

Crispus Attucks

Name _____

Crispus Attucks was thought to be the first person of African-American descent to be killed in the American Revolution. He died on March 5, 1770, during the Boston Massacre.

Crispus Attucks was born sometime in 1723 in or near Framingham, Massachusetts. His cultural heritage is the subject of much debate. Some historians believe Attucks was of African and Native American descent. Although his mother was a slave, it is not clear whether Attucks was considered a free black man, or, was a runaway slave himself. Although details of his life are largely unknown, Attucks spent many years as a sailor and working the docks of various colonial ports. Historians who claim he was a runaway slave believe he used the name "Michael Johnson" to elude capture.

Following the 1768 issuance of the Townshend Act, and the subsequent unrest in Boston, British soldiers patrolled Boston's streets, leading to resentment and bitterness among the citizens. On the night of March 5, 1770, tensions finally boiled over when a British soldier assaulted a Boston man who was harassing him. Tensions quickly escalated as a mob of Bostonians gathered with ice chunks, bottles, and other objects. Several British soldiers were cornered. When someone within the mob hurled a club at a soldier, gunshots rang out. When the mob finally dispersed, five Bostonians were left dead including Crispus Attucks, who was thought to be the first killed.

While Attucks and the other dead were hailed as heroes in Boston, future president John Adams thought otherwise. Adams blamed Attucks for trying to be the "hero of the night" and by helping to fan the flames of the riot with his "mad behavior." Adams defended the British soldiers in the ensuing trial and most were acquitted of wrongdoing, having acted in self-defense. Attucks was buried with the four others who died during the Boston Massacre in the Granary Burying Ground, where many other Boston heroes such as Samuel Adams and John Hancock are buried.

Long after his death, Crispus Attucks remains a hero and symbol of freedom. Schools, parks, roads, and theaters across America bear his name.

1. What is DEFINITELY known about Crispus Attucks?

- A. He was a runaway slave
- B. He was of African and Native descent
- C. His exact birthdate
- D. His mother was a slave

2. Why may have Crispus Attucks used a different name?

- A. Because he was of Native descent
- B. Because he may have been eluding capture
- C. Because he was trying to fit into Boston society
- D. Because details of his life are largely unknown

3. Which of the following best describes the Boston Massacre?

- A. The Boston Massacre was a situation that quickly escalated until the cornered Bostonians fired at British soldiers
- B. The Boston Massacre was a situation in which five British soldiers were killed
- C. The Boston Massacre was an instance in which the British fired into an innocent and unarmed mob of Bostonians
- D. The Boston Massacre was a situation that quickly escalated until the cornered soldiers fired at the Bostonians

4. What event happened first?

- A. Crispus Attucks was killed
- B. A club was hurled at a British soldier
- C. The mob of Bostonians dispersed
- D. March 4, 1770

5. Which of the following best describes the mood of the third paragraph?

- A. tense
- B. celebratory
- C. uncertain
- D. historic

6. John Adams... (circle all that are true)

- A. did not view Crispus Attucks as a hero.
- B. defended British soldiers charged in the Boston Massacre.
- C. would eventually become a president.
- D. defended members of the Boston mob charged in the Boston Massacre.

7. To which of the following questions would “after a British soldier assaulted a Bostonian” be the answer?

- A. What happened after the club was hurled at a British soldier?
- B. When did the mob disperse?
- C. How did the Boston Massacre start?
- D. Why was a Bostonian harassing a British soldier?