as the “first American *Pensioner*,” paid with extorted money.³² A further argument, which recurred in several places, concerned Hutchinson’s nativity to North America. Adams complained that though British secretary Lord Hillsborough was departing, there were “others on this Side of the Atlantick who have been more assiduous in plotting the Ruin of our Liberties than even he, and they are more infamous, because the Country they would enslave, is that very Country in which...they were born & educated.”³³ The fact that Hutchison, unlike the British-born Lord Hillsborough, was one of their own gave the colonists a deeper sense of betrayal and helps explain why Adams took such a harsh, unrelenting stand against him.

³⁰ Article signed “Valerius Poplicola,” 5 October 1772, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 335.

³¹ Samuel Adams to Andrew Elton Wells, 21 October 1772, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 338.

³² Article signed “Candidus,” 12 April 1773, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 29.

³³ Samuel Adams to Arthur Lee, 3 November 1772, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 343.

Although an imperial policy, Adams and his supporters blamed the salary changes on the colonial officials, in particular their deficient character. Adams wrote in an article in the *Boston Gazette* that some crown officials had convinced citizens that they were “incapable of abusing the high trust reposed in them” and their order always come from the King when in fact they acted in their own interest.³⁴ Here, as in all of Adams’ writings, blame was placed in other places than the king. Though George III gave the orders, he was not condemned in the same way the local officials were.

Even though this seems illogical, blaming the locals rather than King George made sense as a line of thinking and as a tactic to Adams and the men who supported him for several reasons. Despite their aversion to the measures Britain implemented, the British Americans had been trained their entire lives by parents and culture to respect the king, both his position and person. Thus, they could not suddenly disrespect him. Adams, and men like him, also wrote respectfully about the king because their audience was not likely to accept condemnation of King George. Therefore, criticizing from the lower levels of government and moving up over time provided a better propaganda strategy. This relates to another reason for the hesitation to condemn the king, which was that he physically lived much further away from the colonists. This made his actions seem more remote and less connected to his person, while Hutchinson’s were evident to all and easily attributed to him even if he did not originate them. The pension issue provided an example of this line of thinking and the process of expressing and publicizing antagonism.

³⁴ Article Signed “A Chatterer,” 20 August 1770. *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 2: 40-43.

The final, definitive assault on Hutchinson's reputation and the end of his political career in Massachusetts came in 1773-74. The first event involved Hutchinson's personal correspondence. Letters he had written between 1768 and 1771 to Thomas Whately that expressed anti-colonial sentiment became public, causing a furor throughout New England. Then, the Tea Act and subsequent Tea Party vividly revealed for a last time the uncompromising dedication Hutchinson had to his job and to the crown. By this time as well, the colonists were accustomed to blaming Hutchinson for their problems and unwilling to accept any infringement on their personal rights. Finally, in April 1774, General Thomas Gage replaced Hutchinson as governor of Massachusetts, thus ending Hutchinson's political career in the American colonies.

Thomas Hutchinson's correspondents included Thomas Whately, to whom he expressed strongly worded anti-colonial sentiment. For example, he claimed the general colonial public would not follow the radical leaders because of their ideas alone but would have to be coerced. In another letter, dated January 20, 1769, read, "I never think of the measure necessary for the peace and good order of the Colonies without pain. There must be an abridgement of what is called English liberty. I relieve myself by considering that in a remove from the state of nature to the most perfect state of Government there must be a great restraint of natural liberty. I doubt if it is possible to project a System of Government in which a Colony 3000 miles distant from the Parent State shall enjoy all the liberties of the Parent State."³⁵

Adams' comments about the Whately letters would further underscore the importance of reputation in the pre-Revolutionary world. The letters rankled the

³⁵ Thomas Hutchinson to Thomas Whately, 24 August 1769, quoted in Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, 367.

colonists for obvious reasons, given their fears of tyranny. Adams responded to this issue in full force when the letters were circulated, calling anyone in the Assembly who supported Hutchinson a “Tory,” the height of insult in radical circles. This choice of words was not arbitrary but rather an astute use of language. All along, the complaints Adams had against Hutchinson were that he was a traitor to the colonial cause because he supported British measures against the interests of Massachusetts. He degraded Hutchinson’s reputation and political effectiveness by casting him as a symbol of British tyranny. These letters to Whately seemed to prove Adams right and were the final nail in Hutchinson’s coffin. Adams asserted that if the few letters they had seen were made public, Hutchinson’s friends would leave him.³⁶ Then one month later, after the letters had been shown to more people, the House resolved by a vote of 101 of 106 that the letters revealed an intent to “subvert the constitution and introduce arbitrary power into the province.”³⁷ A few days later on June 23, 1773, they wrote to the king petitioning for the removal of Governor Hutchinson. Adams penned a petition on behalf of the House to the king requesting “your Majesty will be so graciously pleased to remove them [Thomas Hutchinson and others] from their posts in this Government and place such good and faithful men in Their stead as your Majesty in your great Wisdom shall think fit.” This language displays both the great desire of the colonials to get rid of Hutchinson and their continuing respect for King George III.

Samuel Adams had succeeded in casting Hutchinson as a symbol of the ills of the British government, making him the target of hatred rather than the King himself. By

³⁶ Samuel Adams to Arthur Lee, 17 May 1774, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 40.

³⁷ Samuel Adams to Arthur Lee, 14 June 1774, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 41.

attacking Hutchinson's reputation rather than the king's authority, Adams' followers could still call themselves "most loyal Subjects" and claim to be writing out of dutifulness to their "Majesty." According to Adams, the revealed letters proved the corruption behind Hutchinson's actions. The House therefore requested an investigation and the removal of Hutchinson and Oliver and replacement of them with good, faithful, wise leaders. The petition, much like the future Declaration of Independence, went on to enumerate the crimes of the two men, which included the following: they strove to make Britain think badly of the colonies, misrepresented the state of affairs to Britain, undermined British and colonial harmony, prevented petitions from getting to the king, and helped bring troops and ships to Massachusetts where they disrupted peace and caused animosity and tension.³⁸ Even after Hutchinson had departed, Adams wrote his friend Arthur Lee in 1775 that the Whately letters showed Hutchinson's deep involvement in fostering the situation the colonists now faced.³⁹

This petition, which passed six months before the Boston Tea Party, is significant because it called for drastic measures: Hutchinson's removal from power. The same sentiment that drove the Massachusetts Assembly to request the departure of Hutchinson resurfaced a mere two years later when a larger body would seek independence. But in 1773, despite Adams' best efforts and widespread public disapproval of Hutchinson's actions, the governor was not removed after the petition. Instead, it would be the crisis over tea that led to Hutchinson's downfall. Hutchinson's attitude towards the relationship between Massachusetts and the imperial center had become so stark that he

³⁸ To King George III, 23 June 1773, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 45-48.

³⁹ Samuel Adams to Arthur Lee, 29 January 1775, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 171.

saw no line between Parliament's total authority and total colonial independence.⁴⁰ The colonists expressed similarly black and white views with statements: "We are more and more convinced, that it has been the design of administration, totally to subvert the constitution, and introduce an arbitrary government in this province"⁴¹ Therefore, these two clashed strongly, for Hutchinson believed that the Adams faction was acting in a treasonous manner, while they believed that they had the right to try to rectify the problems they saw with the British government. This revealed a difference in outlook between the two parties that could not be changed easily and would lead to open conflict. In the case of Hutchinson and Adams, this climax would occur with Hutchinson's departure for England and ruined reputation, while the two nations would have to wait another year for the outbreak of war. As the situation in Massachusetts intensified, particularly centering on tea, language became stronger and stronger. Adams wrote that the "same haughty Power" is threatening everyone's liberties, especially in Boston, the focus of much "Ministerial Wrath."⁴²

Throughout these events, Adams' concern centered on the policies' destruction of liberty, and he encouraged purposeful opposition to defend this integral right. His correspondence showed the depth of his feelings by its strong language and also revealed the growing unity of the colonies. In early November 1773, the town of Boston resolved that the Tea Act was designed to "introduce Arbitrary Government and Slavery" and took away property without consent.⁴³ The assembly urged the citizens to form a plan of

⁴⁰ To the Governor of Massachusetts, 26 January 1773, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 424.

⁴¹ To the Governor of Massachusetts, 12 February 1773, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 429.

⁴² Samuel Adams to Richard Henry Lee, April 10 1773, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 25-26.

⁴³ Resolutions of the Town of Boston, 5 November 1773, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 79.

opposition, claiming that anyone who acquiesced to the law would be considered an enemy of the people. After the most famous act of resistance of the Sons of Liberty, the Boston Tea Party, Sam Adams reported the event to friends in personal letters and to other towns through Boston's Committee of Correspondence. Although he did not emphasize his leadership role, his detailed descriptions revealed his intimate involvement. The Committee of Correspondence claimed that the gathered men made every effort to send the tea back to England but were rebuffed by royal officials—especially Hutchinson with his “inveterate hatred of the people.”⁴⁴ Thus, on the night of December 16, 1773, they dumped 342 chests of tea into the harbor. Adams pronounced the enthusiasm of the spectators but was careful to note that no other private property was destroyed, as if the tea was not enough. Three months afterwards, he warned the public that liberty had to be secured and if Britain did not moderate its policies, “the entire separation and independence of the colonies” would be inevitable.⁴⁵ Describing the event to Arthur Lee, Adams stated that Governor Hutchinson would not give ship captain Mr. Rotch permission to leave Boston harbor without unloading the tea.⁴⁶ The choice thus lay before them between destroying the tea and compromising their ideals by allowing it to be unloaded. Hutchinson, meanwhile, was motivated by his allegiance to England and his duty to uphold the law. But that was not how Samuel Adams saw things.

In a letter to another committee of correspondence, Adams stated “the Citizens had receivd [sic] the barbarous Act with Indignation – that no Language could express

⁴⁴ Samuel Adams to Arthur Lee, 25 January 1774, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 79.

⁴⁵ Samuel Adams to Arthur Lee, 4 April 1774, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 100.

⁴⁶ Samuel Adams to Arthur Lee, 31 December 1773, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 73-77.

their Abhorrence of this additional Act of Tyranny to all America” and that “Hutchinsonian minions are endeavoring to promote an address to him.” Adams interpreted this as the desire of Hutchinson to have “the Shaddow [sic] of Importance” when he arrives England.⁴⁷ He told Charles Thomson that “The whole design of these addresses is to prop a sinking Character in England.”⁴⁸ These writings clearly depict the result on Hutchinson’s character that the previous crises as well as the build-up of his whole career produced. This shows how the criticisms extended to Hutchinson personally, not simply to his handling of the crises over tea. Adams wrote Arthur Lee that Lord Dartmouth, who was coming to North America, would best be prepared for the House actions if given an “Idea of Hutchinson.”⁴⁹ Also, shortly before Hutchinson’s departure for England, Adams recounted an instance in which a lawyer “has been and is still refused by the governor, only because he mention the name of Hutchinson with freedom, and that not in court, but in a Boston town-meeting some years before.”⁵⁰

These two accounts, along with many others like them, do not deal directly with Hutchinson’s professional shortcomings. However, their impact is no less important. Given the importance of reputation to the political climate of the era, these vaguer accusations formed as much if not more of a threat to his career. The insinuations that Hutchinson was dishonorable in character would make people doubt him as much as a questioning of his abilities. However, in contrast, in a letter to Governor Hutchinson in January, 1773, the Assembly claimed that they retained their loyalty to King George,

⁴⁷ To Committee of Correspondence of Marblehead, 22 May 1774, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 120.

⁴⁸ Samuel Adams to Charles Thomson, 30 May, 1774, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 125.

⁴⁹ Samuel Adams to Arthur Lee, 9 April 1773, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 19.

⁵⁰ Samuel Adams to Arthur Lee, 4 April 1774, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 99.

“our rightful Sovereign.”⁵¹ They used this phrase again in their June petition for Hutchinson’s removal. In contrast to the overtly positive language used in reference to the king, Adams typically addressed Hutchinson as “your Honor” and nothing more. Therefore, although the colonial political leaders were willing to defame the local representative of British authority, they would not slander the king himself, not yet at least.

Even after Hutchinson was gone, Adams and others still associated him with the growing crisis in British-colonial relations. The most troubling portion of the punitive Coercive Acts—passed in response to the Tea Party—was the closing of Boston’s port until the destroyed tea was paid for, leaving the city isolated and unable to stand alone. The Acts also dissolved the Massachusetts legislature, provided for troop quartering in colonial houses, and allowed royal officials accused of capital crimes to have their trials held in Britain rather than colonial courts. Adams repeatedly asserted that the people were indignant but hoped that they would bear the burden with dignity.⁵² Adams felt that the colonists needed to make Britain suffer in the same way as they were to gain relief from oppression. His personal and committee letters therefore asked for aid from other towns and colonies, praising those like Newburyport and New York that had pledged to cease trade with Britain immediately. Boston’s Committee of Correspondence wrote: “Nothing can afford us greater pleasure than to find so noble a Spirit of Opposition of the Efforts of arbitrary power prevailing in so great a number of Towns in this province.”⁵³

⁵¹ To the Governor of Massachusetts, 26 January 1773, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 426.

⁵² Samuel Adams to Arthur Lee, 18 May 1774, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 117-18.

⁵³ Committee of Correspondence of Boston to John Wadsworth, 13 April 1773, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 32.

Adams had no doubt that the Coercive Acts were an intentional design of tyranny. He repeatedly referred to the program in this manner, once even more explicitly as “Hutchinsonian vengeance,” revealing his inner prejudice.⁵⁴ Britain intended the act to divide the colonies because royal ministers believed that no one outside Massachusetts really cared about Boston, but the closing of the port actually had the opposite effect. Many towns and colonies contributed both material aid and moral support through cessation of commerce.

As reactionary and vitriolic as Adams’ letters were, he claimed to still desire peace with Britain, but only on a foundation of liberty. However, his strong ideals and belief that this liberty was quickly slipping away drove his overt actions of resistance which seemed, by 1774, on an inevitable path toward revolution. As historian T.H. Breen recently demonstrated, the die for the American Revolution was cast in Boston in 1774.⁵⁵

While Boston eventually recovered from the Coercive Acts and the war that followed, Hutchinson has never really recovered his reputation. Over a year after his departure, Adams wrote that “America never will, Britain never ought to forgive him.”⁵⁶ And in a way, America never did. He was and remains a dutiful, decent man on the wrong side of history.

The war of words between Samuel Adams and Thomas Hutchinson during the years 1765-1774 has repeated itself in politics long after this era. Political leaders on opposite sides of an issue still attempt to win public favor by denigrating the reputation of their opponents. As was the case in Boston in 1765-75, truth often matters far less than

⁵⁴ Samuel Adams to James Warren, 14 May 1774, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 112.

⁵⁵ Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*.

⁵⁶ Samuel Adams to Arthur Lee, 29 January 1775, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 171-172.

perception. Samuel Adams, though sometimes wrong, proved to be more influential, teaming with others to ruin Hutchinson's political reputation and effectiveness and thereby setting the tone of the political debate. This tactic can be very effective for destroying someone's public reputation. Even today, "fighting words" in the writings and speech of public figures can produce the same effect on others as Samuel Adams had on Thomas Hutchinson. And the question lingers: Where do we draw the line between political savvy and an "Act of Tyranny"?