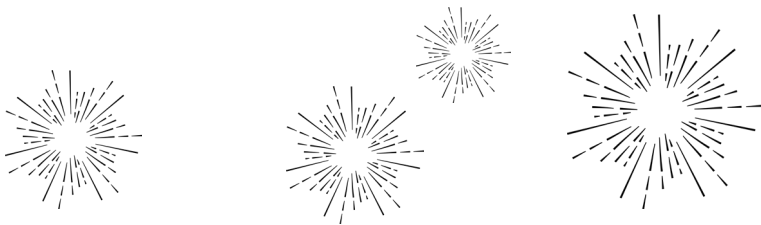


# REVOLUTIONARY HEROES

TRUE STORIES OF COURAGE FROM AMERICA'S  
FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE



PAT WILLIAMS  
WITH JIM DENNEY



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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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This book is dedicated to *you*  
and to all young freedom-loving heroes everywhere.

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# 1

## The First Shots Fired in the Revolution



*Bostonians Reading the Stamp Act by James Henry Stark*

**T**here are some who say that the American Revolutionary War began with an incident involving an eleven-year-old boy named Christopher Seider. Others say the Revolution began with a confrontation between a British soldier and a thirteen-year-old boy named Edward Garrick. Still others say the Revolution began with the heroic actions of a young Black man named Crispus Attucks.

It's an exciting story—a story you'll want to tell all your friends. I'll tell you the facts, and *you* can decide when the Revolution *really* began.

The American Revolutionary War was fought between Great Britain and the Thirteen Colonies in North America from 1775 to 1787. The Thirteen Colonies were the New England colonies of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut; the middle colonies of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware; and the southern colonies of Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

After years of being oppressed by the government of King George III of Great Britain, many people in the Thirteen Colonies had finally had enough. They were tired of being heavily taxed and ordered around by a government more than three thousand miles away.

In 1765, the British government passed a law called the Stamp Act. The law required the people in the Thirteen Colonies to pay a tax on legal papers, magazines, newspapers, and playing cards. The king would use the money to repay Britain's huge debts from the Seven Years' War against France (1756–1763).

Though some colonists were loyal to the king, many colonists rebelled against the king and refused to pay the tax. These colonists rose up and demanded the freedom to elect their own leaders and make their own laws.

Angered by the disobedience of the colonists, King George sent warships to America. In May 1768, the huge fifty-gun warship HMS *Romney* sailed into Boston Harbor, and the captain of the ship sent his men ashore to force Americans



to join the British navy. The Boston colonists were furious, and they protested against Great Britain.

A few months later, in October 1768, the king sent British soldiers to America to stop the protests. The British soldiers wore bright red uniforms, so the American colonists mocked them, calling them “Redcoats.”

## **The Tragic Death of Christopher Seider**

The arrival of the British forces divided the colonies, causing the colonists to choose sides. Those who rebelled against British rule called themselves Patriots. The colonists who supported the British king and government called themselves Loyalists. The Patriots and Loyalists sometimes argued and fought with each other.

On February 22, 1770, an angry crowd of Patriots gathered in front of a Boston shop owned by a Loyalist. They shouted and threw rocks at the store. Soon, a Loyalist neighbor of the shopkeeper arrived, a man named Ebenezer Richardson. He raised a gun and told the crowd to leave.

The Patriots turned their anger against Ebenezer Richardson and began throwing rocks at his house. One of the rocks broke a window and injured Richardson’s wife. Afraid for himself and his wife, Richardson fired into the crowd.

The bullet hit eleven-year-old boy Christopher Seider in the arm and chest. The boy fell to the ground and died later that night.

Hundreds of angry Patriots attended Christopher’s funeral, and the *Boston Gazette* ran stories that inflamed the anger of the colonists. Many Patriots confronted British

soldiers, mocking and taunting them. They blamed King George and the British government for the boy's death. The people of Boston knew that it was just a matter of time before more violence erupted.

## **The Incident at the Custom House**

On the evening of March 5, 1770, a British soldier stood guard in front of the Boston Custom House on King Street. It was the building where British officials collected taxes on tea and other goods imported from Great Britain. The streets were blanketed with snow. The soldier shivered in the cold.

A thirteen-year-old boy, a wigmaker's apprentice named Edward Garrick, walked down King Street near the Custom House, along with several of his young friends. He saw a British captain walking by and recognized him as a customer of John Piemont, the wigmaker Garrick worked for. (In those days, wealthy men wore wigs powdered with white starch and scented with lavender oil.)

The boy shouted to his friends, "There goes the fellow who won't pay my master for dressing his hair!" The captain pretended not to hear and kept walking.

The soldier in front of the Custom House heard the boy insulting the British captain and came running with his musket in his hand. "The captain is an honorable man who pays his debts!" the soldier said.

Young Garrick shouted again, insulting both the captain and the soldier. Enraged, the soldier swung the butt of his musket, hitting young Garrick in the head and knocking him to the snow.

People saw the soldier strike Garrick, and they rushed over to help the boy. Garrick was not badly hurt, and people helped him to his feet.

The crowd turned to confront the soldier, shouting insults and throwing snowballs. The soldier retreated to the steps of the Custom House, where he loaded his musket.

The shouts of the crowd and a ringing church bell drew more people out of nearby shops and houses. A mob of more than fifty people closed in on the soldier. Fearing for his life, the soldier shouted for help.

## **Crispus Attucks: The First Hero of the Revolution**

A few blocks away, Captain Thomas Preston heard that people were rioting in front of the Custom House. He assembled a squad of seven soldiers. By the time he and his soldiers reached the Custom House, there were several hundred people in the street, shouting insults, throwing snowballs, and waving clubs.

Captain Preston ordered his men to move the townspeople back, using their bayonets as a warning. He didn't want anyone to get hurt, so his soldiers' muskets were not loaded.

In the crowd was a Black man named Crispus Attucks. He was born a slave but had escaped to freedom. He worked as a rope-maker and a sailor. He didn't



*Crispus Attucks*, artist unknown

like the British government, and he worried that the British might capture him and force him to serve in the British navy. So he brought some sailor friends from the waterfront, and they pushed their way to the front of the crowd.

There, Crispus Attucks and his friends confronted Captain Thomas Preston with his squad of seven soldiers. Attucks faced the line of soldiers, waving his club and shouting insults at them.

Captain Preston didn't want to have to shoot anyone, but he could see that the mob was not afraid of his soldiers' bayonets. He ordered his men to load their muskets, hoping the threat of loaded guns would persuade the mob to leave.

As the soldiers loaded their guns, Crispus Attucks shouted to the crowd, "Be not afraid! They dare not fire!"

Others in the crowd took up the chant, "The wretches dare not fire!"

The mob threw snowballs at the soldiers and pressed in on them until their faces were inches from the bayonet blades. Some men batted at the bayonets with their clubs.

Crispus Attucks reached out with his left hand and grabbed the bayonet of Captain Preston's musket. At the same time, one of Attucks's friends threw his wooden club at a soldier, knocking him down.

The soldier scrambled back to his feet and fired into the air as a warning shot—but his frightened fellow soldiers thought it was a signal to begin shooting. The roar and smoke of gunfire filled the air as the soldiers fired into the crowd.

Crispus Attucks was the first man shot, hit twice in the chest. He fell to the snow.

## **The Boston Massacre**

Captain Preston shouted to his men to stop shooting, but the soldiers couldn't hear him over the gunfire. The shooting continued.

When the captain finally got his soldiers to stop firing, eleven Boston citizens lay on the snowy ground. Three were dead, including Crispus Attucks. A fourth, seventeen-year-old ivory carver Samuel Maverick, would die the next morning. A fifth, Irish-born American Patrick Carr, would die of his wounds two weeks later. Six men would live, though one was crippled for life.

The soldiers reloaded, fearing that the mob would come at them again. Captain Preston ordered his soldiers to hold their fire. Many of the colonists fled, but some remained to care for the wounded.

Reports of the shooting spread quickly throughout the Thirteen Colonies. Patriots who already hated British rule, with its heavy taxation and forcing sailors into the British navy, were enraged at the killings in Boston. Boston newspaperman Samuel Adams gave the incident a name that would never be forgotten: the Boston Massacre.

As a Black American who was the first to die in the Revolution, Crispus Attucks became a legend among Black Americans during the era of slavery before the Civil War. His name also became a rallying cry during the Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 1960s. He died while fighting injustice in Boston in 1770—and his name continued to inspire people to fight against injustice for years to come.

Angry colonists continued to shout insults at British soldiers—and the soldiers sometimes got into fights with the colonists. British officials in the colonies realized they were losing control of the people, and they asked Great Britain to send more troops to maintain order.