

USE YOUR GAVEL, MR. ADAMS!

(A fictionalized dramatization of a Town Meeting — circa 1776)

Written by Priscilla Lates

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Town Crier: (Enters room ringing bell) Hear ye, hear ye! Town meeting today! Use your gavel, Mr. Adams!

Samuel Adams: (Bangs 3 times) Ladies and gentlemen, I am Samuel Adams. We are gathered here ... because the time has come to consider INDEPENDENCE.

Townpeople: (Rise with picket signs) Independence! Long live the King! Freedom! Nay!

Crier: (Rings bell) Use your gavel, Mr. Adams!

Adams: (Bangs 3 times) Order, order! Those who wish to be heard will have their turn. We will conduct this meeting in a democratic fashion. (Turns and shakes his finger at a portrait of King George) Take heed, King George III!

Loyalists: (Rise, hold up signs) To the King! Long live the King!

Patriots: (Rise) Down with the King! Independence now!

Crier: (Rings bell) Use your gavel, Mr. Adams!

Adams: (Bangs 3 times) Mr. Benjamin Franklin, you may have the floor.

Franklin: (Rises) Almost twenty years ago, my fellow Pennsylvanians sent me to England to handle our tax problems. We were taxed on 55 separate items ... and we had no say as to whether or not we wanted to be taxed. I used all my charm and good sense to get the English to repeal the taxes ... get rid of them. Alas, I was not successful.

Adams: Mr. Thomas Jefferson, you may speak now.

Jefferson: The Stamp Tax was unfair. We were taxed on everything from lead to glass and paint and tea.

Townpeople: Tea?

Jefferson: Yes, tea ... and even on marriage licenses.

Townpeople: (Mutter to each other)

Paul Revere: (Rises without acknowledgment from Adams) And on silverware in my shop! All my customers complained about how unfair these taxes were!

Adams: Please raise your hand the next time you wish to be heard Mr. Revere ... Mr. Thomas Paine, your turn to speak.

Paine: (Rises) The important thing to remember, my fellow Americans, is that we were taxed and are now being taxed without our consent. Our rights are being taken away!

A Loyalist: (Shouts) We should obey the King! We must pay our taxes because we are all British subjects!

A Loyalist: We are all Englishmen who happen to be living on American soil. King George is our ruler. He decides what is best for us.

Townspeople: (Shouts) Nay, down with the King! live King George! To the King, long live King George!

Crier: (Rings bell) Use your gavel, Mr. Adams!

Adams: Order! Order! ... Mr. Thomas Paine.

Paine: Are we all sheep? ... We had been making our own laws, deciding what was best for us. Then England got into debt ... owed all that money because of their wars. King George looked across the ocean and said, "Let's tax the Americans to pay for our wars."

Adams: Mr. John Hancock.

Hancock: And that's exactly what he did He imposed the Stamp Tax on us. Should we obey bad laws?

A Patriot: No! That's why we boycotted English products. We didn't buy English goods. We picketed! We protested! We demonstrated!

A Loyalist: You were hurting our English cousins by not buying their products. It's perfectly understandable. We are all English, you know.

Adams: Mr. George Washington.

Washington: It was not long before we were taxed again. afford it, but that wasn't the point. England had no right to tax us without our representation.

Adams: We were so angry! We wrote letters to all the colonies asking them to help get rid of the taxes. So what happened? British troops were sent to Boston to keep law and order!

A Patriot: That was a terrible time! ... One cold day ... there was snow on the ground. My son and some friends gathered around the soldiers. Some say they threw snowballs at the soldiers. The soldiers were young and frightened. They fired into the crowd. My son and four other young men were killed. (Cries out) They were massacred!

A Loyalist: It wasn't a massacre! The soldiers were there to protect law-abiding citizens like myself. Those men were rowdies, up to no good!

Townpeople: (Commotion. Taking sides. Very noisy)

Crier: (Rings bell) Use your gavel, Mr. Adams!

Adams: (Bangs 3 times) Order! Order! Let's get on with the meeting!

Washington: So once again the English repealed the taxes ... all except the tax on tea.

Adams: Mr. Patrick Henry.

Henry: Well, the Sons of Liberty were furious! One night, dressed as Indians, they boarded a ship in Boston Harbor and dumped its cargo of tea into the sea.

Townpeople: (Gasping) Oh my! Oh no! The English deserved it! How dare they!

Jefferson: (Takes gavel — bangs 3 times) All the colonists heard about it ... Even in Virginia where I live, how the English governor closed the port to punish Boston. No ships could enter or leave.

A Loyalist: That was an unlawful thing to do!

Adams: That was an act of Civil Disobedience. We were willing to pay for the tea.

A Loyalist: You are an agitator and a troublemaker, Mr. Samuel Adams! Because the port was closed, we suffered hardships.

Paine: That's the price we pay for wanting freedom, Madam. These are the times that try men's souls.

Revere: And last but not least, you all know about my famous ride. One night, I rode to Lexington and Concord to warn the Minutemen that the British were coming. They wanted to find and arrest Mr. Adams and destroy our ammunition. A battle took place and many men were killed on both sides.

Adams: You were very brave and saved my life ... That first shot that rang out ... That was the signal for FREEDOM!

Franklin: I say we declare ourselves free and independent, now!

Townpeople: (Shouts) Freedom now! Independence! Traitors! Long live King George!

Adams: Order! Order! Mr. Patrick Henry wishes to speak.

Henry: (Rises slowly) I know not what course others may take, but as for me ... Give me liberty or give me death!

Townspeople: (shouts) Hooray! Traitor! Freedom! Death to the Traitor!

Jefferson: (Stands with document in hand ... quiets the assemblage) I have written a document called "The Declaration of Independence." It says that all men are created equal ... that we are born with certain rights, and that no one can take away these rights ... not even the King of England. These rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Adams: And may I add ... If a government does not protect these rights, the people have a right to change their government.

Washington: Those of us who wish to become a free and independent people will sign that document.

Adams: (Bangs 3 times) THE MEETING IS ADJOURNED!

(John Hancock, Samuel Adams, Ben Franklin, and George Washington come forward to sign the document.)

END