

Name: _____

Date: _____

Multiple Perspectives: Primary Source Activity

Directions: On the night of March 5, 1770, several Boston residents were shot and killed by British soldiers in what became known as the Boston Massacre. What follows are several images and first-hand accounts from eyewitness to and participants in the event. Following each primary source are questions to help you examine and interpret the information.

Primary Source #1: Report of the Committee of the Town of Boston (patriot viewpoint)

On Friday, the second of March, a quarrel arose between some soldiers and the rope-makers journeymen and apprentices, which was carried to that length, as to become dangerous to the lives of each party, many of them being much wounded. This contentious disposition continued until the Monday evening following, (March 5th) when a party of seven or eight soldiers were detached from the main guard, under the command of Captain Preston, and by his orders fired upon the inhabitants promiscuously in King Street, without the least warning of their intention, and killed three on the spot; another has since died of his wounds, and others are dangerously, some it is feared mortally, wounded. Captain Preston and his party are now in jail. An inquiry is now making into this unhappy affair...

Sam Adams, John Hancock, and others,
Committee of the Town of Boston

- 1). What happened on March 2nd that may have angered Bostonians?
 - There was an quarrel between soldiers and colonists (rope-makers, journeymen and apprentices)
- 2). Was the committee report specific about the number of British soldiers? What might that indicate?
 - Yes, seven or eight soldiers
 - You can tell the size of the fight...all of them had guns
- 3). What words used by the committee make a strong argument against the British?
 - without any warning of their intention
 - unhappy affair

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Primary Source #2: Testimony from Bostonian William Tant (providing a view much less one-sided than the Committee's)

...I saw a party of soldiers come from the main guard, and draw themselves up in a line from the corner of the Customs-house to the sentry-box; the people still continued in the street, crying "Fire, fire, and be damned," and love [throw] some more snow balls; whereupon I heard a musket go off, and in the space of two or three seconds, I heard the word "Fire" given, but by whom I do not know, and instantly the soldiers fired one after another. I then stood between the sentry-box and the Custom-house door. And further I know not.

Some other considerations:

- 1). Who gave the order to fire? Was it Captain Preston or someone in the patriot crowd?
 - Someone in the patriot crowd yelled fire

- 2). What did the crowd do that may have frightened the soldiers into thinking they might be attacked by the people in the street?
 - They were throwing snow and ice balls and other things at the soldiers

- 3). What more could Mr. Tant describe after the shots were fired?
 - The blood of the five people who were shot
 - He may have seen which soldiers were the most aggressive