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The Sons of Liberty: Terrorism or Patriotism

Hello. My name is Catherine Walker and in this podcast will be discussing the Sons of Liberty and evaluating if they can be considered a terrorist organization. During the American Revolution, the Sons of Liberty was a group that was opposed to British rule. The Sons of Liberty originated in Boston, Massachusetts. The group was originally call the Boston Loyal Nine and the Boston Caucus Club. The biggest reason why the group was so opposed to the British rule was because of the Stamp Act. This act taxed the colonist following the French and Indian War. The group was comprised of mostly shopkeepers and artisan. High government officials could not associate with the group due to the violence that was linked with the Sons of Liberty. The Sons of Liberty were predominate in big cities such as New York and Boston. However, by 1765 the Sons of Liberty had a branch in every colony. Within cities, the group had to work in underground networks. To maintain order, these networks had to be regulated. The Sons of Liberty were involved in many prerevolutionary acts. The first of these acts being the destroying of Andrew Oliver’s house. Andrew Oliver was to become the commissioned distributer of stamps in Massachusetts. As the Sons of Liberty gathered, the group began to head toward Oliver’s house and promptly began smashing windows and tore down the fence surrounding his house. Two days later, Andrew Oliver resigned from his position as commissioned distributer of stamps. Following this act, the Sons of Liberty took out more of their opposition to the stamp act on Thomas Hutchinson, who was the Chief Justice and Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts. On August 26th, 1765 a mob took over Hutchinson’s house, breaking everything they possibly could and running Hutchinson out of his home. These two events do not accurately represent the Sons of Liberty. The organization was a mostly peaceful one. However, the peaceful demonstrations are not the ones remembered in history most of the time. The Sons of Liberty found the most effective way to voice there opposition to the Stamp Act was in newsprint.
Most newspaper published the daily events that the Sons of Liberty were involved in. In addition to the opposition of the Stamp Act, the Sons of Liberty were very opposed to the Tea Act. In New York, the Sons of Liberty branch declared that any person who helped carry out the act was to be considered an enemy to the cause. In Boston, on December 16th, 1773, the Sons of Liberty carried out a nonviolent political protest, which would later become known as the Boston Tea Party. The Boston Tea Party was an event in which the Sons of Liberty dressed up as natives and destroyed all of the tea on a ship from the East India Company in the Boston Harbor. Although, through these acts the Sons of Liberty do not seem to embody the qualities that are generally used to refer to terrorists, some believe them to be a terrorist group. According to David Rapoport, Americans have “Historical Amnesia” about any American group being a terrorist organization (Rapoport, 2008). The Sons of Liberty were a very well organized group. Much of the organization was through higher classes and the lower classes were the ones to carry out the acts. In this way, the group was not disorderly and could not be considered to have mob violence, which is a key concept in terrorism. The Sons of Liberty would be considered more of a trained mob compared to a disorderly crowd because of the organization. Many prefer to see them as “freedom fighters”, as David Rapoport explains (v 2008). Another way in which the Sons of Liberty cannot be considered a terrorist organization is because the group was very respectful of other people and their property. Throughout history, terrorist organizations have been known to destroy anything they can of the person or group in which they are opposed to. The Sons of Liberty were not out to destroy the property of the British and the British people. This concept can even been seen during the Boston Tea Party, when the Sons of Liberty threw tea into the Boston harbor. They did not harm any of the sailors during the act and even the padlock that was broken on one of the chests of tea was replaced. In this way, as well, the Sons of Liberty cannot be considered a terrorist group. After looking at all the evidence that has been provided, it is clear that the Sons of Liberty cannot be thought of as a terrorist organization. Thank you for listening to this podcast.
Cited and Consulted Works


Sons of Liberty. *Boston, (Hanover-Square,) Dec. 18, 1765. Messieurs Drapers, Your inserting the following letter, sent on Monday evening last to the Honourable Andrew Oliver, Esq; commissioner for distributing stamps in this province; with the proceedings occasioned thereon, will oblige the true Sons of Liberty.* Boston, 1765. *America's Historical Imprints.* Web. 5 Dec. 2013. <http://0-infoweb.newsbank.com.dewey2.library.denison.edu/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbids=U4DX51SEMTM4NjU1ODA1MS40ODAzNDU6MToxNToxNDAuMTQxLjEZMC4xMjA&p_action=doc&p_queryname=2&p_docref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-0F2F82386FB33268@41523-@1&f_mode=citation>.

The proceedings of the Sons of Liberty, March 1, 1766. The Sons of Liberty of Baltimore County and Anne-Arundel County, met at the Court-House of the city of Annapolis, the first day of March 1766. Annapolis: Jonas Green, 1766. America's Historical Imprints. Web. 6 Dec. 2013.