



## Boston Massacre

"No more taxation without representation!" This was the colonists' cry in response to the British **Parliament** (the British government) making laws and charging taxes without giving them a voice in the matter. The colonists felt like this was very unfair. In June 1767, Parliament created the Townshend Acts. They needed to raise money in order to pay back the debts they had from protecting the Americans in the French and Indian War. The act created new taxes on glass, paint, oil, lead, paper, and tea. Just as they had been after the Sugar and Stamp Acts were passed, the colonists were furious. They did not like the British officials telling them what to do. So, the colonists **boycotted** British goods. They only purchased local goods. In 1768, a number of the **merchants** (sellers) in Boston made an agreement not to import certain British goods at all. Merchants in other cities joined the boycott during the next year. British imports had been cut in half by the end of 1769!

Some of the colonists' protests became violent. Colonists in Boston resisted British customs workers who tried to collect taxes from them. Because of this, the British sent more troops to Boston in March of 1770 to try to help keep order in the city. This frustrated the colonists even more. On March 5<sup>th</sup>, a small disagreement broke out between a British soldier and a few colonists outside of the Customs House on King Street. Several colonists nearby heard the argument going on and joined the fight. They threw sticks and snowballs at the British soldier. The soldier's name was Hugh White.

Private White called for backup. British Captain Thomas Preston was the first to hear Private White's call for help. Captain Preston sent more soldiers to the Customs House to try to restore order. However, the arrival of more British soldiers only made things worse. The British troops tried to calm the crowd, but the crowd continued to taunt the soldiers. One colonist threw a chunk of ice at British Private Hugh Montgomery, striking the soldier and knocking him to the ground. As he was falling, Private Montgomery accidentally fired his gun. This frightened several of the other British soldiers, and they fired their guns as well. Three colonists dropped dead. Two more were severely wounded and died soon after. The British soldiers and several townspeople were immediately thrown in jail until the case could be heard in court.

The colonists and the British blamed each other for the dispute. British Captain Preston wrote down his account of the events in his prison cell. American patriots also wrote about the disagreement. The patriots claimed that the British had planned the event all along. American Paul Revere created an engraving that showed the event as a "bloody **massacre**". A massacre is a violent killing of a large number of people. Revere spread his engraving throughout Boston and the surrounding area. To this day, the details of exactly what happened on March 5, 1770 are not known. The British claim dangerous objects were thrown at them and they acted in self-defense. The Patriots claim the British were armed and opened fire on innocent colonists.

The case of the Boston Massacre was heard in the Queen Street Courthouse on November 27, 1770. Eight months had passed since the incident had occurred. Despite this, the Americans were still extremely upset. Captain Preston and the British soldiers did have one



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thing going for them - they were represented by American lawyer John Adams. Adams, who would later become the second President of the U.S., was so passionate about protecting justice in the colonies that he decided to defend the British soldiers. He believed they deserved a right to a fair trial! After much deliberation, the British soldiers were found not guilty. The court ruled that they had not planned to murder the colonists. Adams argued that the British only fired their weapons out of self-defense. Two of the soldiers were found guilty of shooting the colonists out of self-defense. These two men did not receive the death penalty, but they were branded, or burned, on their thumbs.

Regardless of who is to blame, the Boston Massacre was a case of a small argument between citizens and soldiers escalating into serious violence. Three Bostonians ended up dead and two were severely wounded as a result of the argument. This is why the patriots named the event the "Boston Massacre." The colonists used the event as another example of poor treatment by the British. This event added to the colonists' anger towards the British rule. Once again, the British had tried to control the colonists, and the colonists had rebelled. The so-called "Boston Massacre" was one of the key events that led up to the American Revolution several years later.

**FAST FACT:** Ropemaker Samuel Gray, African American Crispus Attucks, and mariner James Caldwell were the three colonists who died instantly from the shots fired by the British soldiers. Teenager Samuel Maverick and Irish immigrant Patrick Carr were wounded during the disagreement, but they survived the massacre. Sadly, Maverick died the next day. Carr died two weeks later.

