

**BIG Question:** What happened in Boston on March 5, 1770? Who was responsible?

On March 5, 1770, there was a violent confrontation between British soldiers and colonists in Boston. British soldiers killed five colonists in an event that came to be known as the Boston Massacre. The events leading up to the Boston Massacre were chaotic, and there are many conflicting accounts of what took place. Today we are going to be exploring a series of documents in order to answer these questions: What happened in Boston on March 5, 1770? Who was responsible?

As historians, we never want to accept a single account as evidence of what happened in the past, So, let's look at a second depiction of the event.

Which image do you think presents a more trustworthy account of the Boston Massacre? What other information would you want to know about the images to better understand the Boston Massacre? What information would you want to help you determine who was responsible for the violence?

Paul Revere created the first image, which he titled "Bloody Massacre in King Street." Revere, a silversmith and engraver, was actively involved in efforts to resist British rule. He was a member of the Sons of Liberty and created engravings that sought to build opposition to the British. Revere began selling copies of "Bloody Massacre" three weeks after the event. He based it on an engraving by Henry Pelham, who was a Loyalist. Pelham was never credited for his work.

The second image comes from William Nell's book *The Colored Patriots of The American Revolution*. The book was published in 1855. It was one of the earliest and most comprehensive books about African American history. Nell was an African American abolitionist from Massachusetts. He wrote for William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* and Frederick Douglass's *The North Star*. He also worked to end segregation in Massachusetts's public schools. In 1851, he lobbied the Massachusetts legislature to create a monument honoring Crispus Attucks. In 1888, after Nell's death, Boston installed a large monument commemorating the Boston Massacre and Attucks was featured prominently.

Ultimately, as historians, we need to examine other types of evidence to address the Central Historical Questions of what happened in Boston on March 5, 1770, and who was responsible. To continue investigating what happened in Boston and who was responsible for the violence, you will now analyze two documents from people who witnessed the event.

First, before you read the documents, you are going to source it. Historians source documents to know who made them, when, and for what purposes.



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# The Boston Massacre

# **BIG Question**

*What happened in Boston  
on March 5, 1770? Who was  
responsible?*



# Image 2

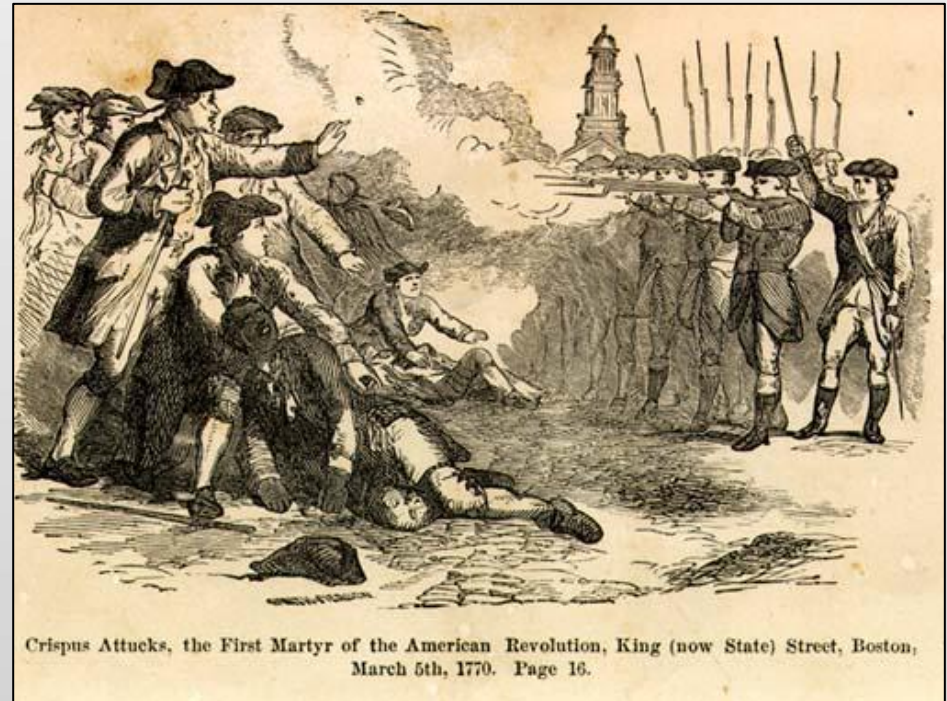


Crispus Attucks, the First Martyr of the American Revolution, King (now State) Street, Boston, March 5th, 1770. Page 16.

# Image 1 & Image 2



Paul Revere, March 28, 1770  
*The Bloody Massacre  
Perpetrated in King Street on  
March 5<sup>th</sup> 1770 by a party of  
the 29<sup>th</sup> Regiment*



William Nell, 1855  
*The Colored Patriots of the  
American Revolution*

### Document A: Thomas Preston (Modified)

*Captain Thomas Preston was an officer in the British army. While in jail, he wrote this narrative. A British tax collector brought this account to London on a ship that left Boston on March 16, 1770. The account was then re-printed in Boston newspapers in June 1770 after copies of the London newspaper were brought to Boston.*

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At about 9 some of the guards informed me that people were gathering to attack the troops. On my way there, I heard the crowd threaten the troops. About 100 people went towards the Custom House where the king's money is kept. They immediately surrounded the soldier there and threatened him. I was told that they were going to carry off the soldier and probably murder him. I immediately sent an officer and 12 men to protect both the soldier and the king's money. I followed them to prevent, if possible, any problems. I feared that the officer and soldiers might be **provoked** by the insults of the rioters. I told the troops to go out without loading their weapons and I never gave orders to load them.

The mob still increased, striking their clubs together, and calling out, "Come on you rascals, you bloody backs, you lobster scoundrels, fire if you dare." At this time I was between the soldiers and the mob, trying to **persuade** them to leave peacefully. Someone asked me if I was going to order the men to fire. I answered no, saying that I was in front of the guns, and would be shot if they fired. While I was speaking, one of the soldiers was hit with a stick, stepped a little to one side, and instantly fired. When I turned to ask him why he fired without orders, I was struck with a club on my arm.

The soldiers were attacked by a great number of heavy clubs and snowballs were thrown at them. All our lives were in danger. At the same time, someone from behind called out, "**Damn your bloods** — why don't you fire?" Instantly three or four of the soldiers fired and then three more fired in the same confusion. The mob then ran away, except three unhappy men who instantly died. When I asked the soldiers why they fired without orders, they said they heard the word fire and thought it came from me. This might be the case as many of the mob called out fire, but I told the men that I gave no such order. My words were, don't fire, stop your firing.

**Source:** *The Case of Capt. Preston of the 29<sup>th</sup> Regiment*, Public Advertiser (London), April 28, 1770

#### **Vocabulary**

provoke: to make someone angry

persuade: to convince someone to do something

damn your bloods: an insult in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

## Document B: Samuel Drowne (Modified)

*On March 12, 1770, Boston residents held a town meeting, which was how local government decisions were made. At the meeting, the colonists appointed a committee to produce an account of what happened March 5th to send to officials in London because they wanted to influence the way the events of March 5<sup>th</sup> were portrayed. Drowne was one of 96 residents of Boston to give sworn testimony to justices of the peace about what happened between the British soldiers and residents of Boston. These accounts were taken by ship to London on April 1, 1770.*

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Samuel Drowne of Boston, of lawful age, testified that about nine o'clock of the evening of the fifth day of March he saw about 14 or 15 soldiers of the 29th regiment, some were armed with swords or bayonets, others with clubs or fire-shovels. They came upon the people of the town and abused some and violently assaulted others. Most of the townspeople did not even have a stick in their hands to defend themselves.

Most of the soldiers went to King Street. Drowne followed them, and saw them fighting with people there. Drowne thought that there were no more than a dozen people there. When the soldiers arrived, most of the people left. Some of them were first assaulted by the soldiers. Then the soldiers went towards the main guard house. At the same time, five soldiers and a corporal armed with guns came out of the guard house. By this time, there were two hundred people on King Street.

Drowne saw Captain Preston, whom he knew well, with a number of soldiers armed with guns near the Custom House. Drowne believed that most of the crowd left after seeing the armed soldiers. No more than twenty or thirty remained on King Street. Those who remained were mostly sailors and other persons who were poorly dressed.

Several of them dared the soldiers to fire. Drowne then heard Capt. Preston say to the soldiers, "Damn your bloods! Why don't you fire?" The soldiers did not listen and Preston immediately said "Fire." The soldiers fired randomly.

**Source:** *Summary of the sworn testimony of Samuel Drowne, March 16, 1770.*



## Boston Massacre Images

### Image 1

What do you see in this image?

What evidence does it provide about what happened at the Boston Massacre?

### Image 2

What do you see in this image?

What evidence does it provide about what happened at the Boston Massacre?

How is Image 2 similar to Image 1?

How is Image 2 different from Image 1?

## Boston Massacre

### Document A

**Sourcing** (Answer these questions before reading the document.)

- 1) Who was Thomas Preston?
- 2) When was it written?
- 3) Why was it written?
- 4) What do you predict this document will say?

### Close Reading

- 5) According to this document, what happened at the Boston Massacre?
- 6) According to this document, who was responsible for the Boston Massacre?

### Corroboration

- 7) How is this account similar or different from the accounts provided by the two images?

### Reliability

- 8) How trustworthy is this account of what happened at the Boston Massacre? Explain your reasoning.

## Document B

**Sourcing** (Answer these questions before reading the document)

- 1) Who was Samuel Drowne?
- 2) What kind of document is this?
- 3) When was this document created?
- 4) What do you predict this document will say?

**Close Reading**

- 5) According to this document, what happened at the Boston Massacre?
- 6) According to this document, who was responsible for the Boston Massacre?

**Corroboration**

- 7) What details about the Boston Massacre do Documents A and B have in common?
- 8) What details about the event are different?
- 8) How is this account similar or different from the accounts provided by the two images?

**Reliability**

- 9) How trustworthy is this account of what happened at the Boston Massacre? Explain your reasoning.