

# Paul Revere's Ride

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Paul Revere's midnight ride looms as an almost mythical event in American history--yet it has been largely ignored by scholars and left to patriotic writers and debunkers. Now one of the foremost American historians offers the first serious look at the events of the night of April 18, 1775--what led up to it, what really happened, and what followed--uncovering a truth far more remarkable than the myths of tradition.

In *Paul Revere's Ride*, David Hackett Fischer fashions an exciting narrative that offers deep insight into the outbreak of revolution and the emergence of the American republic. Beginning in the years before the eruption of war, Fischer illuminates the figure of Paul Revere, a man far more complex than the simple artisan and messenger of tradition. Revere ranged widely through the complex world of Boston's revolutionary movement--from organizing local mechanics to mingling with the likes of John Hancock and Samuel Adams. When the fateful night arrived, more than sixty men and women joined him on his task of alarm--an operation Revere himself helped to organize and set in motion. Fischer recreates Revere's capture that night, showing how it had an important impact on the events that followed. He had an uncanny gift for being at the center of events, and the author follows him to Lexington Green--setting the stage for a fresh interpretation of the battle that began the war. Drawing on intensive new research, Fischer reveals a clash very different from both patriotic and iconoclastic myths. The local militia were elaborately organized and intelligently led, in a manner that had deep roots in New England. On the morning of April 19, they fought in fixed positions and close formation, twice breaking the British regulars. In the afternoon, the American officers switched tactics, forging a ring of fire around the retreating enemy which they maintained for several hours--an extraordinary feat of combat leadership. In the days that followed, Paul Revere led a new battle--for public opinion--which proved even more decisive than the fighting itself.

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When the alarm-riders of April 18 took to the streets, they did not cry, "the British are coming," for most of them still believed they were British. Within a day, many began to think differently. For George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Thomas Paine, the news of Lexington was their revolutionary Rubicon. *Paul Revere's Ride* returns Paul Revere to center stage in these critical events, capturing both the drama and the underlying developments in a triumphant return to narrative history at its finest.

Paul Revere's midnight ride is a legendary event in American history - yet it has been largely ignored by scholars, and left to patriotic writers and debunkers. Now one of the foremost American historians offers the first serious study of this event - what led to it, what really happened, what followed - uncovering a truth more remarkable than the many myths it has inspired. In *Paul Revere's Ride*, David Hackett Fischer has created an exciting narrative that offers new insight into the coming of the American Revolution. From research in British and American archives, the author unravels a plot that no novelist would dare invent - a true story of high drama and deep suspense, of old-fashioned heroes and unvarnished villains, of a beautiful American spy who betrayed her aristocratic British husband, of violent mobs and marching armies, of brave men dying on their doorsteps, of high courage, desperate fear, and the destiny of nations. The narrative is constructed around two thematic lines. One story centers on the American patriot Paul Revere; the other, on British General Thomas Gage. Both were men of high principle who played larger

roles than recent historiography has recognized. Thomas Gage was not the Tory tyrant of patriot legend, but an English Whig who believed in liberty and the rule of law. In 1774 and 1775, General Gage's advice shaped the fatal choices of British leaders, and his actions guided the course of American events. Paul Revere was more than a "simple artizan", as his most recent biographer described him fifty years ago. The author presents new evidence that revolutionary Boston was a world of many circles - more complex than we have known. Paul Revere and his friend Joseph Warren ranged more widely through those circles than any other leaders. They became the linchpins of the Whig movement. On April 18th, 1775, Paul Revere played that role in a manner that has never been told before. He and William Dawes were not the only midnight riders to carry the Lexington alarm. This first careful study of that event finds evidence of more than sixty men and women who were abroad that night on the same mission. The more we learn about them, the more interesting Paul Revere's role becomes. More than any other figure, he organized that activity and set it in motion. That night, Paul Revere had many other adventures. He was captured by a British patrol, and was freed in time to rescue Hancock and Adams (twice) and save the secret papers of the Revolution. At sunrise he was present on Lexington Green when the first shots were fired, in what General John Galvin describes as "one of the least known of all American battles". Drawing on extensive new research, Fischer finds evidence that this conflict was very different from the spontaneous rising of patriot legend. The New England militia were elaborately organized and actively led. On the morning of April 19, 1775, they stood against Thomas Gage's Regular Infantry in fixed positions and close formations at least six times. Twice the Regulars were broken. In the afternoon, the American leaders changed their tactics. Now facing a larger enemy and artillery, they forged a moving "circle of fire" around the British force and maintained it for many hours an extraordinary feat of combat leadership with citizen soldiers. After the fighting was over, many of these same men, including Paul Revere and Thomas Gage, fought these second battle of Lexington and Concord. This was a contest for what their generation was the first to call popular opinion, and even more decisive than the battle itself. Yankee leaders were victorious in spreading their version of events through the colonies. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Thomas Paine all testified that the news of Lexington was, in Adams's phrase, their revolutionary Rubicon. The true story of Paul Revere's ride is very different from the popular myth of the lone rider of the Revolution. It is also far removed from the heavy determinism of academic historiography. This is a tale of contingency, with great events hanging in the narrow balance. It is the story of free people, making hard choices. Most of all, it is about America's half-remembered heritage of collective action in the cause of freedom. When Paul Revere and his many friends alarmed the Middlesex countryside, they were carrying that message for us.

## David Hackett Fischer

is Warren Professor of History at Brandeis University. His books include the highly acclaimed *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* and *Growing Old in America*.

### Other Books

*Paul Revere and the Bell Ringers*. Young Paul Revere and his friends form a club whose members ring the bells at Christ Church, an experience which teaches him responsibility and other lessons that he uses as an adult in the American Revolution. Simultaneous. ? ? ? ? ? . As a boy working in his father's shop, Paul Revere hears adults talk all about their

clubs with meetings, rules, and elections. It gives Paul an idea: Why doesn't he start his own club -- a bell ringing club?"