

## Boston Massacre Primary Source Activity

In *America: The Story of Us - "Rebels,"* we watched as 4,000 British troops move into Boston, which was a daunting presence in a city with a total population of only 16,000. We heard the shot ring out that moved America one step closer to war with England. We saw the panic and the violence that ensued. We saw the body of Crispus Attucks, a runaway slave and the first casualty of the American Revolution who was immortalized as "the first to defy, the first to die," lying lifeless in the street.

Deemed "The Boston Massacre" by a local printer, political radical, and skilled practitioner of the new technology of engraving by the name of Paul Revere, this terrible event may never have risen to the level of importance it did except for one thing: Revere's engraving of the event, titled "The Bloody Massacre perpetrated in King-Street, Boston on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1770 by a party of the 29<sup>th</sup> Regt.," which was published in the *Boston Gazette*. Within days, it was spread by the news media, and it became the topic of conversation throughout most of America.

### I. Analysis of Revere's Engraving



1. What do you see in the image, and how would you describe the event that it depicts?
2. Who are the aggressors in this engraving by Paul Revere?
3. Where is Captain Preston, the British commander of the Redcoats? What is he doing?
4. Describe the crowd—its size, composition, and location.
5. What is the crowd doing?

6. Compose a current day tweet describing the event (old 140 limit).

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## London Chronicle Article

Excerpt of Article from *The London Chronicle*

April 26–28, 1770

The following is a substance of a letter from Boston, dated the 12th of March, relative to the unhappy affair between the Townsmen and the Soldiers on the 5th of that month:

For some time past frequent affrays have happened in the streets of this town between the inhabitants and the soldiers quartered there, and particularly on the 2nd and 3rd of March in which affrays one or two of the soldiers were much hurt. On the 5th of March, in the evening, a number of the townspeople, after insulting in the barracks, attacked a sentry upon duty at the Customhouse, and forced him from his post. Upon his requiring aid, Captain Preston (who was Captain of the day) sent a non-commissioned officer and 12 men to his assistance, and soon after followed himself. This party was also attacked, and insulted by the mob, and one of them, receiving a blow, fired his piece, after which six or seven others fired, by which three of the townspeople were killed upon the spot and several others wounded; one of which is since dead of his wounds. During this transaction there was a great tumult in the town. The people prepared to arm; expresses had been sent to the neighboring towns for assistance; and a resolution taken to give a general alarm, by firing the beacon; but by the persuasion of the Lieutenant Governor, the people were prevailed upon, after some time, to disperse; A barrel of tar, which was carrying to the beacon, was brought back, and the troops, which were under arms, retired to their barracks.

On the next morning the Council assembled to deliberate on the measures it might be advisable to pursue. It having been declared, by several of the members, that it was the determination of the people to have the troops removed from the town at all events, that this was the sense of the whole province, that the inhabitants of the other towns stood ready to come in, in order to affect this, and that they had formed their plan, of which this was only a part. And the inhabitants, assembled in town meeting, having by their selectmen, and by messages repeatedly represented, that nothing would satisfy the people, but a total and immediate removal of the troops. The Lieutenant-Governor thought fit to request the commanding officer, to cause both the regiments to remove to the barracks at the castle, which was accordingly done without further disturbance.

## II. Comparing Sources

Read the *London Chronicle* article (see previous page) and the facts below taken from the trial testimony:

- October 1, 1768: British regulars arrived in Boston, MA to maintain order and enforce the taxes the colonists were asked to pay after the French and Indian War, such as the Townsend Acts.
- The wealthy people of Boston resented the British soldiers and considered them a foreign presence.
- The common people of Boston resented their presence because they competed for jobs with the “Lobster Backs” (slang for British soldier). They taunted them and prevented them from carrying out their duties.
- March 5, 1770: The 29th Regiment came to the relief of the soldiers on duty at the Customs House in Boston. They were met by an unruly gang of civilians, many of them drunk after having left a local tavern.
- It was dark, and the crowd threw snowballs, ice balls, horse manure, and anything else lying on the street at the soldiers. The crowd also taunted the soldiers by yelling and calling them names.
- Captain Preston could not control the crowd as they taunted the soldiers. He ordered his troops “Don’t fire!” but with the commotion the troops fired and killed three men instantly; another two died later. The first man to die was Crispus Attucks, a black man.
- This was not a massacre in the sense that a lot of people died--only five died.
- The funerals of the dead were great patriotic demonstrations.
- Captain Preston and six of his men were acquitted, but two of his men were found guilty of manslaughter, punished and discharged from the army.
- The event and the public opinion regarding it helped lead to the Revolutionary War.

1. Create a list of the discrepancies that exist between the *London Chronicle* article, trial testimony, and Revere’s engraving.

Reality	Revere

2. After reading the facts listed above and the London Chronicle article, compose a current day tweet describing the event.

### **III. Revere as Propaganda**

1. Revere changed the sign on the building to read “Butcher's Hall” instead of Customs House. What effect might this alteration have had on viewers?

2. How do you think Revere intended his viewers to understand the event? What did he hope to accomplish by this?

3. Write the definition of propaganda.

4. Does this engraving qualify as propaganda? Why or why not?

### **IV. Innovation**

1. Of all the communications innovations that exist today – text messaging and Twitter, for example – which do you think is the most effective? Why?

2. What do you think will be the next great innovation in communications, and what effect do you think it will have on this country?

3. Why did several people who witnessed the same event recall it differently? What does this phenomenon tell you about the study of history?