

Doc Chat Episode Four Transcript

JULIE GOLIA: Hello, everybody. Welcome to Doc Chat. My name is Julie Golia and I'm the curator of history, social sciences and government information at the New York Public Library. For those of you who haven't attended yet, Doc Chat is a weekly program from NYPL Center for the Research in Humanity that digs deep into the stories behind the library's most interesting collections, and highlights ways that teachers can incorporate them into the classroom. In this episode, which I'm very excited about, Madeleine Viljoen, curator of prints and the Spencer Collection at the New York Public Library is joined by Liz Covart, digital projects editor at the Omohundro Institute, and creator and the host of the award winning and fantastic "Ben Franklin's World". So Liz and Madeleine will be discussing two almost identical prints that tell the story of rivalry and the power of the printed image on the eve of the American Revolution. So, some housekeeping things. Our guests are going to speak for about 10 to 15 minutes before we open up the conversation. During the program, as we usually do, you're free to use the chat function to share general comments. So, make sure that you change your chat mode to panelists and attendees, so that everyone is included. I'll share pertinent links with you throughout the time in the chat, including the featured images themselves. Once we begin the question and answer segment, please use the question and answer function rather than the chat function to share your questions and comments. If you wish to remain anonymous, please click that option before submitting your question. We also would like to know a little bit more about you, so please fill out the very brief poll that I am about to launch. And with that, I'm going to hand it over to Madeleine.

MADELEINE VILJOEN: All right. Well, sorry about that [laughs]. That's one way to start the event today. But, anyway, sorry, the technology is still managed to baffle me. Hello, everyone. I'm just delighted to be here and also to welcome you to the forth of our Doc Chat, which is on the printing of the Boston Massacre. Before we dive into and look at the images a little bit more carefully, and discuss them in greater depth, so I thought I would allow everyone to take a look at the two images that we're going to be looking at, which I'm struggling now to advance the image, you know. Oh, all right. And next, there we go. So the two images are, as Julie said, are virtually identical, one by Henry Pelham called "The Fruits of Arbitrary Power," and the other one by Paul Revere called "The Bloody Massacre". Both of them are in the print collection at the New York Public Library. And as I said before, we sort of talked about them in greater depth, I thought I would invite everyone to sort of take a look at them, see what you, you know, these very identical, rather similar images, see what you see in them, perhaps compare and contrast them, and let me know your thoughts in the chat. I need just to get the ball rolling. I would just make a few comments. I mean, the state -- the most obvious, in terms of what we're seeing, is a line of seven soldiers on the right-hand side firing on a group of unarmed figures on

the left, a huge massive plume of smoke serve as sort of added drama to the scene. I don't know what -- Do you want to add something, Liz?

LIZ COVART: Yeah. You know, something else that strikes me about these images is you have the orderly way of the soldiers, almost like this is a pre-meditative act. And the crowd is kind of this messy scene that seems almost caught off guard. So, yeah.

MADELEINE VILJOEN: Absolutely. I think, there's a, you know, there's a sense of the sort of rigor of the military organization versus the sort of messiness of the response, right? And sort of the unpreparedness of the response. I'm wondering if we're getting any other comments?

LIZ COVART: Well, Bob has noted that more recent reproduction of this image, a color one of the deceased shows one of the deceased members as a black man, and that's Crispus Attucks.

MADELEINE VILJOEN: That's one of the comments that came in?

LIZ COVART: Yeah. And Catherine Cortez notes that, you know, if we look at the Bostonians, as you mentioned earlier, Madeleine, they're whole unarmed, the soldiers that are arm, but the crowd are not.

MADELEINE VILJOEN: Right, absolutely. And, you know, there's some things that are -- that one might notice as well, just generally about the two images. The one on the right seems a little bit more sort of zoomed into the scene, a little bit more focused, perhaps a little easier to read, I would say. But you know, all in all, very, very, very similar images and striking, because they were produced really within just weeks of one another, days, actually. And we'll talk a little bit about the circumstances of how this came about, these two images, but actually identical came to be published almost at the same time as well. And I -- Liz, I wonder whether you could talk us, you know, so now that we're moving into the kind of phase of talking a bit more in depth about the image, whether you would share some of your background and your expertise in American history and tell us a little bit more about what happened that night on March 5, 1770? What is the Boston Massacre? And why was it such, you know, a momentous moment in American history?

LIZ COVART: Yeah, absolutely. The thing to know about the Boston Massacre, to really understand this event, you pretty much have to go back to 1763, so seven years earlier. And Great Britain had won the Seven Years of French and Indian War, but the cost of that war was significant. So, they had more than doubled its national debt at a time when national debt was not seen as something good, something positive to have, and they had this now worldwide empire that they needed to manage. So, the things that the British Empire did to try and get their grasp of this empire is they tried to consolidate power, and they tried to rein in colonies like those in North America that it basically then kind of governing themselves more or less since the

17th century. Colonists reacted poorly to this power consolidation. Ways that the parliament did this, of course, was passing taxation members, controlling, you know, different sorts of governance. Colonists protested this. You know, we see the Stamp Act to 1765, brings out great riots. We see the Townshend duties, which impose taxes on different enumerated or named goods, and the colonists had reacted poorly. And of course, the colonists on the mainland North America from New Hampshire to Georgia are not pleased about this, but some -- for some reason, you know, Boston really erupts in protests. So they have the biggest riots of the Stamp Act. They're threatening customs collectors over the Townshend duties. And so, what happened is in 1768, the crown sent two regiments of troops into Boston to keep the peace. So by the time you get to 1770, for two years, you have soldiers and colonists living together, and there's this heightened tension. There's a depressed economy, there's fight for work. Tensions are not necessarily good. So this brings us up to just a few weeks before the massacre. Bostonians have been threatening one of the customs collectors, Ebenezer Richardson. They attacked him at his home. They're threatening his family. They're throwing rocks at the windows. Richardson is scared, so he goes up and he gets his gun, and he starts firing widely into the crowd. And in the process, he kills a young servant boy named Christopher Seider. So, the town of Boston is really, really upset about this. So tensions are really simmering. Every time the civilian passes the soldier, they do so, by calling them a name. And then on the night of March 5, 1770, you have this incident where supposedly a wig makers' apprentice went out to the customs house, tried to, you know, get an officer to pay their bill, this entry at the door, supposedly use the butt of his musket to get the young man to go away, and then all of the sudden a crowd starts to, you know, gather. Supposedly, the bells were going off. And there's only two reasons in colonial America that your bells go off. One is it's Sunday and you go to church, and the other is there's a fire in town and so you need to come out with your fire bucket. This just made the crowd grow bigger and bigger. They start pushing into the crowd, you know, New York City, a lot like Boston in, you know, early March. You know, you have that gritty snow on the ground. Colonists are taking those icy snowballs, chucking them at the soldiers, and lo and behold, the soldiers fire into the crowd, and five Bostonians would lay dead. So that's some of the context of what brought us to the massacre and, broadly, what went on during the Boston massacre. Now, Madeleine, it is really curious that we have these two near identical images of the massacre. Could you tell us a bit about why we seem to have two images of this massacre?

MADELEINE VILJOEN: Well, absolutely. The one on the left image is by Henry Pelham, and it is actually the image that preceded the Paul Revere. Paul Revere seems to have been good friends with Henry Pelham, and may have somehow gotten his hands on Henry Pelham's original design for this print, have gotten it to press more quickly and issued it more quickly. And this all accounts for why there are two images, but it also -- but it doesn't really account for the sort of the outrage, I guess, that Pelham felt at Revere for, you know, this -- what was really amounts to a huge copyright infringement or an act of intellectual theft, right? And as a historian of print culture, we are familiar with other instances of this sort of copyright theft taking place.

I'm reminded of one of the most iconic ones, which happens in the early 16th century, when Marcantonio Raimondi went to Venice. He was the official printmaker of the artists Rafael, the Italian Renaissance artist, Raphael, and he saw Durer's "Life of the Virgin," and -- in woodcuts and engraved the entire series in which was an added of his, not his monogram, but Durer's monogram. And Durer was extremely obsessed about this and seeing this quite justifiably as an act of great, you know, terrible infringement on his intellectual property. What's different here is that, of course, Revere isn't trying to obfuscate the fact that he's the author of the prints on the rights, but it says quite proudly that it's engraved, printed and sold by Paul Revere, so it's rather different. But it was, nonetheless, very upsetting to Pelham who'd already invested a considerable amount of time and money into the venture of selling the -- of his version of the print. Just a couple of words about Pelham and also Revere and how it is that they could make these prints, Pelham was the son of a school master, who also worked as an engraver. Pelham -- Henry Pelham is now sometimes often thought of as the slightly less famous brother or stepbrother of John Singleton Copley. And it's not fortunate, because he's an accomplished artist in his own right and he sort of slightly overshadowed by his stepbrother -- by the legacy of his stepbrother. But he -- his mother retained the printing press and his father, Peter Pelham, must have taught Henry Pelham in the art of engraving. Revere, by contrast, was a silversmith, and not really trained as an artist or a painter in any way. But one of the things that he did to supplement his income as a silversmith was to make copperplate engravings. And he made illustrations of books and magazines, business cards, political cartoons, book plates, a songbook and Gill's affair for tavern. So he was quite active as an engraver as the sort of -- mostly sort of portrayed, sort of -- all sorts of publications. And so, the story is that the timeline of events is that on March 26, 1770, an announcement appears in the Boston evening posts and then the Boston Gazette, which read, "to be sold by Edes and Gill print containing a representation of the late hard massacre in King Street." And just three days later, an aggrieved and very upset Pelham writes a letter to Revere, stating, "when I heard that you're cutting a plate of the late murder, I thought it impossible as I knew you was not capable of doing it unless you've copied it from mine. And as I thought, I had entrusted it in the hands of a person who had more regard to the dictates of honor and justice, than to take the undue advantage you have done at the confidence and trust I reposed in you. But I find I was mistaken. And after being at the great trouble and expense of making design, paying for paper, printing, et cetera, find myself in the most ungenerous manner deprived, not only of any proposed advantage, but even at the expense I have been at, as truly as if you had plundered me on the highway." So, I mean, he really experiences this as a theft, but more specifically a theft that hits his pocketbook, not really maybe expressed as a theft of intellectual property in a way that we would understand in the day. And then just three days later, he announces his own publication of the image on the left, which does appear but never against the subtraction, that Revere's does. And only two impressions of this print survive. One is with us, and the other one is at the Antiquarian Society in Worcester. And he -- his publication, he claims was going to be an original print taken on the spot. So he -- I think, he's trying to, with this advertisement in the Boston Gazette, to reclaim the fact that he was the one who really designed the original drawing, and that he also was sort

of an eyewitness, so in some ways, gives himself a bit of cachet here. I'm not sure that's true, it was not clear that he saw the event, but he certainly captures it as of sort of as an eyewitness response to the event. I'm wondering, Liz, if you can tell us a little bit more about what you think the intended audience for these images were and why you think, perhaps, Revere is considered the most successful political image?

LIZ COVART: Well, you know, as Henry Pelham stated in his letter, like he intended to make money. He wanted to make a commemorative print that, you know, people could kind of capture that lightbulb moment, you know, that moment that you remember exactly where you are when it happened. Boston Massacre was that for the people of Boston, and so he wanted to create a commemorative image. But if you look closely at Revere, you'll see that Revere had a different intent. He wanted to make a political statement. So if you look over the custom house, which is right behind the soldiers, up on this, you know, the third storey there, he labels it Butcher's Halls, just in case you're curious about, you know, the intentions of the soldiers, that's labeled Butcher's Hall. He, you know, has a little dog there. He has a woman kind of standing out in the crowd whose looking shocked at all of this. He does have the townhouse to show, you know, loyalty to the empire. You know, the townhouse stands right at the end of the Long Wharf. So, as soon as you were sailing into town, that is the first building you saw. And right on the top of it were the English unicorn and the -- sorry, the Scottish unicorn and the English lion, which were the symbols of the British Empire. So, Revere really wanted this image to go out to make a political statement. He wanted it to go along with Boston's account that the account paired by the town of Boston, of this event. And both the townspeople and Revere were rushing these prints -- to print, so to speak, because they wanted to control the narrative back in England. So, that is Revere's intent. So while Pelham sounds a little bit more artistic than Revere's. Revere is going for that political audience. Now, I'm sure we could talk about a whole lot of aspects of these images, but we're curious about what you'd like to talk about. So, if you have any questions for us, you know, please put them in the chat because, you know, we love these images and love to chat about them.

MADELEINE VILJOEN: Yes, absolutely. I would love to hear more as well. But I also just wanted to add something else about the image that we haven't really talked about, and that's the inscriptions. So the -- One of the things that, and I'm actually going to go back to the this image here, just to talk a little bit about how also, I think the -- Paul Revere has this very canny and very smart way of using inscription in a way that really reinforces the message that Liz was outlining just moments ago. He -- At the top of the print, it says very clearly, that the attack happened was at the hands of the 29th Regiment, so it makes very clear who's responsible as opposed to just the sort of -- much sort of slightly flowery and less, certainly, explosive, but less specific claim by Pelham, "The Fruits of Arbitrary Power". The same thing that -- with the inscription at the bottom, Pelham includes an inscription from Psalms 94, which says something that says -- I won't read the whole thing, it says, how long shall they utter and speak hard things? And all the workers of iniquity boast themselves. So it's, again, it's certainly meant to

talk about the sort of injustice that's happened to the patriots at the hands of the colonists. But I think, again, what Revere does is really mentioned in his inscription at the bottom of the print, he says -- he actually mentions people by name. He says, Unhappy Boston! See thy Sons deplore. Thy hallowed Walks besmeared with guiltless Gore, while faithless Preston. And actually, he is the figure at the far right-hand side, who seems to be holding a sword in the air and giving the soldiers the command to fire. There's no suggestion in the historical record that there was -- that he really told them to fire. I think it was more sort of a response, you know, mounting response to things that happens, and it just -- it wasn't as coordinated as this image would seem to suggest. And that, you know, the reference again to Preston, which is slightly oblique, because they actually sort of the x out the actual words between the P and the N, but everybody would have known exactly who Preston was. It's really laying, very clear of laying. And the other thing that I think makes the image more successful as a business venture is that, you know, he's already, you know, got it all figured out. He has on the print, it says engraved, printed and sold by Paul Revere. We know where we're going to get it. And I thought this was fascinating at the -- in between the segments of text at the bottom, it says copyright secured. There was no copyright really that was at that time in the colonies. And so, he's making a claim to copyright, so he's trying to sort of -- he realizes having stolen this image already from Pelham that this sort of image could itself become the subject of other copies, and in fact, it is. But he is making a claim here, and it's sort of fascinating that he feels the need to do that. But, again, it suggests a sort of savviness about how to get a printout, the fact that he's also working with the Boston Gazette, I think, also speaks to that.

JULIE GOLIA: Madeleine, we have a bunch of really interesting questions that stem right off of what you're saying. And one of them, Zoey asks, do you think Paul Revere felt he had a political imperative to copy the print? That's would somehow justified the copyright infringement. It's an interesting question, like he knows he has a bigger reach or a bigger impact. Is there just -- some justification in that?

MADELEINE VILJOEN: I don't know. That's a wonderful question. It's tantalizing. I think he was -- I don't think it was an imperative, I just think he was just -- he was smart. And I think he was -- I mean, what we know was about Paul Revere was he was an extremely devoted to the patriotic cause. I mean, perhaps arguably more so than Pelham, but I would stand corrected by Liz if she disagrees. I mean, she's the specialist on history here. But I think that, you know, he really wanted to -- he felt, I think, that imperative. So instead of political imperative that his -- yes, he needed to get the message out.

LIZ COVART: Yeah. Jane Kamensky, who's a scholar, she wrote a very interesting biography about Pelham's older brother, John Singleton Copley, and she spent some dedicated time on this print. And she found in her research that Revere wasn't the, you know, talented sketch artist that Henry Pelham was. And he seems to have somehow gotten to see Pelham's images and engraved his own, but Revere was the more talented engraver of the two. So it's

funny to see these pictures, you know, side by side, because you can kind of see where both of them have their artistic strengths with that.

JULIE GOLIA: And Liz, someone has asked in the chat, actually, will you say a little bit more about Crispus Attucks?

LIZ COVART: Sure, so Crispus --

MADELEINE VILJOEN: Shall we wait until we get to the next slide? Because we want -- There's a point that I'd love to make before the next slide.

JULIE GOLIA: Madeleine, we have two more minutes until [inaudible].

MADELEINE VILJOEN: Oh, no.

LIZ COVART: I just point to the slide and I can tell you about Attucks. So these are -- See these are the colored engravings. And you can see on the one on, you know, it's my left, but there is a black man who's lying down, that's Crispus Attucks. Crispus Attucks was a man of Native American and African descent. We do not know a lot about him. Mitch Kachun wrote the book, "First Martyr of Liberty," and he's tracked down every source he could find and said, we just can't get -- you know, really know a whole lot about Crispus Attucks, but he seems to have been a runaway slave from Framingham, Massachusetts. He somehow got involved in the seafaring trades, and was import the night of the massacre. Now, they say that Attucks and others had clubs. John Adams, in the trial of the soldiers, he was defending the soldiers, he actually said something like Attucks led the mob and seem to be in charge. Regardless of what happened, which we know really don't know, because there's so many different accounts of this massacre, what they do agree on is that Attucks was the first to fall. So that's why Mitch Kachun titled his book, "First Martyr of Liberty," because he is regarded as the first patriot to fall in the revolution. With that said, we don't really even know his political views. We do not know if he was at that event for political reasons or just because something was going on. But as he said, he is -- he's the first person to go down in the massacre.

JULIE GOLIA: And I'll link to that book in the chat in just a second. Madeleine, tell us about this hand colored version.

MADELEINE VILJOEN: All right. So I, you know, one of the things that, you know, I think is slightly misleading is that our impression is not colored. What I could find, actually, is that most of the impressions of Paul Revere's prints are in fact hand colored. And it seems that even some of them were in their original frames, and that they were intended to be sold colored, hand colored, what I also found is that none of the hand coloring is consistent, so that, you know, from one image to the next, it might change. And the history of hand coloring is long and complicated. It seems to be that the person who may be responsible for hand coloring here was

somebody called Charles Remick -- or Christian Remick, I'm sorry, who was a actually a mariner, and that his side occupation was one of being a colorist. And he advertised themselves bringing things to life with coloring. And I just want to ask, and I thought I'd open this up for chat as well and see what other people think is how does color in flex and sort of change our way of understanding and interpreting the image? And I'm certainly what, you know, the inscription of race to -- the identification of race rather than inscription is very important in the Met impression of this hand colored image, not necessarily duplicated among other images. But I think it's fascinating to me that the image then can actually tell us more about who, you know, from what supply, from what, you know, what race the people were who actually were involved in the event. And if there are other thoughts on this, I'd love to hear them.

JULIE GOLIA: Yeah, I mean, I'm struck. We didn't talk much about teaching, but it strikes me that a really interesting teaching exercise might be to put these next to each other and ask -- to ask students, yeah, what changes. And somebody asked -- somebody says in the chat something this changes the viewer focus. Liz, thoughts on the different colors, and here come my children?

LIZ COVART: Well, you know, it's interesting because, you know, I do think the color adds depth to the image. And as you know, Dominique is saying in the chat that it changes your focus, you are definitely attracted to the red coats first, I think, you know, at least my eye is, and the blood that is coming out of the five slain Bostonians. So, I think, you know, color adds a little bit of gore, and a little bit of, I don't know, maybe professionalism or something to the drawing, but it definitely does change our view.

MADELEINE VILJOEN: To me, it adds real pathos as well. I mean, sort of the -- you know, it reminds me -- I mean, so, again, Jane Kamensky describes the figure who's being held there as a sort of pieta. And I think that's absolutely right, I think it's, you know, it's almost -- I mean, that pose of that sort of slump figure is very similar to images of Christ coming being taken from the cross. And it's not uncommon for devotional texts and images to be hand colored as well in the early modern period. And so, it feels like this is almost another example of this sort of version of hand coloring where in -- with devotional images, often it's Christ, and he's bleeding profusely, and you're meant to sort of empathize with him and feel incredible sorrow and distress, right, at the, this -- the figure, so bloodied. And I think it's very similar here, there was a sort of kind of appeal to almost your absolute gut instincts than your -- this sort of -- yeah, almost an idea of faith. I mean, it's almost that the way in which politics are cast as a form of faith, I think is fascinating.

JULIE GOLIA: Madeleine, I think that's a nice segue to people who are going to want to explore these images more potentially in the classroom, potentially in their own work. I'm putting the link in the chat one more time for people, but tell us -- any other details and how they might find

this?

MADELEINE VILJOEN: They can find us in the print room as well. We have -- These impressions, we have some others as well that are copies and there are also materials in the picture collection that could be of interest, including a sort of a spurious portrait of Crispus Attucks. So, there's lots to look at and think about it.

JULIE GOLIA: And also including in the chat, a link for our next Doc Chat next Thursday, which we'll dig into poetry and revolution on the lower east side in the 1970s. It's -- I've gotten a little glimpse of it, and I think it's going to be even a little bit sexy. So, I hope you'll all be able to attend next week. And as always, we will be holding Doc Chats on Thursdays at 3:30. We'll be following up after this wonderful episode to tell you about the blog post that follows up to include a link to the video of the episode that you are seeing here. Liz, Madeleine, thank you so much for a wonderful episode.

LIZ COVART: It was a great pleasure. Thank you.

MADELEINE VILJOEN: Thanks everyone for coming