

A Shot that Changed the World:

The Impact of Lexington and Concord on the Colonists' Fight for Independence

BANG. One shot started the war. No one knows who fired first. But, Ralph Waldo Emerson heralded this pivotal moment in his poem, "Concord Hymn," as a "shot heard round the world."¹ That shot, fired on April 19, 1775, in Concord, Massachusetts, started a revolution that would eventually democratize America.² Under command of Massachusetts Military Governor General Thomas Gage, British Regulars attempted to seize and destroy stockpiles of ammunition, supplies, and weapons stored by the Massachusetts Provincial Congress in an armory near Concord, Massachusetts.³ Minutemen, led by Captain John Parker, intercepted the Regulars at Lexington to prevent the theft and control of the American colonies.⁴ Extraordinarily mismatched, approximately 80 Minutemen faced 700 British Regulars at Lexington.⁵ Chaos ensued and shots fired.⁶ The British fled Lexington and fought Americans in subsequent battles throughout Middlesex County.⁷ At North Bridge in Concord, approximately 300 Americans confronted 90 British soldiers and forced a British retreat. That "shot heard round the world" by the "embattled farmers" at Concord signified a burgeoning revolution--a call to arms and an upwelling of patriotic sentiment described by Emerson as, "Spirit, that made those heroes dare / To die and leave their children free."⁸ By day's end, Britain lost 273 soldiers; America lost 93.⁹ While technically skirmishes, these small battles were important to the American Revolution because they unified the revolutionary sentiment among the thirteen colonies.

¹ Emerson, Concord Hymn by Ralph Waldo Emerson - Poems | Academy of American Poets."

² New World Encyclopedia Contributors, "Battles of Lexington and Concord."

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Emerson, Concord Hymn by Ralph Waldo Emerson - Poems | Academy of American Poets."

⁹ Ibid.

The Lexington and Concord battles increased public support for American independence. Prior to that shot, a higher concentration of patriots resided in the Middle Colonies in comparison to the New England and Southern colonies. If American independence were to succeed, it needed more support from all thirteen colonies. Greatly charged with emotion, language, type set, and even images, the articles, broadsides and handbills written about the Lexington and Concord battles persuasively united the colonists together against the British. Of the 37 newspapers scattered across the 13 colonies, 27 newspapers printed news of the battles and effectively garnered public support for the American cause.¹⁰ For example, the *Essex Gazette* identified each dead and wounded soldier by name and attached a memorial poem that honored the men for their valiant efforts and poignantly delivered a resounding call to arms for others to take up the fight for freedom.¹¹ Similarly, Ezekiel Russell's *Salem Gazette* savagely described the battle in a broadside titled, "*A Bloody Butchery By the British: Or, The Runaway Fight of the Regulars.*"¹² Replete with black borders and images of coffins, this pro-American broadside further spread anti-British sentiment across the colonies and stoked the swelling cry for freedom.¹³ The impact of the Lexington and Concord battles remained an important reminder to patriots of England's tyranny and oppression of the American colonists.

The overwhelming support for the call to freedom resulting from the battles of Lexington and Concord singularly served as a catalyst of the American Revolution. In a sense, Emerson's "shot heard round the world" truly reverberated throughout the globe. That shot became a call to arms and an inspiration to fight for American independence.

Word Count: 499

¹⁰ "The Battles of Lexington and Concord: A Public Relations Case Study - News in the Age of Revolution - The News Media and the Making of America, 1730-1865."

¹¹ Mott, "The Newspaper Coverage of Lexington and Concord," 494.

¹² Mott, "The Newspaper Coverage of Lexington and Concord," 494.

¹³ Leech. "The "Shot Heard Round the World."

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<https://origins.osu.edu/milestones/april-2015-shot-heard-round-world-april-19-1775-and-american-revolutionary-war>.

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https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Battles_of_Lexington_and_Concord&oldid=1046801 (accessed Dec. 27, 2020).