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### *The Bloody Massacre*

#### **Paul Revere**

Born: Boston, Massachusetts 1735

Died: Boston, Massachusetts 1818

Museum purchase

1976.24.4

[Collections Webpage and High Resolution Image](#)

*This image of the Boston Massacre can be found in virtually every American history textbook in the country. It is an image that has come to symbolize the most significant catalyst that directly led to the American Revolution. Created by Paul Revere, the print espoused patriot views and fanned the flames of revolution, arguably becoming one of the most effective pieces of political propaganda ever to be dispersed on American soil. But what do we really know about the history of the print itself?*

*Researcher Laura formulated the following questions to uncover the story behind the art:*

- **There must have been a market for prints of the Massacre, so did anyone else distribute prints besides Revere? If so, what did those prints look like?**
- **In an effort to dominate the market, Revere must have had to put his print to market rather quickly. How soon after the tragic event did this print start circulating?**

Through my initial research I found a wonderful resource in the form of the Boston Massacre Historical Society. Just the mere fact that this event in our nation's history has its own historical society clues you into its historical significance. On the society's website I discovered that in the period immediately following the Massacre, three artists put out prints for sale; Paul Revere, Henry Pelham, and Jonathan Mulliken. [Revere's print](#) went on sale first, followed by Pelham's and then Mulliken's. The print that Revere put out for sale was one of the most elaborate he had ever produced and is the image most associated with the Massacre. The print includes a complex composition with minute details in the foreground and background; the artist having a keen knowledge of perspective. Taking all of this in to account, it seems amazing that Revere managed to have it on sale a mere three weeks after the Massacre occurred. To learn more, I obtained a book on Paul Revere's engravings and learned that it is known, and was known back then, that Revere was a talented silversmith and engraver, but not an artist. Scholars, including the author of the aforementioned book, have argued that a man of Revere's skills did not possess the artistic acumen that would have been necessary to produce this print, especially in such a short span of time. So how did Revere manage to have the engraving executed and the prints created so soon after the event? His advertisement for the sale of the prints for eight pence each appeared in the Boston Gazette on March 26, 1770. Three days later, the aspiring artist Henry Pelham, the half brother of the celebrated painter John Singleton Copley, wrote a scathing letter to Paul Revere, which can be found in a book of his letters and papers. In the letter, Pelham accuses Revere of blatantly copying his work. He is dismayed that he has "entrusted it in the hands of a person who had more regard to the dictates of Honour and Justice than to take the undue advantage you have done of the confidence and Trust I reposed in you." Pelham goes on to say that he put great expense and trouble into making the design and paying for the paper and printing. He feels that this "dishonorable" act of Revere's is almost "as if you had plundered me on the highway."

Pelham certainly had a right to be mad with Revere. After the event, he had immediately set to work on his own version, entitled [The Fruits of Arbitrary Power](#). His print is almost identical to Revere's though scholars note some details concerning perspective and rendering are handled more skillfully in Pelham's print. His letter suggests that, for an unknown reason, sometime after the Massacre occurred Pelham must have given Revere his engraved plate. We could speculate that perhaps Pelham wanted Revere's opinion as a fellow artist or as a friend. So why did Revere copy Pelham's engraving? In various journal articles and books I discovered that one of the theories is that Revere, a fervent Patriot, wanted to get this piece of print propaganda out to the masses as quickly as possible in an effort to stoke anti-British sentiments. Perhaps he thought Pelham was wasting time trying to perfect his art and not getting out the word about what had happened quickly enough. Therefore the copying of Pelham's print in Revere's mind might have seemed justified. Interestingly, Revere had quite a history of copying other artists' work when it came to engravings. Many of his prints were copied from drawings by British artists or from drawings created by his partner Christian Remmick, who colored many of Revere's prints. As Revere based his version off of Pelham's it is perhaps fitting then that [Jonathan Mulliken's print](#) was based off of Revere's version.

Some scholars have viewed Pelham's anger at Revere in the letter to be strictly over the money that he lost out on by having Revere's print hit the market sooner, rather than any indignation over stolen

artistic property. I looked for evidence proving this theory in Henry Pelham's personal papers and letters, which have been widely reproduced. In the papers there is a bill to Pelham for printing 575 of his prints for 5 pounds and 9 shillings. For an aspiring young artist such as Pelham that was quite an investment; one that he had hoped would turn a good profit. Unfortunately for Pelham, he never had a chance to make his mark on history as, unlike Revere, he was more artist than businessman. Revere was also fifteen years Pelham's senior which probably only exacerbated Pelham's naiveté. Although there is no record as to Revere's reaction to Pelham's letter, we can only believe things between the two were smoothed over with time as Revere's account books show that following the Massacre, he engaged in business with the Pelham/ Copley family.

After learning about the sensational story that surrounded the creation of this print, it got me thinking about the event itself. **The view of the Massacre we receive from Revere is one-sided, which is understandable given Revere's politics. However, this raises the question of the historical accuracy in Revere's print.**

- **How much is fact and how much is fiction?**
- **How do the historical accuracies compare when looking at the three different versions of the prints? Are there any un-biased portrayals of the event?**

**Bibliography: Paul Revere, *The Bloody Massacre***

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