

Boston Massacre:

Propaganda

Propaganda is as much a part of war as the weapons carried by armies. While soldiers fire bullets of lead at one another, propagandists fire verbal or written attacks.

The propagandists of the American Revolution began firing their shots long before the Minutemen met the Redcoats at Lexington and Concord. The “shot heard ‘round the world” may have started in a gun but the real noise came from the pens and presses of those reporting it.

Several events, beginning with the Treaty of Paris in 1763, offered propagandists from both sides many opportunities to demonstrate their skills. Revolutionary propaganda came in many forms. The clergy preached it from their pulpits, editors spread it across the front pages of newspapers and artists engraved it, painted it and sculpted it. Politicians stood before their various legislative bodies to deliver fiery speeches on one issue or another, some supporting the Patriot’s cause and others condemning it.

One event that drew the attention of many occurred in Boston on March 5, 1770. On that date British soldiers fired into a crowd of colonists on a Boston street corner, killing five people. Sam Adams wasted no time in reporting the shooting to the other colonists, calling it the Boston Massacre. The name alone was enough to light the fires of hatred throughout the colonies and those fires would be fed for years to come.

What actually happened on that day is still subject to speculation. If you were British, the event was little more than law enforcement authorities defending themselves in the line of duty. If you were a colonist, the event was a gross violation of citizens’ rights, which demanded the punishment of those responsible. Both sides used the incident to further their own causes and viewpoints.

EXAMINE THE ENGRAVING AND THEN ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. From whose viewpoint was this engraving made?
2. How are the soldiers portrayed?
3. How are the patriots portrayed?
4. Why did Revere show the incident this way?
5. What other items of Propaganda do you see in the engraving?

