

## Boston Massacre and Crispus Attucks

Colonial anger grew as the British government continued to enforce the Sugar Act and passed additional tax laws in the 1760s. Passage of the Townshend Acts in 1767 inflamed colonial passions even more. Not only did the acts levy more import duties, or taxes, on goods brought into the colonies, such as glass, paper, and tea, but they created more admiralty—that is, naval—courts for trying people accused of smuggling. Since 1215 and the signing of the Magna Carta, an accused English citizen had been assured of a trial before a jury of his or her peers. In admiralty courts, a military judge, not a jury, decided guilt or innocence.



Some of the tax revenue that the Townshend Acts raised was to be used to pay royal governors and judges. Up until then, the colonial legislatures were able to use the power of the purse—the withholding of salaries—to gain the compliance of officials appointed by the Crown. Now the British government was removing this power from the colonial legislatures. It would pay the tax collectors itself, and so secure their loyalty.

The colonists protested these new laws. In addition to writing inflammatory pamphlets and giving rousing speeches in their legislatures, the colonists organized into Sons of Liberty and Daughters of Liberty. They boycotted British goods and marched in the streets. The boycotts caused the British to lose money as trade decreased. In particular, the British East India Company lost revenue due to the colonists' boycott of tea. The British even dissolved the Massachusetts Assembly in 1768 for writing a letter to the other colonies encouraging a unified response to Britain.

King George III, wishing to defuse the tense situation in the colonies, removed the prime minister responsible for the Townshend Acts and appointed a new prime minister. On March 5, 1770, the same day the new prime minister moved to repeal the import duties, the Boston Massacre took place 3,000 miles away.

## Boston Massacre

During the period between 1767 and 1770, the British had sent troops to Boston to patrol the streets and ensure that protests by colonists did not escalate into violence. The presence of armed British troops in their midst only increased the colonists' anger. On the night of March 5, 1770, a crowd of about 60 Bostonians was harassing a lone sentry. He called for help from nearby soldiers. The heckling intensified into jeering; snowballs were packed around pieces of ice and stones and hurled at the soldiers. The frightened soldiers opened fire on the crowd. When the shooting stopped, five Bostonians had been killed and six more were wounded. Among those killed was Crispus Attucks, a sailor and a former slave, who was part African and part Native American. The first of the five to die, Attucks was a member of the Sons of Liberty and a ringleader of the day's heckling. He was one of many of the multiculturally diverse mob members who opposed British troops.

To the already angry colonists, this event became known as the Boston Massacre. The British garrison was moved to an island in Boston Harbor. The soldiers who fired on the crowd were brought to trial but acquitted. **38**

The events of March 5 calmed relations between the colonists and Great Britain for a time—there was “a post-massacre truce,” as one historian notes. The tax on tea had been retained to show the colonists that Parliament had the right to tax them, but a steady flow of imports entered the colonies.

### Teaching Idea

**Paul Revere made a famous illustration of the Boston Massacre in which he shows the colonists in the best possible light and the British in the worst possible light. This illustration can be found in many books on the American Revolution, and on the web—search for “Paul Revere” and “Boston Massacre.” Share the picture with students, and invite them to consider how a pro-British artist might have depicted the episode differently.**