

FACTS ABOUT THE BOSTON MASSACRE, 1770

The streets of Boston in 1770 were filled with strain and tension. More than 2,000 British regulars occupied the city. Small fights between patriots and loyalists and between patriots and British soldiers were a daily problem. Patriots protested taxes, destroyed British goods, and vandalized stores belonging to colonists loyal to the King (Loyalists). British regulars were required to uphold the law and keep the peace.

On February 22nd, a mob of patriots attacked a loyalist's store and an 11-year-old boy was killed by a local customs officer firing his gun into the crowd, trying to break it up. Boston was a powder keg waiting for something more to ignite it.

A British soldier, Private Hugh White, was guarding the Custom House on King Street on the evening of March 5th, 1770, to discourage vandalism and rioting by colonists. White and a local wigmaker's apprentice began to argue and shout insults at each other. A group of colonists formed around him and began to verbally insult White. White struck a colonist with his bayonet and was warned by a colonist that if he shot his musket, he could be killed by the crowd. Colonists began to pelt him with snowballs, ice, and stones. Bells in the city, used as a fire alarm, started ringing and more colonists arrived. White called for British reinforcements.

Capt. Thomas Preston arrived with four more British soldiers, a total of six scattered among a crowd of perhaps as many as fifty colonists and onlookers. The colonists struck the soldiers with clubs and sticks. It is unclear who said the word "fire", but after that, a soldier fired his gun. After the first shot, other soldiers fired their guns. Later, in court, witnesses would testify that no one knew who gave the order to fire. In the end, five colonists were killed, and six colonists were wounded. Preston and his soldiers were arrested and jailed.

Despite the bloodshed, patriot leaders like Samuel Adams and Paul Revere urged colonists to continue to oppose British law openly, resist soldiers, and rebel. Paul Revere created an engraving of the event just three weeks after the massacre. It was titled, "Bloody Massacre Perpetuated in Kings Street" and included a poem by Revere that implied the British soldiers enjoyed their day of killing (Paul Revere Heritage Project website).

A trial for the soldiers was held seven months later. John Adams, a colonist, lawyer, and future US President, defended the British soldiers in court to demonstrate that all citizens should have "due

process under the law". The jury had to decide if the soldiers had fired in self-defense or deliberately, and which soldier or soldiers killed or wounded the victims.

Sources:

Boston massacre (n.d.) Wikipedia.org. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston_Massacre

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