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LEADERSHIP EDUCATION ADVANCING
DEMOCRACY & DIVERSITY
A PROJECT OF INTERFAITH ALLIANCE

Voices of Reason: Samuel Adams

Although perhaps best known today for a popular beer named for him, Samuel Adams was widely recognized in colonial America as a radical revolutionary and a dynamic speaker. Adams drew on the Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke (1632-1704), emphasizing freedom of conscience as both a philosophical and a political virtue. To him the principles of political and religious freedom were inevitably intertwined. In his own words, “The religion and public liberty of people are so intimately connected, their interests are interwoven, and cannot exist separately.” (Church 8)

Even though Sam Adams was himself a tax collector, he strongly opposed Britain’s imposition of the Stamp Act (a tax on all printed papers and documents, including wills, newspapers, and playing cards) and was, in fact, the first to propose the establishment of a Continental Congress among the American colonies.

Directions: Samuel Adams’ own words can be read in Chapter 2 of *The Separation of Church and State* edited by Forrest Church. Read pages 11-15 starting with the first full paragraph (“Sam Adams’s greatest contribution. . .”), which provides an introduction to Adams’ “The Rights of the Colonists” (1772) which follows. This forward-looking document, in support of the independence of the American colonies, anticipated the Declaration of Independence by four years.

Be prepared to discuss the following questions:

1. Describe the person and historical context of this individual who is promoting the idea of religious liberty.
2. What arguments does the individual make for **religious** liberty?
3. What limits, if any, does this person place on the practice of religious liberty? [HINT: In this case, pay attention to what Adams says about Roman Catholics or Papists]. What do you speculate might be the source of this prejudice?]