

# American history

[History](#)



Topic: Essay, History and Political Science: American History

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The wise saying goes that desperate situations need desperate remedies. Jill Lepore's "New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan" is a book that examines one of the darkest episodes in New York's history. I am not willing to term it as the slave rebellion of 1741. Fighting repression of the worst order is not rebellion, but it is a noble act of the highest order. In the context of this rebellion, the white community has no right even to mention the word "liberty." Jill Lepore rightly argues, "The call for liberty came from a world of slavery has been named the central paradox of American history."(xii) The theme I am going to deal with is: How the White Race of that era practiced duplicity and hypocrisy of the highest order in their disposition towards the Black Race and utilized every avenue for exploiting them for territorial gains and aggrandizement of wealth? In America slavery was business as usual for centuries under various guises. In Manhattan one out of five at that time was a slave. Exploitation of the Blacks was the order of the day. In New York particularly, a section of the White society believed that slavery was wrong, and at the same time they were worried about the retaliatory action by the slaves that they would rebel, and when there was a rash of fires in the city in 1741, the Blacks became the suspects. There is lots of controversy about the reasons for the rebellion, whether it was a social reaction or a criminal conspiracy with motivated agenda, whether factors other than racism were involved. Assuming for a while that the Blacks were the culprits for the major incidents of fire, the important issue for me is what led them to such desperate

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measures. They were persecuted in the name of religion, political ideologies that supported slavery, scheming of the vested interests and big farmers etc. 152 blacks were arrested, some were burned at the stake, some were hanged and the most intriguing aspect was four of the alleged white ring leaders were hanged. The judicial process was also interrupted at the final stages, after thirty executions, that the slaves did not have the mental capacity to plan such a conspiracy. But the type of punishment given to the convicted slaves was again mockery of justice and an act of racism, as Whites were not burned as it was done in the case of many Blacks. The reliance on shoddy evidence provides the picture of legal proceedings during that time, which placed no value to the lives of the Blacks.

There can be no justifications for cruelty in colonial America on an unprecedented scale unleashed by the White race. Dehumanizing process of the Blacks was practiced on a wide scale in New York, and every effort was made by the vested interests amongst the Whites to cripple the minds, darken their spirits, degrade their moral status and destroy all traces of their connections to mankind. The weight of their bondage is too difficult for the printed words to capture. Blacks groaned under the burden of their hardships for centuries. In every segment of social and economic life of America Blacks were not given their rightful place and were humiliated. The slave rebellion and the fire in New York in 1741 need to be evaluated and understood in the context of this background information and the treatment meted out to the Blacks is a blot on the racial history of America, which can be forgiven by the Blacks in the larger interests of American democracy, but never be forgotten.

#### Bibliography

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Lepore, Jill (2006) *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan*. Vintage; New York, Print

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