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Crispus Attucks

Lead: On March 5, 1770, in Boston, Massachusetts, British soldiers led by Captain Preston fired into an unruly crowd of protesters. One of the first to fall was Crispus Attucks.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: All during the winter and spring of 1770, tension in Boston had been building between citizens and British soldiers sent there to prevent unrest and awe the population. Many American workers were resentful of

the soldiers because they would take civilian jobs at cheaper rates when they were off duty. This plus the general indignation in the City over the presence of the troops set up one of the first bloody confrontations of the Revolutionary period.

Crispus Attucks was at forty-seven, a six foot-drifter, a mulatto, a light-skinned black man. Born around 1723, he served as a slave for some years but had escaped by going to sea. Attucks was well-known around the docks and was a powerful intimidating physical specimen. On the day of the so-called Boston Massacre, in the early evening a crowd began to harass a squad of Brits as they came to rescue one of

their comrades surrounded at the Customs House on King Street. Crispus Attucks was at the head of the crowd.

At the trial six months later, a slave named Andrew testified that a stout mulatto had weighed in and struck one of the soldiers in the heat of the moment. The soldier turned and fired, several more blasted into the crowd and soon five men lay dead or wounded. Crispus Attucks was among the first to fall.

There is little doubt that the crowd provoked the attack. John Adams, defending the soldiers, called the crowd, "hooligans, who got what they

deserved," but he would also later say that, "Not the Battle of Lexington or Bunker Hill, not the surrender of Burgoyne or Cornwallis were more important events in American history than the battle of King Street on the 5th of March, 1770," and the first to fall at that most singular event was a man of color, Crispus Attucks.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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