

DBQ: Was the Boston Massacre really a Massacre?

A.C.A.P.S.

Document A: Deposition (testimony) of Captain Thomas Preston, March 13, 1770. Boston, MA.

On my way there, I saw people all excited and heard them threatening the troops. A few minutes later after I reached the guard, about 100 people passed by and went towards the customs house where the King's money is kept. They immediately surrounded the soldier posted there and threatened him with clubs and sticks and snowballs. Someone standing by told me they were planning to kidnap and murder him.

The soldiers soon kept the people back using bayonets, but more and more people came. They slammed their clubs and sticks together and chanted insults at the troops, yelling out, "*come on you rascals, you bloody backs, you lobster scoundrels, fire if you dare, G-d damn you, fire and be damned, we know you dare not.*"

At this time I was between the soldiers and the mob. They advanced to the points of the bayonets, struck some of them and even the muzzles of the pieces. A bystander who was not badly behaved asked me if the guns were loaded. I said yes. He then asked me if I intended to order the men to fire. I replied no, absolutely not! I pointed out to him that I was standing in front of the muzzles of the men's weapons, and must fall a sacrifice if they fired.

Just as I said that, one of the soldiers received a severe blow and as he stumbled back, he fired without orders. Our lives were now in danger as the mob advanced upon us daring us to fire, calling out: "*damn your bloods-why don't you fire.*" Instantly three or four of the soldiers fired, one after another, and directly after three more in the same confusion and hurry. The mob then ran away. When I asked them if they fired without orders, they said they heard the order and thought it came from me. On which I judged it unsafe to remain there any longer.

Document B: Testimony of witness, Robert Goddard, colonist, March 7, 1770.

I saw around 14 or 15 soldiers from barracks. They were armed with daggers and swords and such. This violent gang of soldiers walked up King's street beating people up. The outrageous behavior caused someone to ring the meeting house bell as if there were a fire.

A number of tough boys went over to surround and threaten the guard at the Customs house. There was a lot of swearing and the Captain told the young boys to go home least there should be murder done. They were throwing snowballs. They did not go off but threw more snowballs pelting the guard upon the right side of his face with ice.

The Captain was behind the soldiers. I saw no person speak to him. I was so near I should have seen it. They placed themselves in front of the Customs house to protect the guard and formed a half circle. The Captain told them to fire. One Gun went off. After the Captain said "Damn your bloods fire," they all fired one after another about 7 or 8 in all. He stood behind all the time.

I went to the jail the next day, being sworn for the Grand Jury, to see the Captain. Then said pointing to him that's the person who gave the word to fire. He said if you swear that you will ruin me everlastingly. I was so near the officer when he gave the word fire that I could touch him. His face was towards me. He stood in the middle behind the men. I looked him in the face. He then stood within the circle. When he told them to fire he turned about to me. I looked him in the face.

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Analysis Document “A”

Author: Who is the author (source) of the document. What point of view does it represent?

Context: What is the date, location, and name of event?

Purpose: Why is Captain Preston providing this testimony? What is he accused of?

Significance: Why is Captain Preston’s account important? What details can be learned from it?

Analysis Document “B”

Author: Who is the author? What point of view does it represent?

Significance: Why is it important? What details does it provide? In what ways does it differ from Captain Preston’s testimony?

Analysis Documents “A” and “B”

In your opinion, which account do you find more reliable or believable? Why?

Apply: How do you think this lesson / event is taught in England?

Analysis Document “C” - Paul Revere, “The Bloody Massacre in King-Street, March 5, 1770.

What do you see or notice? Is there any evidence of bias?

What purpose does the engraving / print serve? Paul Revere was a member of the Sons of Liberty, what effect do you think he wanted to have on the other colonies?

Video Reenactment: Boston Massacre

How is the Boston Massacre portrayed in the video? What new evidence does it present? What point of view does it take?

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Misfacture, and the ...
Hours to the Gates of this City many Thousands of our
brave Brethren in the Country, deeply affected with our
Distresses, and to whom we are greatly obliged on this
Occasion—No one knows where this would have ended,
and what important Consequences even to the whole
British Empire might have followed, which our Moderation
& Loyalty upon so trying an Occasion, and our Faith
in the Commander's Assurances have happily prevented.
Last Thursday, agreeable to a general Request of the
Inhabitants, and by the Consent of Parents and Friends,
were carried to their Graves in Succession, the Bodies
of Samuel Gray, Samuel Maverick, James Caldwell,
and Crispus Attucks, the unhappy Victims who fell in
the bloody Massacre of the Monday Evening preceeding!

On this Occasion most of the Shops in Town were
shut, all the Bells were ordered to toll a solemn Peal, as
were also those in the neighboring Towns of Charlestown
Roxbury, &c. The Procession began to move between
the Hours of 4 and 5 in the Afternoon; two of the un-
fortunate Sufferers, viz, Mess. James Caldwell and Crispus
Attucks, who were Strangers, borne from Faneuil-Hall,