

# American Revolution

## Boston Massacre

[History](#) >> [American Revolution](#)

The Boston Massacre occurred on March 5, 1770 when British soldiers in Boston opened fire on a group of American colonists killing five men.

### Townshend Acts

Prior to the Boston Massacre the British had instituted a number of new taxes on the American colonies including taxes on tea, glass, paper, paint, and lead. These taxes were part of a group of laws called the Townshend Acts. The colonies did not like these laws. They felt these laws were a violation of their rights. Just like when Britain imposed the Stamp Act, the colonists began to protest and the British brought in soldiers to keep order.

### What happened at the Boston Massacre?

The Boston Massacre began the evening of March 5, 1770 with a small argument between British Private Hugh White and a few colonists outside the Custom House in Boston on King Street. The argument began to escalate as more colonists gathered and began to harass and throw sticks and snowballs at Private White.

Soon there were over 50 colonists at the scene. The local British officer of the watch, Captain Thomas Preston, sent a number of soldiers over to the Custom House to maintain order.

However, the sight of British soldiers armed with bayonets just aggravated the crowd further. They began to shout at the soldiers, daring them to fire.

Captain Preston then arrived and tried to get the crowd to disperse. Unfortunately, an object thrown from the crowd struck one of the soldiers, Private Montgomery, and knocked him down. He fired into the crowd. After a few seconds of stunned silence, a number of other soldiers fired into the crowd as well. Three colonists died immediately and two more died later from wounds.

### After the Incident

The crowd was eventually dispersed by the acting governor of Boston, Thomas Hutchinson. Thirteen people were arrested including eight British soldiers, one officer, and four civilians. They were charged with murder and put in jail awaiting their trial. British troops were removed from the city as well.

### The Trials

The trial of the eight soldiers began on November 27, 1770. The government wanted the soldiers to have a fair trial, but they were having difficulty in getting a lawyer to represent them. Finally, John Adams agreed to be their lawyer. Although he was a patriot, Adams thought that the soldiers deserved a fair trial.



*The Boston Massacre by Unknown*



Adams argued that the soldiers had the right to defend themselves. He showed that they thought their lives were in danger from the mob that had gathered. Six of the soldiers were found not-guilty and two were found guilty of manslaughter.

## **Results**

The Boston Massacre became a rallying cry for patriotism in the colonies. Groups like the Sons of Liberty used it to show the evils of British rule. Although the American Revolution would not start for another five years, the event certainly moved people to look at British rule in a different light.

## **Interesting Facts About the Boston Massacre**

- The British call the Boston Massacre the "Incident on King Street".
- After the incident, both sides tried to use propaganda in the newspapers to make the other side look bad. One famous engraving by Paul Revere shows Captain Preston ordering his men to fire (which he never did) and labels the Custom House as "Butcher's Hall".
- There is some evidence that the colonists planned the attack on the soldiers.
- One of the men killed was Crispus Attucks, a runaway slave who had become a sailor. The other victims included Samuel Gray, James Caldwell, Samuel Maverick, and Patrick Carr.
- There was little evidence against the four civilians arrested and they were all found not-guilty in their trial.