

Boston Massacre - Primary Source Analysis / Short Answer Question



Revere, Paul. "The Bloody Massacre perpetrated in King Street Boston on March 5th 1770 by a party of the 29th Regt." Just three weeks after British soldiers shot and killed five Bostonians and wounded six others, the silversmith and patriot Paul Revere produced this engraving.

1. Use the image to answer parts a, b, and c.

A. Briefly explain the artist's point of view about the political tensions between the British colonists and Great Britain.

B. Briefly explain ONE development in the period 1763-1776 that could be used to support the point of view expressed by the artist.

C. Briefly explain ONE development in the period 1763-1776 that could be used to challenge the point of view expressed by the artist.

The BLOODY MASSACRE perpetrated in King-Street BOSTON on March 5th 1770 by a party of the 29th REG^t



Engrav'd Printed & Sold by PAUL REVERE BOSTON

Unhappy BOSTON! see thy Sons deplore,	Thy hallow'd Walks besear'd with guiltless Gore	While faithless P—n and his savage Bands	With murderous Rancour stretch their bloody Hands	Like fierce Barbarians grinning o'er their prey	Approve the Carnage and enjoy the Day	Of scalding Drops from Rage from Anguish Wring	Speecheless Sorrows lab'ring for a Tongue	Where JUSTICE strips the Murderer of his Soul	Should venal C—ts the scandal of the Land	Snatch the relentless Villain from her Hand	Keen Execrations on this Plate inferib'd	Shall reach a JUDGE who never can be brib'd
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The unhappy Sufferers were Messrs SAM^l GRAY, SAM^l MAWERICK, JAM^s CALDWELL, CRISPUS ATTUCKS & PAT^r CARR
 Killed Six wounded two of them (CHRIST^l MONK & JOHN CLARK) Mortally

Background Information

By the beginning of 1770 there 4,00 British soldiers in Boston, a city with 15,000 inhabitants, and tensions were running high. On the evening of March 5, crowds of day laborers, apprentices, and merchant sailors began to pelt British soldiers with snowballs and rocks. A shot rang out, and then several soldiers fired their weapons. When it was over, five civilians lay dead or dying, including Crispus Attucks, an African American merchant sailor who had escaped from slavery more than twenty years earlier.

Produced just three weeks after the Boston Massacre, Paul Revere's historic engraving, "The Bloody Massacre in King Street," was probably the most effective piece of war propaganda in American history. Not an accurate depiction of the actual event, it shows an orderly line of British soldiers firing into an American crowd and includes a poem that Revere likely wrote. Revere based his engraving on that of artist Henry Pelham, who create the first illustration of the episode – and who was neither paid nor credited for his work.

Here are a few of the elements Paul Revere used in his engraving to shape public opinion.

- The British are lined up an officer is giving an order to fire, implying that the British soldiers are the aggressors.
- The colonists are shown reacting to the British when in fact they had attacked the soldiers.
- British faces are sharp and angular in contrast to the Americans' softer, more, innocent features. This makes the British look more menacing.
- The British soldiers look like they are enjoying the violence, particularly the soldier at the far end.
- The colonists, who were mostly laborers, are dressed as gentlemen. Elevating their status could affect the way people perceived them.
- The only two signs in the image that you can read are "Butcher's Hall" and Customs House," both hanging directly over the British soldiers.
- There is a distressed woman in the rear of the crowd. This played on eighteenth- century notions of chivalry.
- There appears to be a sniper in the window beneath the "Butcher's Hall" sign.
- Dogs tend to symbolize loyalty and fidelity. The dog in the print is not bothered by the mayhem behind him and is staring out at the viewer.
- The sky is illustrated in such a way that it seems to cast light on the British "atrocities."
- Crispus Attucks is visible in the lower left-hand corner. In many other existing copies of this print, he is not portrayed as African American.
- The weather conditions depicted do not match the testimony presented at the soldier's trial (no snow).
- The soldiers' stance indicates an aggressive, military posture.

Other Interesting Facts

- In the first edition, the time on the clock was incorrect. Revere had it corrected immediately.
- The trial of the British soldiers was the first time a judge used the phrase "reasonable doubt."
- One of the British soldiers named Piercer Butler left the army and became a South Caroline plantation owner. In 1787, he was appointed as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention.

“The Fruits of Arbitrary Power, or The Bloody Massacre” by Henry Pelham



Questions for Discussion

1. While there are many similarities in the engravings by Henry Pelham and Paul Revere, there are also significant differences. Carefully examine both documents and explain how they differ. Consider both the image of the event and the text at the top and bottom of both documents.
2. Revere's document was well-known at the time while Pelham's was less regarded. Over the years, Revere's painting had gained notoriety and has been frequently reproduced in textbooks and popular publications. How can this be explained?