Attucks, Crispus

(b. 1723?--d. March 5, 1770, Boston, Mass. [U.S.]), American hero and martyr of the Boston Massacre.

Attucks' life prior to the day of his death is still shrouded in mystery. Most historians say that he was black; others argue that his ancestry was both African and Natick Indian. In any event, in the fall of 1750, a resident of Framingham, Mass., advertised for the recovery of a runaway slave named Crispus--usually thought to be the Crispus in question. In the 20-year interval between his escape from slavery and his death at the hands of British soldiers, Attucks probably spent a good deal of time aboard whaling ships.

All that is definitely known about him concerns the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770. Toward evening that day, a crowd of colonists gathered and began taunting a small group of British soldiers. Tension mounted rapidly, and when one of the soldiers was struck the others fired their muskets, killing three of the Americans instantly and mortally wounding two others. Attucks was the first to fall, thus becoming one of the first men to lose his life in the cause of American independence. His body was carried to Faneuil Hall, where it lay in state until March 8, when all five victims were buried in a common grave. Attucks was the only victim of the Boston Massacre whose name was widely remembered. In 1888 the Crispus Attucks monument was unveiled in the Boston Common.