*In the spring of 1770 a group of townspeople in a small town gathered around a government building in the town’s square. Angry at the presence of the army on their streets, a major war had ended not 10 years earlier, the citizens started yelling insults and provoking the soldiers guarding the building. Eventually one of the guards hit one of the civilians with the butt of his rifle. Here is what followed…*

On Monday night about 8 o'clock two soldiers were attacked and beat. A party of the townspeople in order broke into two meeting houses and rang the alarm bells. About 9 some of the guard came to inform me the town inhabitants were assembling to attack the troops, and that the bells were ringing as the signal for that purpose. And the beacon intended to be fired to bring in the distant people of the country. This, as I was captain of the day, occasioned my repairing immediately to the main guard.

On my way there I saw the people in great commotion, and heard them use the most cruel and horrid threats against the troops. In a few minutes after I reached the guard, about 100 people passed it, and went towards the custom house where the government’s money is lodged.

They immediately surrounded the guard posted there, and with clubs and other weapons threatened to execute their vengeance on him. I was soon informed by a townsman their intention was to carry off the soldier from his post and probably murder him.

I immediately sent an officer and 12 men to protect both the guard and the money, and very soon followed myself to prevent, if possible, all disorder, fearing lest the officer and soldiers, by the insults and provocations of the rioters, should be thrown off their guard and commit some rash act.

They soon rushed through the people, and by charging their bayonets in half-circles, kept them at a little distance. Nay, so far was I from intending the death of any person that I suffered the troops to go to the spot where the unhappy affair took place without loading their weapons; nor did I ever give orders for loading them. This remiss conduct in me perhaps merits censure; yet it is evidence that my intention was not to act offensively and not without compulsion.

The mob still increased and were more outrageous, striking their clubs or bludgeons one against another, and calling out, 'Come on you rascals, you bloody backs, you lobster scoundrels, fire if you dare, G-d damn you, fire and be damned, we know you dare not,' and much more such language was used. At this time I was between the soldiers and the mob, and endeavoring all in my power to persuade them to retire peaceably.

They advanced to the points of the bayonets, struck some of them and even the muzzles of the pieces, and seemed to be endeavoring to close with the soldiers. On which some well behaved persons asked me if the guns were charged. I replied yes. They then asked me if I intended to order the men to fire. I answered no, by no means, observing to them that I was advanced before the muzzles of the men's pieces, and must fall a sacrifice if they fired.

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While I was thus speaking, one of the soldiers having received a severe blow with a stick, stepped a little on one side and instantly fired, on which turning to and asking him why he fired without orders, I was struck with a club on my arm, which for some time deprived me of the use of it, which blow had it been placed on my head most probably would have de­stroyed me. On this a general attack was made on the men by a great number of heavy clubs and snowballs being thrown at them, by which all our lives were in imminent danger, some persons at the same time from behind calling out, ‘damn your bloods-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, ; . . one more is since dead, three others are severely wounded, and four slightly wounded. The whole of this melancholy affair was transacted in almost 20 minutes.

On my asking the soldiers why they fired without orders, they said they heard the word fire and supposed it came from me. This might be the case as many of the mob called out fire, fire, but I assured the men that I gave no such order; that my words were, don't fire, stop your firing. In short, it was scarcely possible for the soldiers to know who said fire, or don't fire, or stop your firing.

Immediately after a townsman came and told me that 4 or 5000 people were assembled in the next street, and had sworn to take my life with every man's with me. On which I judged it unsafe to remain there any longer, and therefore sent the party to the main guard, where the street is narrow and short, there telling them off into street firings, divided and planted them at each end of the street to secure their rear, expecting an attack, as there was a constant cry of the inhabitants ‘to arms, to arms, turn out with your guns;’ and the town drums beating to arms, I ordered my drums to beat to arms, and being soon after joined by the different companies of the 29th regiment, I formed them as the guard into street firings.

1. Summarize the events.
2. How/why did the gun fire occur? Who started it?
3. Eventually high ranking soldiers, including the author of this account, and four civilian “leaders” of this incident were put on trial to determine fault; who would you have found at fault here? Why?

THE HORRID MASSACRE PERPETRATED IN THE EVENING OF THE FIFTH DAY OF MARCH, 1770, BY SOLDIERS OF THE TWENTY-NINTH REGIMENT WITH SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE STATE OF THINGS PRIOR TO THAT CATASTROPHE It may be a proper introduction to briefly to represent the state of things for some time previous to the said Massacre.

At the end of the late war, in which this state fought so hard, a happy union subsisted between the government and the people. This was unfortunately interrupted by unjust laws and disruption of commerce and business. The government also saw fit to place and keep soldiers on our streets even after the war had ended.

Thus were we, frustrated and embarrassed, embarrassed with troops, forced upon us, contrary to the spirit of [the](http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/before-1600/magna-charta.php) law-contrary to the very letter of the Bill of Rights, in which it is declared, that the raising or keeping a standing army in time of peace, unless it be with the consent of the people, is against law. All of this on top of unjust laws and taxes.

We shall next attend to the conduct of the troops, and to some circumstances relative to them. The government intended to turn a lawfully run office of the legislature into a barracks for unwanted, and unnecessary, troops. When the lawful government of the state refused, the troops were sent to intimidate the legislatures and the people of the town. This situation occasioned many quarrels and uneasiness. Some of these included: the attack by a party of soldiers on some of the magistrates of the town-the firing of a loaded musket in a public street, to the endangering a great number of peaceable inhabitants-the frequent wounding of persons by their bayonets, and the numerous instances of bad behavior of the soldiers, made us early sensible that the troops were not sent here for any benefit to the town.

It was not expected, however, that such an outrage and massacre, as happened here on the evening of the fifth, would have been perpetrated. There were then killed and wounded, by a discharge of musketry, eleven citizens. The actors in this dreadful tragedy were a party of soldiers commanded by [Capt. Preston](http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1751-1775/captain-prestons-account-of-the-boston-massacre-march-5-1770.php) of the 29th regiment. This party included eight other soldiers, who are all committed to jail.

Here are the accounts of the events:

Benjamin Frizell, on the evening of the 5th of March, having taken his station near the west corner of the Custom-house in King street, before and at the time of the soldiers firing their guns, declares (among other things) that the first discharge was only of one gun, the next of two guns, upon which he thinks he saw a man stumble; the third discharge was of three guns, upon which he thinks he saw two men fall; and immediately after were discharged five guns, two of which were by soldiers on his right hand; the other three, were discharged from the balcony, or the chamber window of the office building.

Mr. Grays, owner of the rope-making shop, said tensions started when a soldier challenged one of his employees to a boxing match. The challenge was accepted, the soldier lost. He ran to the barrack in the neighborhood, and returned with several of his companions. The fray was renewed, and the soldiers were driven off. They soon returned with recruits and were again beaten. This happened several times, till at length a considerable body of soldiers was collected. By this time Mr. Gray being alarmed, and with the assistance of some gentlemen prevented any further disturbance. To satisfy the soldiers and punish the man who had continued the fight, and as an example to the rest, Mr. Grays fired them; and waited on Col. Dalrymple, the commanding officer of the troops, and with him took measures for preventing further mischief. Though this affair ended thus, it made a strong impression on the minds of the soldiers in general, who thought the honor of the regiment needed to be avenged. For this purpose they seem to have formed a combination to commit some outrage upon the inhabitants of the town indiscriminately; and this was to be done on the evening of the 5th or soon after.

Samuel Drowne declares that, about nine o'clock of the evening of the fifth of March current, standing at his own door in Cornhill, he saw about fourteen or fifteen soldiers of the 29th regiment, who came from Murray's barracks, armed, swords, &c., and came upon the inhabitants of the town, abused some, and violently assaulted others as they met them; most of whom were without so much as a stick in their hand to defend themselves, as he very clearly could discern, it being moonlight, and himself being one of the assaulted persons.

The soldiers then walked up Kings Street; where, making a short stop, and after assaulting and driving away the few they met there, they brandished their arms and cried out,*“where are the cowards!"* At this time there were very few persons in the street beside themselves. Other guards watched as the soldiers assaulted provoked the people of the town. The outrageous behavior and the threats of the said party occasioned the ringing of the meeting bell near the head of King street in order to signal the townspeople of distress. It presently brought out a number of inhabitants. There was much commotion and confusion. The soldiers yelled foul language and shoved the townspeople with bayonets; as a consequence of this some boys threw snowballs at the soldiers. This seems to have been the only provocation that was given. Mr. Knox declares, that while he was talking with Capt. Preston, the soldiers had attacked the people with their bayonets without Capt. Preston’s orders. He also declares, that Capt. Preston seemed to be in great haste and much agitated. The said party was formed into a half circle; and within a short time after they had been posted at the government building, began to fire upon the people.

Captain Preston is said to have ordered them to fire, and to have repeated that order. One gun was fired first; then others in succession and with deliberation, till ten or a dozen guns were fired. By which means eleven persons were killed and wounded, as above represented.

1. Summarize the events.
2. How/why did the gun fire occur? Who started it?
3. Eventually high ranking soldiers, including Capt. Preston, and four civilian “leaders” of this incident were put on trial to determine fault; who would you have found at fault here? Why?