



# The Bloody Massacre

## Evaluating Sources

**Aim:**

*How did American colonists rebel against British policies in the years before the Revolution?*

*Historical Context:* Read the excerpt and answer the two pre-analysis questions below.

### **Boston Massacre**

The tension between the colonists and British had been rising for years and reached a peak following the French and Indian War. The Proclamation of 1763 prevented colonists from moving west into the Ohio River valley; an area of the new world ripe with natural resources that colonists wanted to take advantage of. Further angering the colonists, the British Parliament raised taxes to pay for the costs of the war and future protection of the colonies. After the passage of the Sugar Act (1764), the Quartering Act (1764), the Stamp Act (1765), and the Townshend Acts (1767) colonists became fed up. The taxes on everyday goods and services were very high, and making ends meet was becoming very difficult for colonists. The colonists were paying taxes to a British monarchy and parliamentary government, in which they had no representation or voice. The cry, “No taxation without representation!”, spread like wildfire.

The taxes caused riots in Boston and other major American cities. These riots led to customs (tax collection) officials to demand additional protection from the British government. Four additional British regiments of soldiers arrived in the colonies in 1768, making the colonists feel threatened and the British feel like they had greater control over the colonists. In Boston, where the most unrest was taking place, there were 4,000 troops to control a population of only 20,000 colonists. People in Boston called the British troops “lobster backs” because they wore red coats. Crowds constantly booed and harassed the troops. On March 5, 1770, the colonists and British troops clashed in what is now called the Boston Massacre.

From: “New York Grade 11 US History and Gov’t - Reading Essentials & Study Guide Student Workbook” McGraw Hill (2016)

### ***Historical Context Analysis Questions:***

- 1) *Summarize:* Why were the British raising taxes on the American colonists? How did the colonists feel about the taxes they were forced to pay the British government?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) *Predict:* How do you think the colonists in Boston felt when large numbers of British troops arrived to occupy the colonies? How might you feel if you were a colonist living in Boston in 1770 and you were surrounded by British troops?

**Primary Source - "The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King Street, March 5th 1770", Paul Revere (1770):** The image below was created by Bostonian Paul Revere. Paul Revere was a famous American colonist and a leader in the movement for American independence. Revere was an original founding member of the rebellious group of American colonists fighting for freedom from Great Britain, *Sons of Liberty*. Originally produced as a woodblock engraving, it was replicated as a print and spread throughout the colonies in 1770. It appeared in many colonial newspapers, brochures, and pamphlets to illustrate the cruelty of the British government, and to gain support for the revolutionary movement.



Use the tools on the subsequent pages to prompt your thinking and analyze this primary source.



**Primary Source: [Captain Thomas Preston 1770 - Trial Testimony of the Boston Massacre](#)**

Captain Thomas Preston was commander of the British squad the evening of the Boston Massacre. He, along with the other members of the squad, was tried for murder in a Boston Court.

**Directions:** Read the primary source below. Answer the analysis questions that follow.

About 9 some of the guard came to and informed me the town inhabitants were assembling to attack the troops...On my way to meet the troops, I saw the people in great commotion, and heard them use the most cruel and horrid threats against the troops. In a few minutes after I reached the custom house, where the King's money is kept.

The crowd had surrounded the soldiers posted there, and with clubs and other weapons threatened to execute their vengeance on him. I was soon informed by a townsman their intention was to carry off the soldier from his post and probably murder him. This I feared might be a prelude to their plundering the King's chest.

The reinforcements soon rushed through the people, and by charging their bayonets in half-circles, kept the crowd at a little distance. The mob still increased and were more outrageous, striking their clubs or bludgeons one against another, and calling 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,' and much more such language was used. At this time I was between the soldiers and the mob, parleying with, and endeavoring all in my power to persuade them to retire peaceably...

They advanced to the points of the bayonets, struck some of them and even the muzzles of the pieces, and seemed to be endeavoring to close with the soldiers. On which some well behaved persons asked me if the guns were charged. I replied yes. They then asked me if I intended to order the men to fire. I answered no, by no means...

While I was thus speaking, one of the soldiers having received a severe blow with a stick, stepped a little on one side and instantly fired, on which turning to and asking him why he fired without orders, I was struck with a club on my arm... On this a general attack was made on the men by a great number of heavy clubs and snowballs being thrown at them, by which all our lives were in imminent danger, some persons at the same time from behind 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, except three unhappy men who instantly expired, ; . . one more is since dead...The whole of this melancholy affair was transacted in almost 20 minutes.

On my asking the soldiers why they fired without orders, they said they heard the word fire and supposed it came from me. This might be the case as many of the mob called out fire, fire, but I assured the men that I gave no such order; that my words were, don't fire, stop your firing....

**Analysis Questions:**

- 1) *Sourcing:* Whose perspective on the Boston Massacre does this represent, the British soldiers or the American colonists?
- 2) *Corroboration:* Does this document support the image created by Paul Revere? Why or why not?
- 3) *Corroboration:* How does this testimony change your view of the Paul Revere image?



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## Evaluating Sources

**Exit  
Ticket**

*Is Paul Revere's woodblock engraving depicting the Boston Massacre an example of propaganda?*

Propaganda is defined as “information, ideas, or statements of a biased\* or misleading nature, used to promote a particular point of view.” Based on this definition, do you think Paul Revere’s woodblock engraving is a piece of propaganda? Why or why not?

\*Biased: showing an inclination/prejudice for or against something or someone.