

**Interpretation of a Major Event in History:**  
**American and British Views of the BOSTON MASSACRE**

**Propaganda:** Words or images that promote a particular point of view.

Just as Paul Revere's engraving portrayed the Boston Massacre in a particular light, so did the written accounts that took place afterwards. Below are short accounts of the Boston Massacre from five different sources. Read each selection carefully. As you read, highlight the words or phrases that indicate whether the person writing is British or American in origin. Then answer the questions that follow.

***SOURCES:***

- A. *Report of the Committee of the Town of Boston*
- B. *An article called "Historical Chronicle" presenting Capt. Preston's views of the event from the British periodical, The Gentlemen's Magazine of April, 1770.*
- C. *John Adams' account from his Autobiography.*
- D. *Except from The American Revolution, written by George Trevelyan, an English politician and cabinet minister in 1897.*
- E. *An account by two noted contemporary American historians, Samuel Elliot Morrison and Henry Steele Commager, first published in 1930.*

1. "On the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> of March, 1770, there came a short and sharp collision between a handful of soldiers and a small crowd, voluble in abuse, and too free with clubs and snowballs. There was a sputter of musketry, and five or six dropped down dead or dying. That was the Boston Massacre."

\*Source letter \_\_\_\_\_

BRITISH OR AMERICAN

2. "On Friday the 2<sup>nd</sup> instant, a quarrel arose between some soldiers of the 29<sup>th</sup> and the rope-makers journeymen....many of them being wounded. This contentious disposition continued until Monday evening following, 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."

\*Source letter \_\_\_\_\_

BRITISH OR AMERICAN

3. "The presence of British red-coats in Boston was a standing invitation to disorder. Antagonism between citizens and soldiery flared up in the so-called Boston Massacre of 5 March 1770. A snowballing of the red-coats degenerated into mob attack, someone gave the order to fire, and four Bostonians lay dead in the snow."

\*Source letter \_\_\_\_\_

BRITISH OR AMERICAN

**4. “The year 1770 was memorable enough.... The evening of the fifth of March....About nine o’clock we were alarmed with the ringing of Bells, and supposing it to be a Signal of fire, We snatched our Hats and Cloaks....In the Street We were informed that the British had fired on the inhabitants, killed some and wounded others near the Town house.”**

**\*Source letter \_\_\_\_\_**

**BRITISH OR AMERICAN**

**5. “On Monday night about eight o’clock, two soldiers were attacked and beat....about 100 people passed and went toward the custom-house, where the King’s money is lodged. They immediately surrounded the sentinel posted there, and with clubs and other weapons threatened to execute their vengeance on him....The mob still increased....They advanced to the points of the bayonets, struck some of them....a soldier having received a severe blow with a stick instantly fired....A general attack was then made on the men by heaving clubs and snow balls....some persons from behind called out.... ‘why don’t you fire?!’ Instantly three or four of the soldiers fired, one after another, and directly after, three more in the same confusion and hurry. The mob then ran away, except three unhappy men who instantly expired.”**

**\*Source letter \_\_\_\_\_**

**BRITISH OR AMERICAN**

**QUESTIONS:**

1. On what facts do all five accounts agree?
2. On what facts do these five accounts of the same event differ?
3. Which account includes opinion as well as fact? What is the opinion?
4. Which account do you think is the most accurate? Why?
5. What should this exercise tell you about historical events?