

The Boston Massacre

By 1770 Boston was an occupied town. It had been compelled to accept the presence of four regiments of British regulars. For eighteen months they had treated the inhabitants with insolence, posted sentries in front of public offices, engaged in street fights with the town boys, and used the Boston Common for flogging unruly soldiers and exercising troops (then acting governor, Lt. Governor Thomas Hutchinson of Massachusetts, refuted these allegations).

It began when a young barber's apprentice by the name of Edward Garrick shouted an insult at Hugh White, a soldier of the 29th Regiment on sentry duty in front of the Customs House (a symbol of royal authority). White gave the apprentice a knock on the ear with the butt of his rifle. The boy howled for help, and returned with a sizable and unruly crowd, chiefly boys and youths, and, pointing at White, said, "There's the son of a bitch that knocked me down!" Someone rang the bells in a nearby church. This action drew more people into the street. The sentry found himself confronting an angry mob. He stood his ground and called for the main guard. Six men, led by a corporal, responded. They were soon joined by the officer on duty, Captain John Preston of the "29th," with guns unloaded but with fixed bayonets, to White's relief.

The crowd soon swelled to almost 400 men. They began pelting the soldiers with snowballs and chunks of ice. Led by a huge mulatto, Crispus Attucks, they surged to within inches of the fixed bayonets and dared the soldiers to fire. The soldiers loaded their guns, but the crowd, far from drawing back, came close, calling out, "Come on you rascals, you bloody backs, you lobster scoundrels, fire if you dare, God damn you, fire and be damned, we know you dare not," and striking at the soldiers with clubs and a cutlass.

Where upon the soldiers fired, killing three men outright and mortally wounding two others. The mob fled. As the gun smoke cleared, Crispus Attucks and four others lay dead or dying. Six more men were wounded but survived.

Captain Preston, the soldiers, and four men in the Customs House alleged to have fired shots from it were promptly arrested, indicted for murder, and held in prison pending trial for murder in the Massachusetts Superior Court, which prudently postponed the trial until the fall, thus giving the people of Boston and vicinity from whom the jury would be drawn, time to cool off.

All troops were immediately withdrawn from town. John Adams defended the soldiers at their trials (Oct. 24-30 and Nov. 27-Dec. 5, 1770); Preston and four men were acquitted, while two soldiers were found guilty of manslaughter and released after being branded on the hand.

The calm with which the outcome of the trials was accepted doubtless was attributable in large measure to the evidence at the trials that the soldiers had not fired until they were attacked. But another important factor was the withdrawal of the troops from Boston immediately after the "Massacre." The sending of British warships and troops to Boston for the protection of the American Customs Board and the "Massacre" resulting from the presence of troops there were, however, ultimately of great significance in the movement toward the revolution.

The "Massacre" served as anti-British propoganda for Boston radicals and elsewhere heightened American fears of standing armies.

The BLOODY MASSACRE perpetrated in King-Street BOSTON on March 5th 1770 by a party of the 9th REGT



Engraved Printed & Sold by Paul Revere

Unhappy Boston! see thy Sons deplore,
 Thy hallow'd Walks belmur'd with guiltless Gore.
 Woe faithful F— n and his savage Bands,
 With murderous Banour stretch their bloody hands,
 Like fierce barbarians grinning o'er their Prey,
 Approve the Carnage and enjoy the Day.

If leading drops from Anguish's Wings,
 If fix'd steel's Sorrows lab'ring for a Tongue,
 Or if a weeping World can ought appease,
 The plaintive Ghosts of Victims such as these;
 The Patriot's cupous Bars for each are shed,
 A glorious Tribute which embalms the Dead.

But know Fate summons to that awful Goal,
 Where Justice strips the Murderer of his Soul,
 Should vend C— to the Scandal of the Land,
 Snatch the reluctant Victim from her Hand,
 Keen Executions on this Plate infer'd,
 Shall reach a Jupiter who never can be held.

The unhappy Sufferers were Messrs SAUL GRAY, SAMUEL MAVERICK, JAMES CALDWELL, CRISPUS ATTUCKS & PATRICK CARROLL
 Killed Six wounded two of them (CHRISTOPHER MONK & JOHN CLARK) Mortally

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