

“Thanksgiving for the Repeal of the Stamp-Act”

(Diary of John Adams, 1:316)

1765	1768	1770
The Stamp Act is repealed	Soldiers are stationed in the colonies	The Boston Massacre

By 1770, 16,000 people lived in Boston. About 600 were soldiers of the British Army. They were called “lobsterbacks” by the townspeople because of the red coat they wore as part of their uniform. The soldiers and the people of Boston did not get along because the colonists thought the soldiers were sent to enforce laws they did not want and therefore limited their freedom. Some colonists did not believe the soldiers were sent for their protection.

Several incidents that preceded the Boston Massacre on March 5th 1770:

Event 1

On February 28, 1770, a mob of people formed outside a British tax collector’s house in Boston’s North End. This tax collector was also believed to be an informant for the British government. The protestors showed their anger by throwing rotten food, ice, and stones at the tax collector’s house as well as calling him names. The crowd was out of control. Suddenly, something flew through the window and hit the tax collector’s wife. Her husband grabbed the gun, which was unloaded and waived it out the window to warn the crowd. When they kept up, he loaded the gun and fired into the crowd. Christopher Seider, an eleven-year-old boy, was shot, and died later that evening.

Read what John Adams wrote in his diary about the funeral for Christopher:

Feb. 26, 1770

“When I came into Town, I saw a vast Collection of People, near Liberty Tree—enquired and found the funeral of the Child, lately kill’d by Richardson was to be attended. Went into Mr. Rowes, and warmed me, and then went out with him to the Funeral, a vast Number of Boys walk’d before the Coffin, a vast Number of Women and Men after it, and a Number of Carriages. My Eyes never beheld such a funeral. The Procession extended further than can be well imagined.

This Shewes, there are many more Lives to spend if wanted in the Service of their Country.

It Shews, too that the Faction is not yet expiring – that the Ardor of the People is not to be quelled by the Slaughter of one Child and the Wounding of another. “

(Diary of John Adams, 1:349)

What did John Adams mean when he wrote the lines that are underlined?

Ebenezer Richardson, the tax collector, was charged with murder. According to English law, if you were found guilty of murder, the punishment was death. He was found guilty of killing Christopher Seider, but the King pardoned him.

Event 2

On March 2nd, three days before the Boston Massacre, there was a fight between a group of Bostonians and a group of soldiers. Oftentimes, the soldiers in the British Army would do extra work to earn money. This incident took place at John Gray's Ropewalk. A British soldier came to the ropewalk looking for work. A rope maker asked him if he wanted work. The soldier said yes. The man then said to him, "Well then go clean my outhouse!" The soldier said, "Go clean it yourself!" Eventually, the soldier and a group of rope makers were fighting. The soldier was able to get away, but he returned with more soldiers and the fight started again. Men on both sides were injured.

Event 4

The next night, March 3rd, the soldiers returned to the ropewalk and another fight broke out. That night, one of the rope makers believed he heard a threat from one of the soldiers. He thought the soldier said "there were a great many townspeople who would eat their dinners on Monday next who would not eat any on Tuesday." One of the soldiers involved in the fight would later be charged with murder in the Boston Massacre.

March 5th — What happened?

Paul Revere's famous engraving of the Boston Massacre is not a true representation of what happened on the evening of March 5, 1770. Using the information below—from a broadside, a series of eyewitness accounts, and the Revere engraving—your group must come up with a more accurate drawing of what happened that evening.

Paul Revere's engraving: http://www.masshist.org/database/onview_full.cfm?queryID=178

Broadside:

A Monumental Inscription on the Fifth of March (Boston: Isaiah Thomas, 1772)

AMERICANS!
Bear in Remembrance
The HORRID MASSACRE!
Perpetrated in King-street, Boston,
New-England,
On the Evening of March the Fifth, 1770.
When Five of your fellow countrymen,
GRAY, MAVERICK, CALDWELL, ATTUCKS,
and CARR
Lay wallowing in their Gore!
Being *basely*, and most *inhumanly*
MURDERED!
And SIX others badly wounded!
By a Party of the XXIXth Regiment,
Under the command of Capt. Tho. Preston.
Remember!
That Two of the Murderes
Were convicted of MANSLAUGHTER!
By a Jury, of whom I shall say
NOTHING,
Branded in the hand!
And *dismissed*,
The others were Acquitted,
And their Captain PENSIONED!
Also,
Bear in Remembrance
That on the 22nd Day of February, 1770.
The infamous
EBENEZER RICHARDSON, Informer,
And tool to Ministerial hirelings,

Most *barbarously*
MURDERED
CHRISTOPHER SEIDER,
An innocent youth!
Of which crime he was found guilty
By his Country
On Friday April 20th, 1770;
But remained *Unsentenced*
On Saturday the 22nd Day of February, 1772.
When the Grand Inquest
For Suffolk county,
Were informed, at request,
By the Judges of the Superior Court,
That Ebenezer Richardson's *Case*
Then lay before his Majesty.
Therefore said *Richardson*
This day, March Fifth! 1772,
Remains unchanged!!!
Let these things be told to Posterity!
And handed down
From Generation to Generation,
'Till Time shall be no more!
Forever may AMERICA be preserved,
From weak and wicked monarchs,
Tyrannical Ministers,
Abandoned Governors,
Their Underlings and Hirelings!
And may the
Machinations of artful, designing wretches,
Who would ENSLAVE THIS People,
Come to an end,
Let their NAMES and MEMORIES
Be buried in eternal oblivion,
And the PRESS,
For a *SCOURGE* to Tyrannical Rulers,
Remain FREE.

Eyewitness Accounts:

Joseph Helyer

Hearing the bell ring I repaired to the middle Town. Passed up Cornhill. The Street was still. Went down to the Custom house. Saw some people about the Centinel who was on the steps. Heard some young voices say fire if you dare. Some people came along and told the Boys not to molest the Centinel. I went up King street near the foot of the Town house. Met 8 or 10 Soldiers coming down. I observed a Commission officer with them. I heard a Person say to the Officer you need not or you won't fire upon them, you have nothing to do but to keep them off. The Soldiers went to the Custom house. As soon as they got there I heard a confused noise and went down and found them in a rank intire. Whether $\frac{1}{2}$ moon or strait I know not, with their Bayonets charged. Just after I passed the last Man on the left a gun was fired on the right. In about 20 seconds a second. In about 10 seconds a third. The last man but one fired on the left last. I heard no orders. It appeared to me the Soldiers who fired acted pure nature. I mean they acted and fired by themselves because of their being disciplined and fired without orders. I saw no contest between the Soldiers and Inhabitants that could justify their firing and when I saw the men lying in the Street I could not believe they were dead. After the firing the Captain said dont fire upon the Inhabitants. When I went to the Custom house there were but about 30. At least about 100 or 60. The Sentry box was not in the Gutter.

Captain James Gifford

About 10 OClock went to the Main Guard and found Capt. Preston. He told me he had sent a Party to Protect the Centinel. That the Mob attacked them so furiously that they fired upon them.

The Prisoner asked did you ever know an Officer order Men to fire with their Bayonets charged: answer no.

Thomas H. Peck

I was at home when the Guns were fired. I heard 'em distinct. I went up to the main guard and addressed myself to the Captain and said to him What have you done? He said, Sir it was none of my doings, the Soldiers fired of their own accord, I was in the Street and might have been shot. His character is good as a Gentleman and Soldier. I think it exceeds any of the Corps.

Harrison Gray jr.

About $\frac{1}{4}$ after 9 went into the Street and saw about 60 Persons round the Centinel insulting him. I advised 'em to let him alone and told 'em if he had offended 'em that was not the place to resent it. They continued noisy and said damn him let him fire he has but one Gun. I told 'em he was so near the Guard he could have a party presently. They continued very noisy and I went in to Mr. Paine's.

John Gillespie

About 7 o'Clock, in the forestreet, towards the South end met a number of Inhabitants coming down with Sticks and Clubs. After, was told the Bell rang for fire, but was told by Mr. Freeman there was no fire but the People were fighting somewhere with the Soldiers. Some people said by God lets go to their assistance. Came to the Guard House. Saw a great many People there. Went home and heard the Guns fired.

Lieutenant Governor

I suppose I need not mention any thing which preceded my coming into King Street. I was pressed by the people almost upon the Bayonets. The People cried the Governor. I called for the Officer. He came from between the Ranks. I did not know him by Moon light. I had heard no circumstances. I inquired with some emotion, How came you to fire without Orders from a Civil Magistrate? I am not certain of every word. I cannot recollect his answer. It now appears to me that it was imperfect. As if he had more to say. I remember by what he said or his actions I thought he was offended at being questioned. Before I could have his full answer the people cried to the Town house, to the Town house. A Gentleman by me (Mr. Belknap) was extremely civil. I thought he press'd my going into the Town house from a concern for my safety. I was carried by the crowd into the Council Chamber. After some hours Capt. Preston was brought there to be examined. I heard him deny giving Orders. I am very sure it did not occur to me that he had said anything in answer to my question in the Street which would not consist with this denial. My intention in going up was to enquire into the affair. I have no particular intimacy with Capt. Preston. His general character is extremely good. Had I wanted an Officer to guard against a precipitate action I should have pitched upon him as soon as any in the Regiment.

L. Kinvin Wroth and Hiller B. Zobel, ed., *The Legal Papers of John Adams*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1965), 3: 75-78.

Lesson 4
Homework

Name:
Date:

Who would you defend?

Based on what you know now about the Boston Massacre, would you defend the British soldiers? Explain why or why not.

At the time of the Boston Massacre, Bostonians disliked the British soldiers, and they hated them even more after what happened on March 5th. But evidence shows that it really was not a massacre. The colonists were teasing and taunting the soldiers and there was a mob of people in the crowd with their own weapons.

On the lines below, make a list of people or groups of people who are not liked in our society today.

For example, some people today dislike and do not trust Muslims after what happened on September 11th, 2001. Are there other groups or individuals that are viewed in this way? Create a list below.

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