Document A: Captain Thomas Preston's Account of the
Boston Massacre (13 March 1770)

On a freezing March day in 1770, one of the king's soldiers was looking for work to earn some extra money. Someone started making fun of him and told him to get a job cleaning toilets [...] One thing led to another and there was a fight.

That started things. Soon a noisy, jeering group of mischief makers gathered in front of the Boston Customs House. They began pushing and shoving and throwing stones and pieces of ice at the British sentry. He got knocked down and he called for help. Captain Thomas Preston came to the rescue with eight British soldiers.

There is some confusion about what happened next. The mob is said to have taunted the redcoats yelling, "Fire! Fire!" Captain Preston is said to have yelled, "Hold your fire!" Then the British soldier was hit with a big stick. He said he heard the word, "fire," so fired his gun into the crowd. The street gang moved forward; the redcoats panicked and fired at unarmed people. Five Americans died; seven were wounded.

None of them was a hero. The victims were troublemakers who got worse than they deserved. The soldiers were professionals...who shouldn't have panicked. The whole thing shouldn't have happened.