

Fear of Slave Unrest

It was very difficult to enforce restrictive laws on the African population of New York City. Enslaved Africans were often unsupervised and many moved around the city as part of their work. The White population was often in a state of fear and there were constant complaints to the municipal government that defiant Blacks had to be brought under control. In 1690, a gang of runaways was accused of robbing and terrorizing Dutch farmers in Harlem. In 1696, the mayor of the city was punched when he ordered a noisy group of Africans to disperse. In 1706 the Governor of the colony expressed alarm at the “great insolency” of the city’s African population and in 1708, a prominent White landowner in Queens County and his wife and their children were killed by an enslaved Native and his African wife. Source: Burrows, E. and Wallace, M. (1999). *Gotham, A History of New York City to 1898*. NY: Oxford, 146-148.

1706. Death Penalty for Rebellious Maroons

On July 22, 1706, Edward Lord Viscount Cornbury, the provincial governor, armed justices of the peace in Kings County on Long Island with the death penalty in order to deal with African maroons who, after freeing themselves, were striking fear among the local colonists:

Whereas, I am informed that several Negroes in Kings County have assembled themselves in a riotous manner, which, if not prevented, may prove of ill consequence; you and every [one] of you therefore hereby required and commanded to take all proper methods for seizing and apprehending all such negroes in the said country as shall be found to be assembled in such manner as aforesaid, or have run away or absconded from their masters or owners, whereby there may be reason to suspect them of ill practices or designs, and to secure them in safe custody, that their crimes and actions may be inquired into; and if any of them refuse to submit themselves, then to fire on them, kill or destroy them, if they cannot otherwise be taken; and for so doing this shall be your sufficient warrant.

In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City
Craig Steven Wilder, P. 16

1708. An Eyewitness Report of a Slave Revolt

On the evening of January 24, 1708, an enslaved black woman and an enslaved Native American sought revenge on their owner, William Hallet Jr., of New Town, Queens County. They killed Hallet, his pregnant wife, and their five children. Authorities suspected a broader rebellion and arrested the two conspirators and several other Africans. On February 2, 1708, the woman was burned to death and the man was suspended in chains beside a blade that cut his flesh as he moved. Two other Africans were also executed.

“William Hallet Junior who labored at a place called Hellgate his wife and give children in a quarter of an hour were all murdered by one Indian slave whom he had up for 4 years. There was a Negro woman Slave in the house who was to him in counseling him in this bloody matter. Both he and his wife have gone at Justice Hattely house with some others...about seven at night [Hallet and his wife] returned home and went to bed...The slaves were watching their opportunity for they had to do it that night, and the house being something dark, [Sam] came into the house and had a axe laid behind the door and seeing his Master asleep took the axe and struck him first with the edge and then with the back of it. The first shook awakened his wife who was abed in the same room and she called murder, thereupon he struck her with the back of an axe on the head. There was one child lying in a box about 7 or 8 years of age. Those he murdered with the back of an axe and then drags the Young Child out from its murdered mother and Struck it on the head. The mother of the murdered child was also big with child.”

Hodges, G. *Root & Branch: African Americans in New York & East Jersey 1613-1863*, p. 64.

Wilder, C. *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City*, p.17

1708. Lord Cornbury to the Board of Trade

Source: E.B. O'Callaghan, ed. (1856). *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York; Procured in Holland, England and France*. Albany, NY: Weeds, Parsons, v. 5, p. 39

To the Right Honble The Lords commissrs of Trade and Plantations.

My Lords.

I trouble your Lordps with these few lines to acquaint you, that in hopes of yet reaching the Mast Fleet, I send herewith a Duplicate of all the Journals of Assembly of New York, since I came into the Province of New York and the Journal of the Assembly of New Jersey for the last Sessions; In the last there is the Assembly's Reply to my Ansr to their Remonstrance; The Clerk has sent it to me so lately that I have not had time to make the proper Reflections upon it, but I will do it by the next opportunity; however I thought it my Duty to send the Journal to Your Lordps as soon as I cou'd: I hope you will not give any credit to their Assertions, till I can send you my Observations upon it, which shall be by the first Opportunity; I likewise send Your Lordps Duplicates of several of my letters, which I have not yet heard whether you have received or not; I have nothing new to acquaint you with, only that a most barbarous murder has been committed upon the Family of one Hallet by an Indian Man Slave, and a Negro Woman, who have murder'd their Master, Mistress and five Children; The Slaves were taken, and I immediately issued a special commission for the Tryal of them, which was done, and the man sentenced to be hanged, and the Wowan burnt, and they have been executed; They Discovered two other Negros their accomplices who have been tried, condemned & Executed.

I am, My Lords,

Your Lordp's most faithful hum. Servt

Cornbury.

New York.

Feb. 10th 1708