

# Boston Massacre Trial Testimony

## Deposition of Captain Thomas Preston, March 12, 1770 (Except)

**Captain Thomas Preston:** “The mob still increased and were 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.... [O]ne of the soldiers having received a severe blow with a stick, stepped a little to one side and instantly fired.... 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.... 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.”

## Witnesses for the Prosecution

**Ebenezer Hinkley:** “Just after 9 o’clock heard the Cry of Fire. I saw the party come out of the Guard House. A Capt. cried out of the Window ‘fire upon ’em damn ’em.’ I followed ’em down before the Custom House door. Capt. Preston was out and commanded ’em. They drew up and charged their Bayonets.... Then I heard the word fire in ¼ minute he fired.”

**Peter Cunningham:** “I am pretty positive the Capt. bid ’em Prime and load. I stood about 4 feet off him.”

**William Wyatt:** “I heard the officer say fire. The Soldiers did not fire. His back was to me. I heard the same voice say fire. The Soldiers did not fire. The Officer then stamped and said Damn your bloods fire be the consequences what it will. Immediately the first Gun was fired.”

**Theodore Bliss:** “I saw the People throw Snow Balls at the Soldiers and saw a Stick about 3 feet long strike a Soldier upon the right. He sallied\* and then fired.... Then the other[s] fast after one another. One or two Snow balls hit the Soldier, the stick struck, before firing. I know not whether he sallied on account of the Stick or step’d back to make ready. I did not hear any Order given by the Capt. to fire. I stood so near him I think I must have heard him if he had given an order to fire before the first firing.”

\* Sallied = leaped forward suddenly

## Witnesses for the Prisoner (Preston)

**James Woodall:** “I saw one Soldier knocked down. His Gun fell from him. I saw a great many sticks and pieces of sticks and Ice thrown at the Soldiers. The Soldier who was knocked down took up his Gun and fired directly. Soon after the first Gun I saw a Gentleman behind the Soldiers in velvet of blue or black plush trimmed with gold. He put his hand toward their backs. Whether he touched them I know not and said by God I’ll stand by you whilst I have a drop of

blood and then said fire and two went off and the rest to 7 or 8.... The Capt., after, seemed shocked and looked upon the Soldiers. I am very certain he did not give the word fire.”

**Edward Hill:** “After all the firing Captain Preston put up the Gun of a soldier who was going to fire and said fire no more you have done mischief enough.”

**Richard Palmes:** “I said to Preston are your Soldiers Guns loaded. He answered with powder and ball. Sir I hope you dont intend the Soldiers shall fire on the Inhabitants. He said by no means. The instant he spoke I saw something resembling Snow or Ice strike the Grenadier on the Captains right hand.... He instantly stepd one foot back and fired the first Gun. I had then my hand on the Captains shoulder. After the Gun went off I heard the word fire.... I dont know who gave the word fire.”

**Jane Whitehouse:** “A Man came behind the Soldiers walked backwards and forward, encouraging them to fire.... The man touched one of the Soldiers upon the back and said fire, by God I’ll stand by you. He was dressed in dark colored clothes.... He did not look like an Officer. The man fired directly on the word and clap on the Shoulder. I am positive the man was not the Captain.... I am sure he gave no orders.”

**Newton Prince** (*a Negro member of the South Church*): “Saw the Soldiers planted by the Custom house two deep. The People were calling them Lobsters, daring ’em to fire saying damn you why don’t you fire. I saw Capt. Preston out from behind the Soldiers.... I was going off to the west of the Soldiers and heard the Guns fire and saw the dead carried off.... The People whilst striking on the Guns cried fire, damn you fire. I have heard no Orders given to fire, only the people in general cried fire.”

**Sources:** *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts* (1905), Vol. 7, 8-9; Hiller B. Zobel, ed., *The Legal Papers of John Adams* (1965) 3: 46-98; William Bruce Wheeler and Susan D. Becker, eds. *Discovering the American Past: A Look at the Evidence*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (2002), 81-88