



Effects of the Boston Massacre

Following the incident at King Street in which American colonists were shot by British soldiers, the acting governor of Boston, Thomas Hutchinson, finally managed to disperse the crowd. Eight British soldiers were arrested, along with some civilians. The soldiers were charged with murder and imprisoned, pending trial. British troops were pulled out of the city of Boston.

Although the local government wanted to give the soldiers a fair trial, that proved difficult, as no local lawyer was willing to represent them. Eventually, John Adams took the case. A firm patriot, Adams nonetheless believed in the law and due process, and he believed that the soldiers had the right to a fair trial.

The trial of the British soldiers began on November 27, 1770. Adams made a case that the lives of the soldiers had been endangered by the unruly crowd, which had essentially been a hostile mob, and that they had a right to defend themselves. Six of the soldiers were acquitted. The remaining two were found guilty of manslaughter.

But the Boston Massacre had captured the imagination of the American colonists, who saw it as just one more example of the tyranny of the British government. Unlike the taxes which they resented, the Boston Massacre showed that the British government was willing to use violence against its American subjects, and this began to color the way many colonists saw British rule.

Do you agree with the verdict of the trial? Why or why not?