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**Positive Propaganda**

*Propaganda is actually a value-free term: the words of Thomas Paine, John Dickinson and Samuel Adams are all textbook examples of propaganda.*

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*The sun never shined on a greater cause.*

*Liberty, property and no stamps!*

*Let us consider ourselves as men - freemen - Christian freemen - separate from the rest of the world and bound together by the same rights, interests and dangers.*

*These are the times that try men's souls.*

These are some of the words that helped form the United States of America. The words of Thomas Paine, John Dickinson and Samuel Adams defined the American Revolution and in many respects, to this day, define what means to be an American.

They are also a textbook example of propaganda.

The American Revolution occurred in part because of a sustained, successful propaganda movement throughout the colonies. Starting more than a decade before shots were first heard around the world, the propaganda movement helped fuel the fires of revolution.

That may sound like somewhat of a shocking statement, given the connotations that have become associated with propaganda in modern times. To our ears and in our minds, propaganda is the ultimate in deception. It's a tool of corrupt governments seeking to deceive people or of economic leaders looking to make a quick buck at the expense of poor workers. The word propaganda almost instantly brings to mind images of Hitler, Goebbels and Nazi Germany.

But propaganda is actually a value-free term. The dictionary definition of propaganda (according to the American Heritage Dictionary) is "The systematic propagation of a doctrine or cause or of information reflecting the views and interests of those advocating such a doctrine or cause." Notice the lack of positive or negative language in that definition. Propaganda itself is not inherently negative. Certainly, it has been used for many horrific purposes throughout history. However, there are also instances in which propaganda has been used to further positive agendas.

One such agenda was the American Revolution.

Samuel Adams, one of the leaders of the early revolutionary movement, is considered by many historians to be a master propagandist. His writings (primarily in the Boston Gazette) and his skills as a political organizer helped focus colonial anger at British taxation policies into the emerging revolutionary movement. Dickinson's series of 12 essays, "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania," helped spread anti-British from its center in New England and the Northeast throughout all 13 colonies. Paine's work - "Common Sense" before the Declaration of Independence and "The Rights of Man" after the war had started in earnest - remain inspirational masterpieces of patriotic propaganda.

The story of the American Revolution is so often told with a sense of inevitability. That America's Independence was pre-ordained. In fact, the colonies' decision to breakaway from the world's economic and military superpower of that era was (and even in retrospect is) a stunning decision. It's a tribute to the political, writing and persuasion talent of Samuel Adams, John Dickinson, Thomas Paine and others.

It's also a reminder of the potential positive power of propaganda.