

Drinking with Class
Intoxicated Mobs and Influential Spirits of the Revolution

Introduction

In 1773, British Parliament passed the Tea Act, placing a heavy burden on imported tea into the colonies. Furthering an already outraged population, colonists staged a boycott, and refused to allow the cargoes of tea to be unloaded. Over half a century later, George Robert Twelve Hewes, a Boston shoemaker, recounted his experiences participating in many of the key events of the Revolutionary crisis, including his role in the Boston Tea Party.¹

On December 16, as Hewes describes,

“there was a meeting of the citizens of the county of Suffolk, convened at one of the churches in Boston, for the purpose of consulting on what measures might be considered expedient to prevent the landing of the tea,” with Governor Hutchinson. The Governor informed them to return later in the day for a decision, at which point he was no longer available. The committee “returned and informed the meeting of the absence of the Governor,” to the response of “confused murmur among the members,” as the “meeting was immediately dissolved, many of [the committee members] crying out.”²

That night, as the tale now goes, the men dressed up as Natives, boarded the three ships, and proceeded to throw all the tea overboard. Hewes describes: “I immediately dressed myself in the costume of an Indian, equipped with a small hatchet... after having painted my face and hands with coal dust in the shop of a blacksmith,” at which point “I repaired to Griffin’s wharf, where the ships lay that contained the tea. When I first appeared in the street after being thus disguised, I fell in with many who were dressed,

¹ For a complete account of Hewes and his role in revolutionary events, see Young, Alfred F. *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999.

² Hewes, George. "Eyewitness Account by George Hewes." Boston Tea Party Historical Society. 2008. <http://www.boston-tea-party.org/account-george-hewes.html>.

equipped as I was.”³ After arriving at the wharf, Hewes recalls “We were immediately ordered by the respective commanders to board all the ships at the same time,” at which point Hewes was “appointed boatswain.”⁴ Hewes continued recalling his experience, describing throwing the tea overboard, and returning the next morning to the scene to make sure nobody could salvage any of the tea remaining in the harbor.

Hewes, as noted by historians over the years following the Revolution, was of the lower class, or “lower sort.” Not totally impoverished by any means, but born into a lower working-class family, where he himself had decided to pursue a not so lucrative career as a shoemaker. His recollection of Revolutionary events in which he was a part of are particularly interesting, because it is rare to get a glimpse into such extraordinary events from the perspective of ordinary, often unheard of, people. Even more telling, is that Hewes, for presumably the first time in his life, was singled out of the rank and file, and placed in a position of authority as an officer, or boatswain. Why?

Though there has been an increased interest in Hewes, particularly by social historians over the past few decades, recollections of the Boston Tea Party are often told from the newspapers, or the primary sources of major actors, like Samuel Adams, at the time. These stories become stuff of legends, in a sense, and nearly every American citizen has come to learn some version of this event stemming from these memories. The common memory today of this event, though not dissimilar from Hewes’ recollection, takes a different perspective. As is the case in most instances, memory, and the generally accepted history, comes from the “top-down,” or from the well-known, often elite, point of view. Since we get a “bottom-up,” perspective here, with a recollection from a

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

working-class Hewes, we don't hear the common story of Samuel Adams, and the Sons of Liberty, convening at the Green Dragon Tavern in Boston, to plan the Boston Tea Party. This bit of information will become useful under further analysis of Hewes, taverns and the Sons of Liberty; taking a deeper look into the relationship between colonial class structure and its effects on the colonial population's political beliefs, motivations, actions, and general revolutionary attitudes at the time.

The purpose of this article is multi-faceted. First and foremost, it is centered on addressing class, and the culture and role of class to the colonists leading up to, and during, the American Revolution. The tavern, serving as a microcosm for British colonial society, will allow for a better understanding of how class worked in Revolutionary America. Likewise, the Sons of Liberty, who frequently convened at local taverns for meetings relating to political matters at the time, will offer another point of examination for the role of class, both within, and outside, the context of the tavern.⁵ In essence, the article will analyze and add commentary in exploring popular historical thought regarding the political climate, and events leading up to the Revolution, by examining the dynamics of class within tavern culture, along with the organization now known as the Sons of Liberty (who themselves operated within the class structure and space of taverns, and society at large). **While colonial taverns, the Sons of Liberty and the Revolutionary movement as a whole were generally class inclusive, class stratification and the relationships between the upper, middling, and lower sorts**

⁵ Though there will be far more on this later, the phrase "Sons of Liberty," will be used to refer to the organization of Patriot revolutionaries, and political radicals, like Samuel Adams, Isaac Sears, or Christopher Gadsden, who existed independently across colonial towns, often convened at local taverns where they were politically active. Often, they were not officially part of any organization in name, or did not adopt the name until after the fact.

played a complex and significant role in the years leading up to the Revolution – with particular elite actors orchestrating key events – demonstrating an influential class system contrary to the public image and associated rhetoric of equality, inclusion and democracy. Ultimately, this article pursues a better understanding of the role and influence of class in Revolutionary colonial America through an in-depth analysis of class within spaces of empire and Revolutionary America – more specifically, taverns, and the organization known as the Sons of Liberty.

On this last note, this article seeks to address the multiple fields of historical thought, and their theories regarding the underpinnings of the American Revolution, as well as the relationship between class, and the associated events (leading up to the Revolution). Just as the story of the Boston Tea Party changes when the perspective shifts from Hewes' recollection, to the common, almost mythological explanation most know today, so too does the story of the American Revolution as a whole, when we shift focus from the perspective of the elite, well-known, and major actors of the time (i.e. Samuel Adams, Paul Revere, George Washington), to the unknown, often unremarkable, fringe groups of minorities, lower-classes, and marginalized groups. This has led to oppositional theories on the origins, or motivations, leading up to the Revolution, and contradicting theories on how the role of class influenced political thought, as well as particular events. Primarily, there are Whig-theory historians, like Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood, who focus on "the few;" and social historians, like Gary Nash, who shift their attention to the "many;" the unheard voices of the working-class, marginalized, and minority groups throughout history.

Placing focus on only one of these groups, however, does a disservice to seeing the whole picture, and leads to conclusions that may be accurate from the perspective of one group, but ignores the realities of the other. Objectivity would likely hinge on an approach that grants equal merit to both polarized frameworks or approaches, and the differing conclusions they often lead to. This article will attempt to thread the needle between the well-constructed quilts of oppositional frameworks and theories, and tie them together, in an effort to provide a more wholesome, holistic, and organic, understanding of class relations, and what really drove all Patriotic colonists during the years between the end of the Seven Years' War, up to the start of the American Revolution (1763-1776). This research and article was built primarily on the methodologies on the social historian, while attempting to acknowledge and pay equal attention to the groups of people the social historian would typically ignore or place less importance on.⁶

By acknowledging that the theories and frameworks that many consider to be at odds with one another, instead, act as supplementary to one another, a more realistic understanding of the time begins to emerge. Like taking a few steps back from a pointillism painting, a more accurate depiction of what stirred colonists from all classes comes into focus as we make use of the historiography told from all perspectives, rather than centering only on a "top-down," or "bottom-up," approach. By analyzing class structures within taverns as well as the Sons of Liberty, along with the general

⁶ Ultimately, methodologies of research included an abundance of primary source material, primarily from, or pertaining to, the lower sorts, while still applying these findings to the broader picture. Similar methodologies were used, but with focus on the other classes (upper and middling sorts), in hopes of being able to realize a more comprehensive analysis of the role of class – one in which isn't reliant on either top-down or bottom-up interpretations.

relationship between the classes, there is likely to be new insight into these more general frameworks, providing a more nuanced perspective on how the events leading up to the American Revolution unfolded.

I. Historiographical Background

What is it then, that Taverns, the Sons of Liberty, and people like George Robert Twelve Hewes, tell us about the historiography of the origins of the American Revolution? This research sprung from an abundance of academic material on the matter, largely stemming from two predominant areas of thought that continue to influence scholarship on early American history. Scholars, like Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood, focus on the ideal of republicanism, the emergence and influence of enlightenment thought, and more generally, the ideologies that drove certain colonists towards Revolution.⁷ Social historians, like Gary Nash, critiqued this approach on the premise that it ignores a vast majority of the population, and is drawn largely on research of only a few influential actors; and so he sought to dispel this notion by examining marginalized people on the fringes of society who are oft left out of history books, in order to tell the “real,” story.⁸ As a result, social historians, like Nash, have uncovered a number of other motivations and influences, largely centered on more pragmatic reasons, like economics and personal finances, as primary driving forces for ordinary colonists. Both approaches shift their perspective, either to elite historical figures, or long-forgotten commoners – and as a result, both tend to come to theoretical explanations that are often diametrically opposed, though not inherently wrong in any way. Unlike this article, this particular

⁷ For more into this historiography, see works by Bailyn and Wood, including Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, and Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*

⁸ For more insight into a social history, see Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*.

historiographical analysis is part of the broader picture of the Revolution, and less concerned specifically with taverns or the Sons of Liberty. These spaces, as reflections of society, will serve as a perfect point of analysis here to further the ever evolving, more general historiography of this time period, and the Revolution, aiming to provide more insight into colonial class structures and their influence on the Revolutionary-era by focusing more specifically on class within particular revolutionary spaces.

For many historians, the emergence of a new social history in the 1960s and 1970s appeared to be a direct result of the politics of the era. Historian David Hackett Fischer wrote in his 1994 book “Paul Revere’s Ride,” that “there is a broad prejudice in American Universities against Patriotic events of every kind, especially since the troubled years of Vietnam and Watergate,” making the “dead white male,” less and less fashionable in academia.⁹ His harsh critique on social history explains its emergence as a cultural and political phenomenon stemming from an immense distrust in authority at the time in which it rose to prominence in the field of history. His critique, though published in 1994, seems more relevant now than ever, given the current political climate in America today. Like this article, he too sought to address these shortcomings, where, although “much has been gained,” through this social history framework, “An entire generation of academic historiography has tended to lose sense of the causal power of particular actions and contingent events.”¹⁰ By focusing on “historical events as a series of real choices that living people actually made,” a better understanding of “‘what it was like’ to have been there,” emerges.¹¹ His critiques, while valid, do not point to inherent

⁹ Fischer, D.H., *Paul Revere’s Ride*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. iv-v.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

characteristics of social history by definition, but rather, something more like accidental or subconscious side effects of this framework's attributes that often plague the social historian. It is possible to utilize the methodologies and approaches of social history, and seek to answer the same questions, while still avoiding the general pitfalls that Fischer explains, and also sought to address.

In 2017, the William and Mary Quarterly did a historiographical analysis on the Revolution. While noting that "in the last generation or two, few authors have dealt with the period 1763-1765, leading to a dearth of articles on ... paranoia, republicanism, ideology, and the coming of the Revolution... colonial economics, and social movements to the origins of the revolution are also noticeably absent."¹² Critiques included Wood's failure to address the role of African American's in the Revolution, though a recent forum "on Wood's book all seemed to signal the importance of older interpretations of and debates over the Revolution."¹³ Wood, while engaged over the years in scholarly conversation with social historians like Nash, "helped open the door to exploring long-term political and social changes."¹⁴ Though scholarship in this area saw a decline following the peak of historians like Bailyn, Wood, and Nash, they remain central in the ongoing and evolving scholarship in this area, especially as they themselves continue to publish and remain influential in the ongoing conversations happening in academia.¹⁵

More recent works are heavily reliant on the scholarship from these individuals, as well as these particular areas of historical analysis. The evolving scholarship points to

¹² McDonnell, Michael and David Waldstreicher. "Revolution in the Quarterly? A Historiographical Analysis." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (2017): 633-66. doi:10.5309/willmaryquar.74.4.0633.

¹³ Ibid, p. 649

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 653

¹⁵ For more on the historiography of Revolutionary America, see the full article *Revolution in the Quarterly*.

an acknowledgement of the role of class and its effect on revolutionaries at the time. Whether the mob, and those from the lower sorts, deserve more attention than iconic leaders, and those from the middling and upper sorts, is far less important than the fact that there were participants from all classes, and they were directly affected by the existent class-structures of the time. The inclusive nature allowing for action from those of all classes, however, does not suggest an egalitarian and democratic structure of society, since further analysis shows that the class systems existed, and were often deliberately exploited.

Daigler's *Spies, Patriots and Traitors*, relying on an abundance of primary and secondary sources, including the likes of Nash, Carp and Morgan, analyzes this relationship, and likens the Sons of Liberty, and their policies, to a united front campaign where "a group was needed both to organize political activities and to demonstrate in the streets against British policy."¹⁶ This group, the Sons of Liberty, "was meant to be a semiclandestine organization with a fluid membership," at the time of its inception following the Stamp Act.¹⁷ Though early on, they "had little control over the street mobs that protested violently against the Stamp Act," they "evolved into a powerful and effective organization directing political action throughout the colonies," whose "leaders formed the political and military leadership cadre of the Revolutionary era."¹⁸ While using ample work from top social historians, Daigler is able to see the strong and

¹⁶ DAIGLER, KENNETH A. "The United Front Campaign That Led to the American Revolution." In *Spies, Patriots, and Traitors: American Intelligence in the Revolutionary War*, 16-42. Georgetown University Press, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.unh.edu/stable/j.ctt6wpkz8.7>.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 20

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 20

necessary influence of the mob, while still acknowledging that a superior set, or group, was effectively organizing and directing the political activities of the time.

In academia, the battle rages on, and both sides seem too often be at odds with each other. This frustrating reality points to the need for another interpretation: one that acknowledges the merits of the research coming from both schools of thought, and seeks to fit the conclusions from both into the same general framework. If there is truth in both perspectives, then there is a need to acknowledge both perspectives, and seek to knit them together. Neither approach is wrong; with the conclusions that both sides draw being well-supported, and remaining true so long as the context of their research, or the perspective from which it is done, does not shift. While the social historian focuses their attention to a specific group of people (the masses, commoners, “unheard voices,” etc.) so too do imperial and Whig historians like Bailyn and Wood. And while the social historian adds necessary analysis by addressing the shortcomings of traditional, top-down historical interpretations, they too miss a substantial point of analysis in their focus.

In disregarding the importance of these central figures, and their ideologies, social historians have committed the same crimes that they’ve accused their opposition of: ignoring a significant group of actors, or people, that participated in the Revolution, thereby excluding a necessary evaluative component. In narrowly focusing the perspective from which these events are looked at, a substantial portion of the story is lost. The issue at hand here is in deciding which group deserves more attention, and this question is playing too vital a role in much of the scholarship. Hearing the cries from historians on both ends of the spectrum, it appears evident that it would be beneficial to acknowledge a history that accounts for all people involved – both the well to do, as well

as the middling and lower sorts, and the relationship between them. This article will attempt not to ask the question of who is more important, more influential, or more deserving of historical analysis, but to pay equal attention to all actors involved in Revolutionary era politics and events by centering its focus on the relationship of the classes and acknowledging the role of all those involved in Revolutionary politics and events.¹⁹ By analyzing taverns, the Sons of Liberty, as well as the “rabble,” alongside people like Hewes, the relationship between class, politics and society in the years leading up to the Revolution should become clearer, shedding light on traditional interpretations. In order to “thread the needle,” and tie these frameworks together, this article shifts the perspective again; not to the “top,” or the “bottom,” but to the very thing that creates these distinctions: class.

II. The Tavern

First, it is important to look at the role of the tavern in colonial America, and briefly separate it from what we now consider a tavern to be in the context of modern American society, in order to understand its importance in the context of colonial America. Today, the tavern’s function has been limited to a place of food, drink, entertainment and sociability. More simply, it is a restaurant, and a bar serving alcohol, often in an entertainment setting. However, in the colonies, the tavern (also known as *ordinary*, *inn*, or *public house*) was far more ubiquitous, and served a wide range of additional purposes. While “some taverns catered primarily to society’s elite,” most

¹⁹ Here, it is acknowledged that this article, too, leaves out significant parts of the population, including women, African Americans, and Native Americans. Though it is hopeful that this article will evolve and grow to include analysis of a wider population, it is currently focused on individuals, groups, and members of particular classes, that were all (more or less) directly involved in Revolutionary events, and politically active during these years.

“invited a multitude and mixture of people,” even though “the precise form did not alter the fundamental role of the tavern – to provide a place where individuals or groups could gather to eat and drink, talk sing, argue, conduct business, play games of chance.”²⁰ In the taverns serving elite and middle-class patrons, “men gathered on a regular basis to transact business [and] argue over issues of local politics,” while the laboring classes “exchanged news of the day [and] plotted political action.”²¹ Taverns also served additional roles, including acting as a post office, hosting travelers, and renting private rooms out for organizations and meetings. Some even served as brothels. Due to the pre-existing colonial tavern culture, it was almost inevitable that taverns would come to be political hotbeds during the Revolutionary era, and breeding grounds for political mobilization of the masses.

As noted by historian Vaughn Scribner, taverns (particularly mid-eighteenth century) were places where colonists, identifying as British subjects, sought the imperial connections they desired, particularly elites, and “cosmopolites,” who “believed that consumption of foreign goods was a vital aspect of what they considered cosmopolitan behavior, and consequently sought out certain goods and services at city taverns.”²² Further, he notes “elite taverngoers could barricade themselves in private rooms, to engage in sophisticated clubs, debate, coffee, tea... and above all, distinguish themselves as separate, superior members in the world community.”²³ Though taverns would become more inclusive in the years leading up to the Revolution as colonists began boycotting

²⁰ Salinger, Sharon V. *Taverns and Drinking in Early America*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004. P. 7

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 1

²² Scribner, Vaughn. "Cosmopolitan Colonists: Gentlemens Pursuit of Cosmopolitanism and Hierarchy in British American Taverns." *Atlantic Studies*10, no. 4 (2013): p. 3. doi:10.1080/14788810.2013.832473.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 3

British goods rather than pursuing them as part of their identity, the hierarchical class system remained present both in taverns, and society at large.

As in both British, and British colonial society, class remained an issue (though perhaps less so in the colonies) and a driving force for political discontent in the years following the Seven Years' War. Though taverns are often viewed as unique locales, in the sense that class-lines were blurred and equity and democracy seemed to permeate the environment, a closer look shows that there was indeed the same kind of stratification happening in individual taverns, as well as the tavern network as a whole (where certain taverns were specifically designated for certain classes). In the seventeenth century, the Dutch began opening the first colonial taverns in New York. These taverns were largely reflective of a colonial class system, as well as the systems embedded into British and European culture that influenced them. Taverns specifically dedicated to the elite opened in certain neighborhoods, while "alehouses," dedicated to the lower classes opened up in less-to-do neighborhoods. Over time, though separate class-based taverns would still exist, the establishments became more integrated, and accepting of patrons of all classes. While this seems to suggest that taverns (as microcosms of society), and therefore, society as a whole, were becoming far less stratified as the American Revolution neared, an examination of the organization and functions of these taverns shows otherwise.

Pre-Revolutionary taverns were not egalitarian, democratic spaces of inclusiveness where hierarchy and deference were checked at the door. Instead, they were direct reflections of British Empire. And just as intense class-conflict affected the whole of British, and British colonial society, so too could it be felt in the colonial taverns, where colonists sought the Imperial connections they so desired. Some historians, like

Benjamin Carp, however, note that a shift to more integrated taverns (integrated by class, as many, including Indians, blacks, women, and servants, weren't allowed) "brought together a broad array of white men and made them feel equal to any army officer, merchant, or member of Parliament of the Assembly."²⁴ While it is true that colonial taverns in the eighteenth century became institutions of class mixing and leveling, many of the elites were repulsed by this new dynamic, and having to intermingle with "the rabble," further demonstrating the still existent class divide.

John Adams recalled of a tavern he visited in 1760, that, "the Rabble filled the house. Every Room, kitchen, Chamber was crowded with People. Negroes with a fiddle. Young fellows and Girls dancing in the Chamber as if they would kick the floor thro."²⁵ Other elites expressed similar dissatisfaction, including physician Alexander Hamilton, who expressed similar feelings after his 1744 journey, in his now-famous travel journal, *Itinerarium*, including speaking often of the "plebeians," he encountered at multiple taverns, and how they – "talked there upon all subjects – politick, religion, and trade – some tollerably well, but most of them ignorantly."²⁶ These examples serve to show the attitudes of elites at the time, and those considering themselves gentlemen, or cosmopolites. As taverns became more class-inclusive, elites like Hamilton expressed their anxieties that colonists "inability to understand the inherent hierarchy of the Empire also made them dangerous to society," as they considered "those of lesser social standing

²⁴ Carp, Benjamin L. *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 97

²⁵ Adams, John. "Diary of John Adams, Volume, Novr. 25th. 1760." The Adams Papers. <https://www.masshist.org/publications/apde2/view?id=ADMS-01-01-02-0005-0007-0012>.

²⁶ Hamilton, Alexander. *Itinerarium*. New York: Arno Press, 1971. For more on physician Alexander Hamilton, and tavern interactions of colonial elites, see Scribner, "Cosmopolitan Colonists: Gentlemen Pursuit of Cosmopolitanism and Hierarchy in British American Taverns."

as inherently inferior,” especially as exotic consumer goods became increasingly available to members of all classes, as “newcomers scaled the social hierarchy.”²⁷

So while taverns certainly started to become more integrated, blending together people from varying classes, tension and class-segregation still existed. This tension and class structure is reflected in the layout of most taverns (which, as noted earlier, included many different rooms, catering to specific purposes, as well as for specific people, or classes of people), along with documentation and letters from elite persons that specifically mention their discontent with having to interact with “the rabble,” and the “lower sorts.” This same type of class stratification existed within the confines of the Sons of Liberty, who were a network of localized groups of Patriots known for their ability to “rabble-rouse,” and mobilize the masses into action. Typically, they organized and planned out their political acts in secrecy at taverns throughout the country that served as their headquarters. Though under-examined, it wouldn’t be unrealistic to suggest that there was a direct correlation between the dynamic of class within taverns, and the dynamic of class within the Sons’ organization, who frequented these same taverns. Essentially, in many ways, the tavern, and the Sons of Liberty, are direct reflections of one another — and more broadly, reflections of colonial society at large.

It cannot be said with certainty that George Robert Twelve Hewes ever attended the Green Dragon Tavern in Boston, or how, if at all, he was influenced by tavern culture. Despite corroborating evidence to his own recollection of the night of December 16, no such evidence places him anywhere in or near the Green Dragon, where “The Tea Party was organized by the Radical Whig Leaders of Boston,” in the days preceding the act of

²⁷ Scribner, Vaughn. "Cosmopolitan Colonists: Gentlemens Pursuit of Cosmopolitanism and Hierarchy in British American Taverns." p. 5-7

rebellion.²⁸ It can however, be assumed with near certainty, that Hewes, like all of Boston's artisan and working class, was regularly attending taverns throughout his time in Boston, and likely brushed shoulders with members of the Sons of Liberty. How much influence this had on his politics, however, is pure speculation. Still, we know that Hewes likely frequented taverns, as did his colonial laboring counterparts, where he, at the least, would have come in contact with people of all classes, including those associated with the Sons of Liberty, thereby submerging him into the revolutionary rhetoric of the time, and informing him of current affairs.

Whether he actively conversed, or participated, with any member of the Sons of Liberty, is unknown, just as the extent of his relationship to the Sons is largely unknown.²⁹ He may have been mobilized to action directly, or even indirectly, by these Revolutionaries, or may have joined the mob on his own volition, having been politically mobilized years earlier during the Stamp Act Riots or the Boston Massacre, in which he also participated. This seems most likely, as he was "capable of acting on his own initiative," though in Hewes case, it always came "in the wake of collective action."³⁰ Regardless, Hewes, and many like him, would have certainly been a part of the tavern culture within their society, and likely influenced by, or even direct participants with, the Sons of Liberty and other patriotic patrons of the taverns he frequented. In fact, Hewes proudly claimed to have tossed a crate of tea into the Boston Harbor alongside, and with the help of, John Hancock.³¹ Based on Young's description, it appears likely he was

²⁸ Young, Alfred F. *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution*. p. 42

²⁹ Though Young contends he was not a part of any organization, and never attended any of the Sons of Liberty dinners, *Ibid*, 52.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 53

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 44

compelled to action following collective action of the masses. Politicized by the Stamp Act, “Hewes was moved to act by personal experiences he shared with a large number of other plebian Bostonians... and, once aroused, took action with others of his own rank.”³² Hewes was exactly the kind of person members of the Sons of Liberty were looking for to publicly do their bidding: a commoner who would be a necessary component in moving their agenda, effectively helping to keep their motives, and the people planning these events, shrouded in secrecy and out of public controversy, to help create an illusion of a grassroots movement of the masses.

Certainly, colonists like Hewes were regularly attending taverns, and thus were immersed in the associated political discourse that permeated nearly all taverns at the time. And while taverns accommodated and welcomed colonists of the working classes and lower sorts, they were less influential than their upper class counterparts in regards to the political mobilization within, and outside, the tavern. As noted by Carp, there was “One striking practice, characteristic of both the provincial and popular Whigs, emerging: both groups sought to use tavern sociability for political ends,” as groups like “the Sons of Liberty authored patriotic pamphlets and petitions, made popular speeches against imperial encroachment, and formed committees and military companies.”³³ Ultimately, as Carp notes, “taverns were the perfect venues for revolutionaries seeking to surmount the challenges of political mobilization,” as they “allowed for the mixing of inhabitants and visitors from different social groups.”³⁴ While taverns allowed the mixing of social groups, Carp points to the class systems still in place within the taverns, where “laws...

³² Ibid, p. 53

³³ Carp, *Rebels Rising*, p. 79-80

³⁴ Ibid, p. 63

particularly targeted [at] non-whites... prohibited the sale of strong liquors to servants and apprentices,” and where “visitors judged there fellow taverngoers by Atlantic standards of gentility and refinement.”³⁵ That these class systems and relationships existed within the confines of a space that was generally class-inclusive points to the overall essence of the role of class during the Revolution and in colonial society.

Directly embedded into this tavern culture, and associated class system, are the Sons of Liberty, who used taverns across the colonies as their primary meeting places to discuss politics, and plan political action. Just as class stratification existed within tavern culture, so too did it permeate the organization of the Sons of Liberty, where colonists from all social spheres were welcomed, even if its members remained conscious of class. Despite the inclusiveness, the role of class within the influential organization helps demonstrate the motivations of different groups, classes, and players, during this time, as well as understand how and why events unfolded as they did.

III. The Sons of Liberty

Much like current scholarship relating to taverns -- particularly their relation to class -- there is similar contention over scholarship of the Sons of Liberty. Who they were, how they were organized, who was “pulling the strings,” (or more generally, directing their agenda), and to what extent the role in which class played within the organization and their decisions. In many ways, examining the Sons of Liberty, along with taverns, reveals countless similarities about class at the time. Much like taverns, the Sons of Liberty were comprised of people of all classes: elites, merchants, artisans, and generally, people from upper, middle, and lower classes. On the surface, as in the case

³⁵ Ibid, p. 69, 72

with taverns, this seems to suggest a culture of equality, where class lines were blurred, and largely disregarded. This shouldn't be surprising, as taverns were central to the organizational structure of, and planning within, the Sons of Liberty. So much so that it wouldn't be a stretch to suggest that their very inception, existence, and success, was only made possible because of the ubiquitous role of the tavern in colonial society. Though still highly debated amongst historians, this mixing of classes doesn't tell the whole picture, and further investigation highlights that class-conflict was still as prevalent within the Sons of Liberty, as it was in the taverns, during the years leading up to the Revolution.

Class becomes important not only in analyzing the role that ideologies played in the years leading up to the Revolution, but also in understanding how and why particular events unfolded the way they did. For the Sons of Liberty, the pre-existing class structure of colonial society, in many ways was a gift, and a reality they could exploit to further progress their own agendas. The leaders within the organization, generally merchants and politicians, or at the least, the "middling-sorts," understood that they needed the masses on board with their political motivations. As a result, they were careful to remain shrouded in secrecy, recruiting colonists from the lower classes to become politically active, and rally the masses. Though not always ideologically driven, members of the Sons of Liberty relied on Revolutionary rhetoric, in an effort to directly mobilize the "lower- sorts," into action.

Isaac Sears, a well to do merchant living in New York at the time, exemplifies this nicely. An eventual, and influential, member of the Sons of Liberty organization in

New York, he moved to the city “not for freedom but for opportunity.”³⁶ In New York, as a prominent member of the mercantile community, financial success was his primary motivation, serving on the Chamber of Commerce, and later, “on virtually all the committees formed to resist Britain in these years.”³⁷ Unlike his Boston counterpart Samuel Adams, known for his impassioned political speeches, Sears “acted where others had talked,” organizing a Military Association within the Sons of Liberty, and coordinating resistance efforts within New York.³⁸

Like Adams, however, he was extremely successful in mobilizing the mercantile community, as well as members within the Sons of Liberty, into political action in the years leading up to the American Revolution, and often accused of assembling violent mobs. Sears’ involvement, without a doubt, places him as a fundamental player in New York’s political scene, and within the Sons of Liberty, where, in 1765, they “specifically endorsed a social system in which the various ranks of men enjoyed the ‘Rights, Privileges, and Honours justly due to them in their respective Stations in a regular Subordination.’”³⁹ Though there isn’t much in the way of evidence suggesting that any ideology, other than financial freedom and success, was central to Sears’ motivations, his prominent role within the Sons of Liberty displays that, at the least, he was at the forefront of the organization, which was well known for its ideological underpinnings. Furthermore, he made active efforts to mobilize the lower classes, where violent mobs

³⁶ Maier, Pauline. *The old revolutionaries: political lives in the age of Samuel Adams*. New York: Norton, 1990. P. 58

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 61-63

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 64

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 78

often formed and carried out the actions planned by those at the top of the Sons of Liberty.

So while ideology plays a central role within figures like Samuel Adams, and even Sears (if only by association to the Sons of Liberty), a further analysis of the structures within the Sons of Liberty shows that ideological rhetoric may have been more of a political tool to “rouse the rabble,” than it was a core component to their beliefs and driving motivations. Regardless, what matters isn’t so much the authenticity, but the fact that ideology, and ideological rhetoric, was a central component, and political tool, that was employed to rally the masses into, often violent, political action. In the truest sense of “let no crisis go to waste,” the event now known as the Boston Massacre serves as an example of how those central to political planning within the Sons of Liberty, along with other elites like John Adams, purposely used the event, which was far from a massacre, to shape the narrative of a tyrannical British government, and further compel colonists into action.⁴⁰

Consensus historians view the Sons of Liberty as a top-down organization directed by the Revolution’s political leaders, like Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, and Isaac Sears, who used the organization as a way of rallying the masses into political action.⁴¹ Whether their ideological and revolutionary rhetoric reflected their actual views, or was simply used as a means to rally the masses, is irrelevant. Regardless of the reasoning, ideology often drove their rhetoric, and this rhetoric was a key component in

⁴⁰ For instance, Paul Revere’s engraving depicting the “massacre,” which circulated throughout newspapers in the colonies, served as a piece of propaganda to further incite public support. More on this later.

⁴¹ Morgan, E and H. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1953, p. 233-5.
Schlesinger, A. *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764-1776*, New York, Knopf, 1958, p. 20.

driving political mobilization within the masses. In too many instances, there is direct evidence that leaders within the organization were taking direct action to encourage the masses to mobilize into political action.

Social historians, however, taking a bottom-up approach, view the Sons of Liberty as an organization organically founded on working-class activism. While this particular class within, or associated with, the Sons of Liberty was largely influential in carrying out acts of political resistance, the political leaders within the organization often coordinated them. This sentiment is expressed in Young's work on Hewes, even if subconsciously. While he spends ample time explaining what likely mobilized Hewes, showing that he was able to act independently, he concedes that the events people likes Hewes participated in were "organized by the radical Whig leaders of Boston," where the Sons of Liberty "converted the town meetings into meetings of 'the whole body of the people,' ... which Hutchinson found 'consisted principally of the Lower ranks or People & even Journeymen Tradesmen were brought in to increase the number of the Rabble & the Rabble were not excluded yet there were divers Gentlemen of Good Fortunes among them.'"⁴² This demonstrates the role of class within the organization, and sheds insight into the role of ideology within the group, and how it was used to further their political agenda. Additionally, to further demonstrate that the masses were, in many cases, controlled or influenced by political elites at the top, one need look no further than rouge actions taken by the "mob," and the responses they garnered from the organization, who did not condone all the riots they were responsible for instigating.

⁴² Young, A., "The Shoemaker and the Tea Party." p. 42.

In one instance, an angry mob formed in the streets of Boston, and impulsively looted and destroyed the house of Thomas Hutchinson. The Sons viewed this act unfavorably, did not condone it as they viewed it as harmful to the Patriotic cause, and in this instance (as well as others in which they did not condone the actions of the “rabble”) sought to sever all ties to the colonial mob.⁴³ So while it is true that the mob often had a mind of its own, carrying out acts that were not supported by members within the Sons of Liberty, or other Patriotic leaders, they were still directly influenced by them on several occasions.

Indeed, those at the top of the organization certainly saw themselves separately from the “rabble,” and the “mob,” even though both were directly involved with, or influenced by, the Sons of Liberty. Here, George Robert Twelve Hewes again serves as a representation of the class structure within the organization. Directly involved in the Boston Tea Party, he was even appointed a position of leadership in the event. However, there is no evidence he had any role in its planning, which was largely done by those at the forefront of the organization. He was simply compelled into political action, like so many others, as he joined the mob that evening in participatory action, and even placed in a position of leadership. This tactic was employed on more than one occasion, as members of the Sons of Liberty understood the need to separate themselves from violence, and mob action. They also understood the necessity of having the masses on board with their political desires.

⁴³ Hoerder, D, *Boston Leaders and Boston Crowds: 1765-1776*,“ in A. F. Young (ed.), *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1976, p. 240-6.

This further demonstrates the function and organization within the Sons of Liberty, where those in charge actively sought to instigate the lower classes into action. The unintended consequence was that the mob often acted upon their own volition, and not always in the way the Sons of Liberty would have hoped. Hewes, again, finds his way into such an episode, when he unintentionally served a fundamental role in the tarring and feathering of John Malcolm in 1774. Hewes saw Malcolm threatening to hit a boy with a cane, at which point Hewes intervened. Malcolm insisted that Hewes, being of the lower class, and an “impertinent rascal,” should “not speak to a gentleman in the street.”⁴⁴ At this point, Malcolm directed his anger at Hewes, and struck him with his cane, causing a massive gash to his forehead that required medical attention. Following this, a mob had formed, ultimately taking Malcolm to be tarred and feathered; something to which Hewes had actually objected. In this instance, it appears true that the mob acted organically and under their own free will, separate from any influence or direction from the Sons of Liberty, or anyone else.

However, this doesn't negate the known instances in which the Sons of Liberty directly coordinated events in secrecy that would be carried out by the mob, which publicly had no affiliation. It is also possible that the Sons of Liberty did play a role in this event, but succeeded in keeping their role a secret, and publicly denouncing the event to further separate themselves from an event that could have been harmful to their cause, and the integrity of their organization, as a whole. In any case, direct evidence of the Sons of Liberty coordinating particular events carried out by the mob, along with their tendency to publicly denounce mob-action they did not condone, shows an awareness on

⁴⁴ *Boston-Gazette and Country Journal*, 31 January 1774. The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr Jr., Massachusetts Historical Society

their part that they were intentionally, and actively, coordinating events that appeared to be solely a result of mob action.

If however, it is assumed that the Sons of Liberty played no role, this event then functions as one of those occasions where the mob – encouraged and mobilized in other instances as a direct result of planning within the Sons of Liberty – began to react to events under their own volition, often to the dismay of leaders within the Sons. That the Sons relied on these colonists and their willingness to act, but sought to distance themselves from them when they acted on their own will in an unfavorable way, further demonstrates the class structures within the organization, as well as the need for the orchestrators within the Sons of Liberty to actively manipulate, and encourage, “the rabble,” to do their bidding. It was imperative that there was an appearance that these events were natural reactions by the people (and in many cases, they were), rather than being influenced, or directly coordinated, by influential people and groups like the Sons of Liberty. This Revolution would be theirs’, but not without convincing the rest of the colonial populace that this was everyone’s revolution: and that required political action from the “lower sorts,” and working classes.

III. The Influential “Spirits” and “Intoxicated” Mob

Having a better understanding of class, and the operations within the spaces of colonial taverns and the Sons of liberty, this section seeks to fit this analysis within space into the bigger picture of class in revolutionary colonial society. The idea that class played such a significant role in the political actions of colonists is nothing new. It didn’t take years of evolving scholarship, uncovering long lost documents, or curating abstract theories. In fact, the idea that an elite class was essentially pulling the strings, or driving

the sentiments and actions of the masses, was discussed directly in the years in which it was all unfolding, by both Tory loyalists in the colonies, as well as patriotic colonists. Following the implementation of the Stamp Act in 1765, and the riots that ensued in Boston, Governor Thomas Hutchinson penned a letter to his friend in Britain, Thomas Pownall, outlining the colonies' relationship with the crown, and highlighting the political climate at the time in the colonies.

He expresses his amusement of the “present model of government among us,” where the “lowest branch... consists of the rabble of the town of Boston.”⁴⁵ This group – which he refers to as a “branch,” metaphorically, to describe the distribution of power amongst classes -- was “headed by one Mackintosh,” who Hutchinson “imagine[s] [Pownall has] never heard of,” and were the ones responsible “when there is occasion to hang or burn effigies or pull down houses.”⁴⁶ While this group was largely responsible for the political activism in Boston, they were “controuled by a superior set consisting of the master masons [and] carpenters of the town.”⁴⁷ This “superior set,” in which he is referring to, is the Loyal Nine (a precursor to the Sons of Liberty in Boston). And even still, Hutchinson suggests that this group, though planning events and directing people like Mackintosh and James Otis, were likely subordinate to “a committee of merchants,” or politicians, “when anything of more importance is to be determined,” beyond the occasions to “burn effigies or pull down houses.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Thomas Hutchinson to Thomas Pownall. March 8, 1766. AC 1 (Massachusetts Archives, SC1/45X, 26:207–14).

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

Ebenezer Mackintosh, like Hewes, was a shoemaker, who was essentially enlisted by the Loyal Nine to rally large crowds of commoners to carry out political protests and actions in the city of Boston. It was essential to cultivate an image that these were grassroots movements, and not events carefully planned by colonial elites, like merchants and politicians. To do so, the Loyal Nine, and later, the Sons of Liberty, made certain to keep their identities secret. Henry Bass, a well-off merchant, and member of the Loyal Nine, made this all too clear in a letter he penned to Samuel Savage in 1765, where he not only expresses the group's symbiotic relationship with the press as a means of rallying public support, but also notes the importance of keeping their organization private, and cultivating the notion that these were organic, unplanned events.

Bass writes to Savage that, while “We do every thing in order to keep this and the first Affair Private,” and are “pleas'd to hear that McIntosh has the Credit of the whole Affair;” “The whole affair [was] transacted by the Loyall Nine,” both “in writing the Letter [and] getting the advertisements Printed.”⁴⁹ The affair in which Bass is speaking of refers to the climactic resignation of Andrew Oliver, a Massachusetts official responsible for implementing the provisions of the Stamp Act. Oliver, fearing for his life, had essentially been forced into making the decision to resign from his position following an event that was led by Mackintosh, and fueled by the mob he had rallied. The rioters had used Oliver's furniture to start a bonfire in which an effigy of Oliver was hung over.

Publicly, Mackintosh was credited for sparking the event, but behind the scenes were the members of the Loyal Nine. This, however, doesn't suggest that Mackintosh was at the total beck-and-call of the Loyal Nine (or later, the Sons) – for after all, he was

⁴⁹Letter from Henry Bass to Samuel P. Savage, 19 December 1765. From *The Savage Papers*. Massachusetts Historical Society.

also responsible for instigating the riot that led to the destruction of Thomas Hutchinson's home; something they did not approve of, or at least publicly denounced. Essentially, while the Sons of Liberty, and other elites, succeeded in rallying the masses to their cause, it was impossible to hold total control over them. Once the masses were rallied and politically impassioned, it would be significantly harder to direct their actions, keep them from developing a mind of their own, and prevent them from reacting to certain news and events under the direction of those above them in social rank.

Mackintosh, and his ability to rile up large crowds, has been the focus of an abundance of scholarship in regards to the structure of the Sons of Liberty. To someone like historian Gary Nash, the Sons of Liberty were a bottom-up manifestation where the general populace comprised the backbone of the organization.⁵⁰ Nash explains his argument -- that the radical spirit of the organization was within the masses, not the elite -- when he notes that "Master artisans and petty entrepreneurs are organized powerfully in the Sons of Liberty, [while] lower artisans and laborers of the South and North Ends had submerged their rivalry in the face of the threat of stamps."⁵¹ Though there is some truth in this, the direct evidence from the time period shows that in too many instances, it was precisely those that had "organized powerfully," within the organization directing people like Mackintosh in Boston. Mackintosh's tendency to spark riots that were unapproved by the organization doesn't suggest that leaders within the Sons of Liberty weren't still heavily in control, especially when accounting for the fact that the Sons of Liberty, as noted earlier in Bass' letter to Savage, intentionally remained in secret, and let others,

⁵⁰ Nash, Gary. *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness and the Origins of the American Revolution*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979. P. viii.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 306

like Mackintosh, take credit for events they had planned. In many instances where Mackintosh instigated or rallied up a riot seemingly on his own volition, it is more than possible that the Sons of Liberty had a hand in it.

Due to the abundance of direct evidence, the majority of historians have concluded that the Sons of Liberty were more of a top-down organization.⁵² To Morgan, even though the Sons of Liberty “could not have succeeded in their ambitions without the support of their social inferiors,” since “their plans required the use of violence,” which the Sons distanced themselves from, it was still a matter where “gentlemen seem to have held the reins among the Son of Liberty.”⁵³ This particular view acknowledges the importance of the “lower-sorts,” and how the masses were central to the radical actions carried out, but recognizes that still, there were those at the top of the organization, belonging to the “better and wiser,” sort, that were planning and driving these events. And to historian Edward Countryman, the Sons of Liberty can’t be “understood either as a vanguard of lower classes or as domestic revolutionaries,” but instead, as an “organized and disciplined cadre,” that stirred up public support, planned radical events, and when the support proved harmful to their cause, severed all ties from the masses and their actions.⁵⁴

In Boston, there is a class structure where merchants and politicians sit above organizations like the Sons of Liberty, who serve to plan and influence political activism of the masses in secret through their recruitment of people like Mackintosh. However, other regional organizations of the Sons of Liberty in other cities, with a similar system in

⁵² Though plenty, particularly social historians, contest this, claiming the organization was a bottom-up manifestation of lower-class political activism.

⁵³ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, p. 193

⁵⁴ Countryman, Edward., *A People in Revolution*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1980. P. 59

place, were not so secretive about who was planning and influencing these radical events. In Virginia, the “better and wiser sort,” were well known within the community, and chose not to remain as shrouded in mystery as their Boston contemporaries. In 1766, the Virginia chapter of the Sons of Liberty organized and planned a similar event to what happened in Boston, getting their Stamp Act collector, John Mercer, to resign. Governor Fauquier wrote to the Lords of Trade that “This Concourse of People, I should call a Mob, did I not know that it was chiefly, if not altogether, Composed of Gentlemen of Property in the Colony,” including merchants and heads of counties.⁵⁵

Following the implementation of the Stamp Act, similar events were taking place all across the colonies, with mobs taking to the streets to protest, often violently, in an effort to force stamp collectors into resignation. As noted by Morgan, with supporting evidence, “every colony,” had “a group who designated themselves as the ‘Sons of Liberty,’” which was “composed of prominent and well-to-do citizens,” or “at least had their backing;” and that “The episodes of violence which defeated the Stamp Act in America were planned and prepared by men who were recognized at the time as belonging to the ‘better and wiser part.’”⁵⁶ Further, in some colonies, these men chose not to remain in secrecy, or hide their influence, while in other colonies, like Boston, they took the opposite approach. Regardless, “merchants, lawyers and plantation owners may have appeared seldom enough in the actual work of destruction, but that they directed the show from behind the scenes is suggested by every surviving piece of evidence.”⁵⁷

Following the Stamp Act, these events, coordinated by the well-to-do, and typically, the

⁵⁵ Fauquier to Lords of Trade, November 3, 1765, House of Lords Manuscripts, January 27, 1766.

⁵⁶ Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, p. 187.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Sons of Liberty, took place across the colonies, in locations including Virginia, Newport, Boston, Philadelphia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and New York, for example.⁵⁸ The fact that these events occurred in such similar fashion, all across the colonies, with similar newspaper coverage of each event shared throughout the colonies, suggests the work of a network of organizations, like the Sons of Liberty, and other merchants and politicians of the upper sort.

Within this coordinated effort, newspapers came to be one of the primary influencing factors in driving public sentiment at this time, and one of the more useful tools employed by the Sons of Liberty. Publishers and printers had obvious financial motives to be against the Stamp Act — which imposed a tax on each piece of paper they would be printing on — and were sympathetic to the cause regardless of their relationship to members of the Sons of Liberty. Furthermore, printers in several towns, including Boston, Providence, and Philadelphia, were actual members within the organization of the Sons of Liberty, making it that much easier for the organization to publish articles and opinion pieces that would serve to rally the public behind their cause, and further promote the idea that this was a “peoples revolution.”

Benjamin Edes, along with John Gill, for instance, were both members of the Sons of Liberty, as well as publishers of the Boston Gazette. This connection understandably played a crucial role in rallying the masses, as it gave members of the organization easy access to publishing sensational articles that would stir the public, along with the ability to run identical stories in varying newspapers across all colonies. These newspaper articles, often read aloud alongside pamphlets at colonial taverns,

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 187-191

typically covered events often carried out by the “rabble,” and in some cases, actually fueled further action, including violent riots. In Boston, as noted earlier, these events were often sparked by Mackintosh under the direction of the Loyal Nine – though it was important that they, along with other notable figures, not get the attention, or be associated with the violence and action of the mob. The tavern served as the perfect place to plan the events in secret, while the newspaper served as the perfect means to publicize them after they had been carried out. And to further demonstrate the synergetic relationship between taverns, newspapers, and the Sons of Liberty: once it was all said and done, the Sons of Liberty would have an article published in the newspaper dramatically covering the event, where it would be read aloud to the excited patrons in the common room at the tavern.

To this end, it is essential to revisit the Boston Massacre, and Paul Revere’s woodcut engraving, to further demonstrate the operations of the Sons of Liberty, and the importance of the newspaper in igniting public support. Revere, though not a member of the Loyal Nine, had close ties to many of its members, and would later come to be part of the Sons of Liberty under a sub-organization he lead known as the “Mechanics,” who served as a type of intelligence network monitoring British activity in the colonies. The hyperbolic engraving wasn’t exactly accurate, showing a kind of planned act of aggression by the Red Coats, firing their muskets, on order, into a crowd of defenseless and passive colonists. Far from a massacre, with plenty of blame to go around, the engraving depicting the event made its way into nearly every major colonial newspaper, along with equally sensational articles. This piece of propaganda serves as another

example of the active effort by those in influential positions to rally the commoners to their cause, and how effective a network it was.

Analysis of the Boston Massacre, and the associated trials, has been abundant over the years. What is generally agreed upon is that the general unfolding of the event still remains a mystery, and its label as a “massacre,” is an exaggeration, highlighting how revolutionary radicals, like the Sons of Liberty, used this event as a political tool at the time. Hiller Zobel, former lawyer and associate justice, is one of the leading legal scholars on John Adams, and the Boston Massacre, offering an in-depth analysis of the event and its legal proceedings in his book *The Boston Massacre*. Though his analysis is centered on the role of the law, and the “diminish[ing] respect for the law,” in the period of 1765-1770, he offers similar commentary and analysis to leading historians on the role of the “mob,” radical revolutionaries, and the general relationship between actors of different classes during this time.⁵⁹

During the time of the Boston Massacre, “The mob, and whoever was directing it, controlled Boston.”⁶⁰ The mob, comprised of “rough, loud, frequently intoxicated,” “husky, willing bully-boys,” for whom “rioting was almost a ritual,” mostly acts because it is manipulated by the “keepers.”⁶¹ Their passion “could be turned on or off to suit the policies of its directors,” who are the Sons of Liberty working “behind the scenes,” “to achieve political ends,” through propaganda in various forms, including “staging,” riots, meetings, and mass funerals.⁶² Zobel recognizes the relationship between the mob, and

⁵⁹ Zobel, Hiller B. *The Boston Massacre*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996. p. 46

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 32

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 26-41

⁶² *Ibid.*

those directing them; but more importantly, places equal significance on both groups in regards to their influence at the time.⁶³

IV. Conclusion

At this point, the relationship between class in the colonies, and the political climate in the colonies in the years preceding the Revolution, should be clear through heavy analysis of class within spaces like taverns and the Sons of Liberty. The debates occurring between historians on this matter seems to stem on determining which class, or individuals, were more important or influential, and more deserving of their focus. Perhaps focus should be less concerned on particular actors, and centered on, as Fischer put it, “the idea of contingency,” and “study[ing] historical events as a series of real choices that living people actually made.”⁶⁴ Should attention be paid to individuals, classes, or groups, it’d be far more useful to look at the aggregate for a true reflection of the time and its events. As noted earlier, this selective approach does a disservice, by failing to account for all involved and acknowledging the big picture. In acknowledging that those from all classes were crucial, it is necessary to return to the example of interpretations of the Sons of Liberty, and arguments over whether they were a top-down, or bottom-up organization. What should be clear from earlier is that, while the masses made up the majority, and were the ones who often carried out the events (sometimes at their own discretion), they were directed (or heavily influenced) by elites, typically

⁶³ This same dynamic is at play during the trials of Thomas Preston, where there is a sense that the “lower sort,” are getting more political opportunities to participate, particularly in offering testimony on the event, when in reality, elites like John Adams are pulling the strings. For more on the trials, and the ensuing propaganda before, during and after the trials, see Zobel, *The Boston Massacre*; Linder, Douglas. "The Boston Massacre Trials: An Account." Famous Trials. <http://www.famous-trials.com/massacre/196-home>., and Linder, Douglas. "The Boston Massacre Trials: An Account." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2007. doi:10.2139/ssrn.1021327.

⁶⁴ Fischer, D.H., *Paul Revere's Rid.* p. iv-v.

members within the Sons of Liberty, who desperately needed the participation of the masses, or mob, to succeed in their plans.

While all participatory groups and classes served necessary components in carrying out these events, and developing an environment suitable for breeding revolutionary spirit within the colonies, it is evident that major, well-known elites, or the upper-sorts, were largely responsible for planning these events and influencing the masses, particularly through a complex network where they relied on tavern culture, their connections to print media, and the powerful influence of their gentile members. Though revolutionary rhetoric expressed a democratic, egalitarian spirit, it is clear that class-systems still existed, and heavily contributed to the way events unfolded in the years preceding the Revolution. In analyzing the tavern as a microcosm of colonial society, as well as the dynamic relationship of class within the Sons of Liberty, it is clear that these class systems existed, were often exploited, and were incredibly influential in their effects on particular events, and the general political climate within the colonies -- even within spaces and organizations that, in outward appearance, blurred class-lines, and were generally accepting of all members regardless of socioeconomic background. Specific evidence, particularly noted in regards to the Stamp Act Crisis, suggests a coordinated effort where merchants and politicians worked with members of the Sons of Liberty, who in turn employed commoners, like Ebenezer Mackintosh, to rally the masses into political action. This highlights the general relationship between the classes in colonial society, and the influencing role it played within colonial politics and revolutionary events.

The idea that particular elites were generally planning these events, and directly influencing the masses and lower sorts, during the Revolutionary era, is something that

continued long after the Revolution. While this claim certainly calls for far more research in which this article and research hopes to address in the future, it can be seen clearly in the formation of the American government, and the conversations that took place during the Philadelphia Convention in drafting the Constitution, which continue to show a level of perceived superiority from elites, and anxieties concerning the masses, or the mob.⁶⁵

While the “influential spirits,” may have played a significant role in driving the actions of an “intoxicated mob,” those from all classes were still actively participating, and generally rallied into the revolutionary cause, thus placing equal importance on the role of all participants (at the least in regards to understanding how and why events unfolded as they did, along with the perceptions and ideologies of those involved). In taking this approach, a more accurate depiction of the colonies during these years emerges, displaying how and why Patriots of all classes were influenced, motivated and mobilized into political action. Conclusively, the major ideas and events of Revolutionary America, while including members of all colonial classes, were generally coordinated and planned by “the Keepers,” or generally, an elite class of colonists seeking to mobilize the masses into political action to further their agenda. This phenomenon, while not new at the time, continued to influence American society and politics in the years that followed, arguably still strongly affecting the country today.

⁶⁵ For instance, Anti-Federalist #9 expressed concerns of bringing the “better kind of people,” down to the “level of the rabble,” and guarding “against every possible danger from this lower house,” since most men are “more readily led than driven.” Federalist #10 addresses these concerns with their proposal of a republic, where “a small number of citizens [i.e. elites/upper sorts/those at the convention]... whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of the country,” are “elected by the rest,” to prevent the “rabble,” or lower sorts from having too much political influence. This further demonstrates colonial class systems, and that the upper, and even middling, sorts, perceiving themselves superior, were simply using the “rabble,” as political tools. For further information, see the conversations taking place between the Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers.

Works Cited

- Adams, John. "Diary of John Adams, Volume, Novr. 25th. 1760." The Adams Papers. <https://www.masshist.org/publications/apde2/view?id=ADMS-01-01-02-0005-0007-0012>.
- Bailyn, Bernard. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Boston-Gazette and Country Journal*, 31 January 1774. The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr Jr., Massachusetts Historical Society
- Carp, Benjamin L. *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Countryman, Edward., *A People in Revolution*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- Daigler, Kenneth A. "The United Front Campaign That Led to the American Revolution." In *Spies, Patriots, and Traitors: American Intelligence in the Revolutionary War*. Georgetown University Press, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.unh.edu/stable/j.ctt6wpkz8.7>.
- Fischer, D.H., *Paul Revere's Ride*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Fauquier to Lords of Trade, November 3, 1765, House of Lords Manuscripts, January 27, 1766.
- Hamilton, Alexander. *Itinerarium*. New York: Arno Press, 1971.
- Hamilton, Alexander, James Madison, and John Jay. 1982. *The Federalist papers*. New York: Bantam.
- Hewes, George. "Eyewitness Account by George Hewes." Boston Tea Party Historical Society. 2008. <http://www.boston-tea-party.org/account-george-hewes.html>.
- Hoerder, D, Boston Leaders and Boston Crowds: 1765-1776," in A. F. Young (ed.), *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1976.
- Ketcham, Ralph. 1986. *The Anti-Federalist papers ; and, the constitutional convention debates*. New York: New American Library.
- Letter from Henry Bass to Samuel P. Savage, 19 December 1765. From *The Savage Papers*. Massachusetts Historical Society.
- Linder, Douglas. "The Boston Massacre Trials: An Account." Famous Trials. <http://www.famous-trials.com/massacre/196-home>
- Linder, Douglas. "The Boston Massacre Trials: An Account." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2007. doi:10.2139/ssrn.1021327.
- Maier, Pauline. *The old revolutionaries: political lives in the age of Samuel Adams*. New York: Norton, 1990.
- McDonnell, Michael and David Waldstreicher. "Revolution in the Quarterly? A Historiographical Analysis." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (2017): 633-66. doi:10.5309/willmaryquar.74.4.0633.
- Morgan, E and H. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1953.
- Nash, Gary B. *The Unknown American Revolution the Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*. London: Pimlico, 2007.

- Nash, Gary. *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness and the Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Salinger, Sharon V. *Taverns and Drinking in Early America*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.
- Schlesinger, A. *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764-1776*, New York, Knopf, 1958.
- Scribner, Vaughn. "Cosmopolitan Colonists: Gentlemens Pursuit of Cosmopolitanism and Hierarchy in British American Taverns." *Atlantic Studies* 10, no. 4 (2013): p. 3. doi:10.1080/14788810.2013.832473.
- Thomas Hutchinson to Thomas Pownall. March 8, 1766. AC 1 (Massachusetts Archives, SC1/45X, 26:207–14).
- Thompson, Peter. *Rum Punch and Revolution Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.
- Young, Alfred F. *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999.
- Wood, Gordon S. *Radicalism of the American Revolution*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- Zobel, Hiller B. *The Boston Massacre*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996.