

# Sons of Liberty: Roots of Radicalism

Directions:

1. Read the paragraph.
2. Present the paragraph a different way. Make meaning out of what you are reading by rewriting it in your own words, drawing a comic strip, etc.

PARAGRAPH 1:

During the Parliamentary debate over the Stamp Act (1765), Isaac Barré referred to the American opponents of the new tax as the "Sons of Liberty." Secret radical groups in the colonies adopted this name and worked to oppose the stamp tax and other later parliamentary revenue programs.

PARAGRAPH 2:

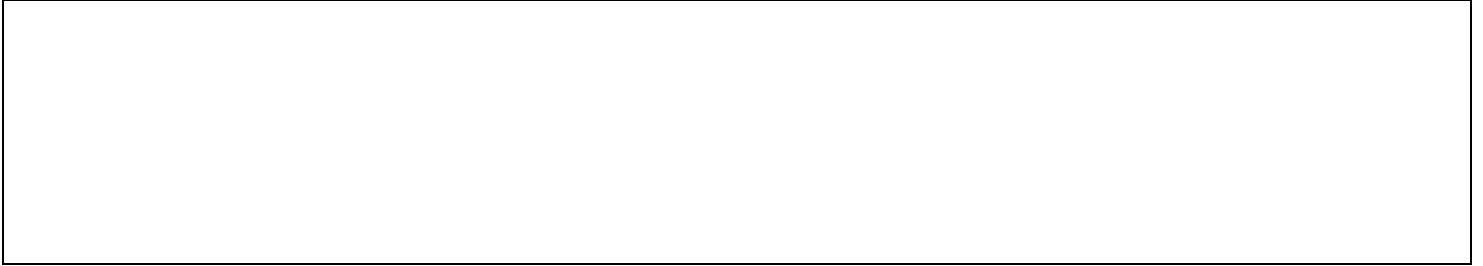
Membership in the Sons of Liberty was largely middle class with more upper-class representation than lower. Relationships were often negotiated with street elements, which sometimes conducted violent actions — often without the Sons' approval. A streak of conservatism remained a hallmark of the Sons until the 1770s. Initially they saw their role as the organizers of protests against specific government policies and not as the disrupters of royal authority.

PARAGRAPH 3:

The first such group was formed in New York City in the fall of 1765. Its leaders were Isaac Sears and Alexander McDougall, both prosperous self-made men and neither a beneficiary of inherited wealth. Loyalty to these men was widespread among the city's working elements.

PARAGRAPH 4:

One of their first contributions to Stamp Act opposition was to enforce non-importation agreements. Greedy merchants would occasionally handle forbidden products, if the price were right. If discovered, the New York Sons of Liberty would force the guilty merchants to make humiliating public confessions. There were few repeat offenders. The New Yorkers also were active with contacting other colonies and encouraging resistance through committees of correspondence.



PARAGRAPH 5:

Not all New York demonstrations remained peaceful. In May 1766, the Sons interrupted the opening performance at a new theater by shouting, "Liberty!" and forcing the audience into the street. Wigs and other signs of class distinction were taken from the theatergoers. The building was pulled down and the resulting jumble of wood was used for a great bonfire.



PARAGRAPH 6:

Sam Adams and Paul Revere headed the Sons of Liberty in Massachusetts. The Sons there also organized demonstrations, enforced boycotts, and occasionally resorted to violence to advance their agenda. Similar groups were later formed in the Carolinas, Virginia & Georgia. The Sons of Liberty's influence waned in most of the colonies following the repeal of the Stamp Act in early 1766. However, the movement was revived with the passage of the Townshend Acts in 1767, and would remain a fixture of American resistance to the time of independence.

