

Loyalists and Patriots

The Revolutionary War era was a time of immense turmoil for the American colonists, no matter where their allegiances lay. By comparing and contrasting these two artworks, we can examine both sides of the dispute over independence and how the issue directly affected the lives of those involved. Those who rebelled against the control and oppression of Britain were termed **Patriots**. The family of Mrs. James Smith and her grandson Campbell Smith were steadfast patriots, with many family members participating in the military and early government in order to secure independence from Britain. British **Loyalists**, like Robert Hooper, remained loyal to the English king during the war and made up approximately 15 to 20 percent of the population of the thirteen American colonies.



Robert Hooper, ca. 1770-72, John Singleton Copley, Smithsonian American Art Museum

Political affiliations at this time were often dictated by economic factors and not personal concerns. Joining the rallying cry of “independence” was not a simple decision. Wealthy merchants in port cities were especially adverse to independence as it would harm their business. Those in the importing and exporting business, like Robert Hooper, relied heavily on trade with England. Their business was vital for providing for their families and so no matter their personal feelings, biting the hand that fed them was not an option.

Perhaps not by coincidence, the painters that were commissioned to paint these portraits shared the political sympathies of their sitters; Charles Willson Peale was an ardent Patriot and a member of the **Sons of Liberty**, while John Singleton Copley, a family friend of Robert Hooper’s, was a vocal Loyalist who was forced to flee to England to escape persecution for his political beliefs.

Loyalists

Loyalists were those in the colonies who remained loyal to the British crown during the American war for independence. They were also known as King’s Men, Tories, and Royalists. They considered themselves to be British citizens and therefore believed revolution to be treason. The majority of these Loyalists belonged to the wealthy merchant class in the colonies, their livelihood dependent on trade and good relations with Britain. Because of their strong

affinity with Great Britain, it is not surprising that these colonists favored styles that were characteristically British, including the style of their portrait paintings.



John Singleton Copley Self-Portrait, 1780-1784, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

British fashions and furnishings, designs and décor all were in vogue for the colonial elite to emulate. Wealthy colonial men and women, particularly Loyalists, were enamored with the current trends in British portrait painting. While these men and women could afford to travel to sit for famed British artists like Thomas Gainsborough or Joshua Reynolds, many chose to employ an artist in the colonies who had similar training and stylistic attributes as Gainsborough and Reynolds. For the elite in Boston, only one artist had all of these qualities – **John Singleton Copley**. Not only was Copley trained in London, but his own personal political leanings were that of a Loyalist.

The Hooper family of Marblehead, Massachusetts, a port town just north of Boston, were one of Copley's richest patrons and provided Copley with numerous commissions. From 1763 until Copley left American shores in 1774, he painted many members of Robert Hooper Jr.'s family including his father, step-mother, and several of his siblings. In the colonies, to own a commissioned portrait indicated the owner's wealth and status because not everyone could afford to have their portrait painted. This portrait of Robert Hooper Jr., painted before the American Revolution, is an image of a successful businessman. His gaze drifts towards the open window – a nod to the source of his wealth, his mercantile and shipping businesses. Hooper grasps a stack of papers in his hands, perhaps a stack of shipping ledgers.

The Hooper family owned the largest and most profitable shipping business in Marblehead, Massachusetts, and therefore had a considerable amount of social and political influence. They were well-known Loyalists, even allowing the British commander-in-chief, and then Massachusetts governor, General Thomas Gage to use their home as his headquarters prior to the **Battles of Lexington and Concord**. The Hooper family were also vocal supporters of the royally-appointed governor of the Massachusetts colony, **Thomas Hutchinson**. Most Patriot-leaning colonists had viewed Hutchinson's performance in office as deplorable, accusing him of pushing a British agenda. He was politically polarized and was identified as the main proponent of the British taxes on the colonies. Yet several men in the Hooper family, including Robert

Hooper Jr., lent their names to a published address to Hutchinson lauding his performance in office. The address read as follows:

We, the subscribers, merchants, traders, and others, inhabitants of Marblehead, beg leave to present your our valedictory address on this occasion . . . our most sincere and hearty thanks for the ready assistance which you have at all times afforded us, when applied to in matters which affected our navigation and commerce . . . our sincere esteem and gratitude. . . In your public administration, we are fully convinced that the general good was the mark which you have ever aimed at . . . we beg leave to entreat you, that when you arrive at the court of Great Britain, you would there embrace every opportunity of moderating the resentment of the government against us.

The address was an obvious entreatment to **King George III** on the part of the colonial merchant class to see that their businesses would not suffer as a result of other colonist's treasonous activities.

These public declarations understandably did not sit well with the Patriots. Given the already unfavorable sentiments towards Hutchinson and King George, the address had many in an uproar. These statements and other persistent acts of British sympathizing by the Hooper family and other Loyalists families caused them to be subjected to public humiliation and violence. Property was vandalized, and homes were looted and burned. The tensions between the Loyalists and Patriots had reached a boiling point. In order to protect their families and businesses, many who had made the aforementioned statement were forced to publicly recant. Robert Hooper Jr.'s recantation reads as follows:

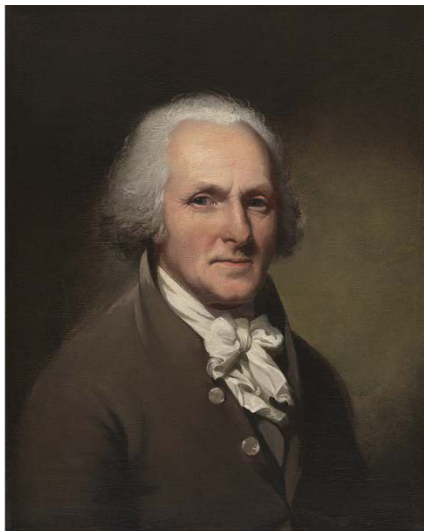
Whereas I the Subscriber did some Time since sign an Address to Governor Hutchinson, which has given just Offence to my Town and Country: I now declare, that I had not the least Design to offend either, but at the Time of signing said Address I thought it might be of Service to my Town and Country, but finding that it has not had the desired Effect, I do now renounce said Address in all its Parts, and beg that my Town and Country would forgive the Error, and I now assure them that at all Times I have been, and still am ready to the utmost of my Power, to support and defend the just Rights and Liberties of my Town and Country with my Life and Fortune. Robert Hooper, Jun. Marblehead, May 1. 1775.

Like the Hooper family, Copley himself was victimized for his Loyalist sympathies. After hosting a prominent Loyalist at his home in 1774, Copley found an angry mob at his doorstep. Frightened beyond measure for his safety and the lives of his family, Copley chose to sail for

England two months later. There the artist was well-received by British society. He soon joined the Royal Academy of Art, and in 1785 was commissioned to paint a group portrait of the three youngest daughters of King George III. Copley would never again set foot in America.

Patriots

Patriots, also known as Whigs, were the colonists who rebelled against British monarchical control. Their rebellion was based on the social and political philosophy of **republicanism**, which rejected the ideas of a monarchy and aristocracy – essentially, inherited power. Instead, the philosophy favored liberty and unalienable individual rights as its core values. Republicanism would form the intellectual basis of such core American documents as the **Declaration of Independence**, the **U.S. Constitution**, and the **Bill of Rights**.



Charles Willson Peale Self-Portrait, c. 1791,
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian
Institution

The majority of Patriots were found in the revolutionary hotbed town of Boston. There, prominent figures like **Samuel Adams** and groups such as the **Sons of Liberty** fanned the flames of revolution. Taxes like the **Stamp Act of 1765** in particular incensed the colonists. The Act required that most printed material in the colonies be printed on specially stamped paper produced in Britain. The printed material, which had to be paid for in British currency, included newspapers, magazines and legal documents. Armed conflict began in April of 1775 with the **Battles of Lexington and Concord**. Discussions about independence from the mother country intensified. In June 1776, a committee including Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams convened – drafted with the task of writing a formal statement of the colonies’ intentions. Congress formally

adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4 in Philadelphia.

Just two months later in that same city, Charles Willson Peale began the portrait of Mrs. James Smith and her grandson Campbell in September 1776. He finished the portrait months later, after he was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Philadelphia city militia. During his time in the militia, Peale was witness to George Washington’s famous crossing of the Delaware River, an event in which Peale deemed “the most hellish scene I have ever beheld,” for the crossing was a dangerous and logistically complicated military maneuver in the middle of an icy winter.

Peale, a radical Patriot, was responsible for raising troops and was eventually promoted to captain of the Philadelphia militia.

By the time John Singleton Copley had sailed for England in 1774, Peale's artistic ability almost matched that of his older colleague. Peale had studied under Copley for a time and had trained in London in the 1760s. Though he had formal training, Peale never attempted the glossy, fanciful refinement which characterizes the work of his fellow London-trained colleagues like Copley. Peale's style appealed to many, including several of those influential men driving the movement for independence, such as **George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Hancock, and Alexander Hamilton**. Perhaps it was the simplicity of his style which led William Smith to commission Peale for the double portrait of his mother, Mary, and his son, Campbell.



Mrs. James Smith and Grandson, 1776, Charles Willson Peale, Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smiths were a family of Irish immigrants who had immigrated to the colonies in the first half of the eighteenth century. William Smith began his career as a merchant in the flour and wheat trade, which began extremely profitable during the war years. He commissioned the portrait of his mother and son in 1776. Peale presents a classic image of youth and promise on one hand, age and wisdom on the other. Using light and shade, Peale delicately explores the individual emotions of each figure, revealing the depth and meaning of the grandmother and grandson's relationship with one another. The eight-year-old Campbell Smith leans affectionately towards his grandmother and dutifully points out his lesson, Hamlet's soliloquy, printed in a popular eighteenth century manual for oratorical training, *The Art of Speaking*. Oratory, the art of formal public speaking, was a highly prized skill in colonial America, particularly for men hoping to go into politics or law. By depicting Campbell reading a book on oratory, Peale indicates the aspirations the boy's family may have had for his prosperous and successful future.

Glossary

Alexander Hamilton: (1755/57-1804) American statesman and Founding Father of the United States.

Battles of Lexington and Concord: (April 19, 1775) the first military engagements of the American Revolution.

Bill of Rights: a formal statement of the fundamental rights of the people of the United States. It is incorporated into the U.S. Constitution as Amendments one through ten.

Charles Willson Peale: (1741-1827) American painter, soldier, inventor, scientist, politician, and naturalist. He is best known for his portraits of prominent figures of the American Revolution, such as George Washington.

Declaration of Independence: the fundamental document establishing the United States as a nation, adopted on July 4, 1776. The declaration was ordered and approved by the Continental Congress, and was written largely by Thomas Jefferson.

George Washington: (1732-1799) 1st President of the United States, Founding Father, Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. Known as the “father of his country” during his lifetime.

John Hancock: (1737-1793) American statesman, merchant, and prominent figure of the American Revolution. He served as president of the Second Continental Congress and as the first governor of Massachusetts.

John Singleton Copley: (1738-1815) Loyalist American painter, active in colonial America and England.

King George III: (1738-1820) King of Great Britain and Ireland, he is most well known as the presiding monarch during the American Revolution.

Loyalists: colonists of the American revolutionary period who supported, and stayed loyal, to the British monarchy.

Patriots: colonists who rebelled against British control during the American Revolution.

republicanism: the social and political philosophy which rejected the ideas of a monarchy and aristocracy and favored liberty and unalienable individual rights.

Samuel Adams: (1722-1803) American statesmen, ardent Patriot, and Founding Father. He is often credited with being the founder and leader of the Sons of Liberty.

Sons of Liberty: a paramilitary political organization formed in 1765 to protect the rights of colonists and to fight taxation by the British government. Originally a secret society, they were the masterminds behind the Boston Tea Party.

Stamp Act of 1765: an act passed by the British Parliament on March 22, 1765; the first direct tax on the colonies, which required all American colonists to pay a tax on every piece of printed paper, which included items such as newspapers, legal documents, and playing cards.

Thomas Hutchinson: (1711-1780) The British-appointed Loyalist colonial governor of Massachusetts from 1769-1774. He was a proponent of the much-hated British taxes. He was replaced as governor in 1774 by General Thomas Gage and soon after went into exile in England.

Thomas Jefferson: (1743-1826) 3rd President of the United States, Founding Father, author of the Declaration of Independence, and American lawyer. Jefferson oversaw the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France and arranged for the exploration of that territory by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark.

U.S. Constitution: the document which embodies the fundamental laws and principles by which the United States is governed. It was drafted by the Constitutional Convention and was later supplemented by the Bill of Rights and other amendments.