

1741. The New York City Slave Conspiracy and Trial

Sources: <http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/912.htm>; <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p286.html>;
[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/llst:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(gcmiscslst0063div5\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/llst:@field(DOCID+@lit(gcmiscslst0063div5)))

Slavery in New York City in the first half of the eighteenth century created a potentially explosive situation. The city had a large population of enslaved Africans. In 1737, 16 percent of the 10,664 inhabitants of New York County (Manhattan Island), were of African ancestry. Conditions were very different from plantation life in the South and the Caribbean. Meetings between enslaved people were relatively easy and unsupervised and slaves and free Blacks and White worked and lived in close proximity. The governors of the city lived in continuous fear of fire, attack by the enemies of England, a slave insurrection, or some combination of all three.

In 1712, Black rebels were accused of setting fire to a building in the middle of the city and attacking White colonists who tried to extinguish the blaze. Nine Whites were shot, stabbed, or beaten to death and another six were wounded. Militia units from New York and Westchester and soldiers from a nearby fort captured twenty-seven rebels. Six captives took their own lives and the others were executed. The uprising led to a series of new legal restrictions on the rights of enslaved Africans in New York City. They included limits on their ability to meet, restrictions on manumission, bans on the use of firearms by slaves, the death penalty for involvement in a conspiracy to kill a White person, and greater threats of physical punishment.

In 1741, White New Yorkers, afraid of another slave revolt, responded to rumors and unexplained fires with the arrest of 146 enslaved Africans, the execution of 35 Blacks and four Whites, and the transport to other colonies of 70 enslaved people. The most serious accusations were made by a young White female indentured servant, who received £100 and her freedom in exchange for her testimony. The joint “confessions” of two of the conspirators, Cuffee and Quaco, were made while they were awaiting being burned to death by an angry mob. Three years after the trials and executions (1744), a record of the “New York Conspiracy” was published by Daniel Horsmaden, one of the judges in the case.

Historians continue to doubt whether a slave conspiracy ever existed. The convictions and executions are often compared with the hysteria surrounding the Salem, Massachusetts Witch trials of 1692. Horsmaden report, instead of exposing the dangerous behavior of Africans in New York, actually documents the repression of enslaved Africans, the failure of the legal system, social conditions in the city, and the ways these factors contributed to a deadly official conspiracy against the city’s Black population.

Student teams should examine the documents in this package and decide on the following:

1. Why was there a series of arrests, trials, executions and deportations aimed at Blacks in New York City during 1741?
2. Did the accused receive fair trials?
3. Would an armed rebellion by enslaved Africans in New York City have been justified?
4. Write an op-ed piece for a local newspaper explaining how New York City acknowledge the events described as the 1741 New York City Slave Conspiracy Trials.

A. Background Events Leading up the 1741 New York City Slave Conspiracy Trials

1702	New York enacts an elaborate slave code. It is revised in 1708, 1709, 1712, 1730 and 1731.
1712	Rebellion of enslaved Africans in New York City ends with the execution of 21 people for “petty treason.”
1730s	Slave insurrections sweep through the West Indies.
1731-1737	A crime wave engulfs New York City. Enslaved Africans are suspected of joining gangs of criminals.
September, 1739	Hundreds of enslaved Africans are executed after a rebellion in Stono, South Carolina.
1740-1741	The worst winter in New York City during the colonial era. The North (Hudson) River is frozen until the spring.
1740-1748	England and Spain battle in King George’s War.

B. Chronology of the 1741 New York City Slave Conspiracy Trials

February 28	A robbery was committed at the house and shop of New York City merchant Robert Hogg. Linen, Spanish silver coins, and other goods for a total value of £60 was reported missing.
March 2	Enslaved Africans Caesar (owned by a baker named John Varick) and Prince (owned by a merchant named John Auboyneau) were arrested for the robbery.
March 4	Mary Burton, an indentured servant, testified about the involvement of her master, innkeeper John Hughson, his wife and daughter, and Peggy Kerry, in criminal activities with enslaved Africans.
March 18 - April 6	There are a series of suspicious fires in New York City. Arson is suspected.
April 6	John Hughson and his family are arrested and charged with receiving and selling stolen goods. Also arrested is Cuffee, an enslaved African owned by Adolph Philipse.
April 11	Government officials believe a conspiracy of enslaved Africans is behind the fires. They offer a reward to information.
April 14	A grand jury is convened to hear testimony on the suspected conspiracy and arson cases.
April 22	Mary Burton testifies before the grand jury on the slave conspiracy.
May 1	Caesar and Prince are tried and convicted of burglary.
May 6	John and Sarah Hughson and Margaret (Peggy Kerry) Sorubiero are tried and convicted of receiving stolen goods. The daughter of John and Sarah Hughson is arrested.
May 8	Caesar and Prince are sentenced to death.
May 11	Caesar and Prince are hanged to death.
May 12	John and Sarah Hughson and Margaret (Peggy Kerry) Sorubiero are charged with participating in the slave conspiracy.
May 22	A series of “informants” confess and testify to the grand jury on the conspiracy. They include enslaved Africans Sandy (owned by Thomas Niblet) and Fortune (owned by John Wilkins). Sandy is transported to Hispaniola. Fortune is transported to Madeira.
May 29	Enslaved Africans Quaco (owned by John Roosevelt) and Cuffee (owned by Adolph Philipse) are tried and convicted of arson.
May 30	Quaco and Cuffee attempt to confess in order to save their lives but they are burned at the stake when a mob demands their execution.
June 1-July 26	109 more enslaved Africans are indicted and arraigned for trial. An additional 33 enslaved Africans are jailed but not brought to trial. 72 of these enslaved Africans eventually confess to involvement in the “conspiracy.” Of these 142 enslaved Africans, 13 were burned at the stake, 18 were hanged and 70 were transported (sold to owners in another colony).
June 8	John and Sarah Hughson, their daughter Sarah, and Margaret (Peggy Kerry) Sorubiero are convicted of participating in the slave conspiracy.
June 12	John and Sarah Hughson, and Margaret (Peggy Kerry) Sorubiero are executed for participating in the slave conspiracy. The sentence of John and Sarah Hughson’s daughter Sarah is postponed.
July 29	John Ury is tried for participation in the slave conspiracy and as a secret Catholic priest. Sarah Hughson (daughter) testifies against Ury in exchange for a pardon.
August 15	John Ury is hanged to death.
November 11	Mary Burton is paid for her testimony on the robbery and slave conspiracy and is released from her indenture.

C. Mr. Justice Frederick Philipse's Charge to the Grand Jury

The many frights and terrors which the good people of this city have of late been put into, by repeated and unusual fires, and burning of houses, give us too much room to suspect, that some of them at least, did not proceed from mere chance, or common accidents; but on the contrary, from the premeditated malice and wicked pursuits of evil and designing persons; and therefore, it greatly behoves us to use our utmost diligence, by all lawful ways and means to discover the contrivers and perpetrators of such daring and flagitious undertakings: that, upon conviction, they may receive condign punishment. . . .

I am told there are several prisoners now in jail, who have been committed by the city magistrates, upon suspicion of having been concerned in some of the late fires; and others, who under pretence of assisting the unhappy sufferers, by saving their goods from the flames, for stealing, or receiving them. This indeed, is adding affliction to the afflicted, and is a very great aggravation of such crime. . . .

This crime is of so shocking a nature, that if we have any in this city, who, having been guilty thereof, should escape, who can say he is safe, or tell where it will end? . . .

My charge, gentlemen, further is, to present all conspiracies, combinations, and other offences, from treasons down to trespasses; and in your inquiries, the oath you, and each of you have just now taken will, I am persuaded, be your guide, and I pray God to direct and assist you in the discharge of your duty.

D. Testimony by Mary Burton against Caesar and Prince

That Prince and Caesar brought the things of which they had robbed Mr. Hogg, to her master, John Hughson's house, and that they were handed in through the window, Hughson, his wife, and Peggy receiving them, about two or three o'clock on a Sunday morning. That Caesar, prince, and Mr. Philipse's negro man (Cuffee) used to meet frequently at her master's house, and that she had heard them (the negroes) talk frequently of burning the fort; and that they would go down to the Fly and burn the whole town; and that her master and mistress said, they would aid and assist them as much as they could.

That in their common conversation they used to say, that when all this was done, Caesar should be governor, and Hughson, her master, should be king. That Cuffee used to say, that a great many people had too much, and others too little; that his old master had a great deal of money, but that, in a short time, he should have less, and that he (Cuffee) should have more.

That at the same time when the things of which Mr. Hogg was robbed, were brought to her master's house, they brought some indigo and bees wax, which was likewise received by her master and mistress. That at the meetings of the three aforesaid negroes, Caesar, Prince and Cuffee, at her master's house, they used to say, in their conversations, that when they set fire to the town, they would do it in the night, and as the white people came to extinguish it, they would kill and destroy them. That she has known at times, seven or eight guns in her master's house, and some swords, and that she has seen twenty or thirty negroes at one time in her master's house; and that at such large meetings, the three aforesaid negroes, Cuffee, Prince and Caesar, were generally present, and most active, and that they used to say, that the other negroes durst not refuse to do what they commanded them, and they were sure that they had a number sufficient to stand by them.

That Hughson (her master) and her mistress used to threaten, that if she, the deponent, ever made mention of the goods stolen from Mr. Hogg, they would poison her; and the negroes swore, if ever she published, or discovered the design of burning the town, they would burn her whenever they met her. That she never saw any white person in company when they talked of burning the town, but her master, her mistress, and Peggy.

E. The Sentencing of Caesar and Prince

You, Caesar and Prince, the grand jury having found two indictments against each of you, for feloniously stealing and taking away from Mr. Hogg, and Mr. Meyers Cohen, sundry goods of considerable value. To these indictments you severally pleaded not guilty; and for your trials put yourselves upon God and the country; which country having found you guilty, it now only remains for the court to pronounce that judgment which the law requires, and the nature of your crimes deserve.

But before I proceed to sentence, I must tell you, that you have been proceeded against in the same manner as any white man, guilty of your crimes, would have been. You had not only the liberty of sending for your witnesses;

asking them such questions as you thought proper; but likewise making the best defence you could; and as you have been convicted by twelve honest men upon their oaths, so the just judgement of God has at length overtaken you.

I have great reason to believe, that the crimes you now stand convicted of, are not the least of those you have been concerned in; for by your general characters you have been very wicked fellows, hardened sinners, and ripe, as well as ready, for the most enormous and daring enterprizes, especially you, Caesar, and as the time you have yet to live is to be but very short, I earnestly advise and exhort both of you to employ it in the most diligent and best manner you can, by confessing your sins, repenting sincerely of them, and praying God of his infinite goodness to have mercy on your souls: and as God knows the secrets of your hearts, and cannot be cheated or imposed upon, so you must shortly give an account to him, and answer for all your actions; and depend upon it, if you do not truly repent before you die, there is a hell to punish the wicked eternally.

And as it is not in your powers to make full restitution for the many injuries you have done the public; so I advise both of you to do all that in you is, to prevent further mischiefs, by discovering such persons as have been concerned with you, in designing or endeavouring to burn this city, and to destroy its inhabitants. This I am fully persuaded is in your power to do if you will; if so, and you do not make such discovery, be assured God almighty will punish you for it, though we do not: therefore I advise you to consider this well, and I hope both of you will tell the truth.

And now, nothing further remains for me to say, but that you Caesar, and you Prince, are to be taken hence to the place whence you came, and from thence to the place of execution, and there you, and each of you, are to be hanged by the neck until you be dead. And I pray the Lord to have mercy on your souls. Ordered, that their execution be on Monday next, the eleventh day of this instant, between the hours of nine and one of the same day. And further ordered that after the execution of the said sentence, the body of Caesar be hung in chains.

F. The Confessions of Cuffee and Quaco

That Hughson was the first contriver of the whole plot, and promoter of it; which was to burn the houses of the town; Cuffee said, to kill the people. That Hughson brought in first Caesar, Varack's; then Prince, Auboyneau's; Cuffee, Philipse's; and others, amongst whom were old Kip's Negro; Robin, Chambers'; Cuffee, Gomez's; Jack, Codweis's, and another short Negro, that cooks for him.

That he (Quaco) did fire the fort; that it was by a lighted stick taken out of the servant's hall, about eight o'clock at night; that he went up the back stairs with it, and so through Barbara's room, and put it near the gutter, betwixt the shingles and the roof of the house.

That on Sunday afternoon, a month before the firing of the fort, over a bowl of punch, the confederates at Hughson's (amongst whom were the confederates above named, Albany and Tickle, *alias* Will, Jack and Cook, Comfort's; old Butchell, Caesar, and Guy, Horsfield's; Tom, Van Rant's; Caesar, Peck's; Worcester, and others voted him, (Quaco), as having a wife in the fort, to be the person who should fire the fort; Sandy and Jack, Codweis's; Caesar and Guy, Horsfield's; were to assist him in it.

That Hughson desired the Negroes to bring to his house what they could get from the fire, and Hughson was to bring down country people in his boat to further the business, and would bring in other Negroes. That forty or fifty to his knowledge were concerned, but their names could not recollect. (The mob pressing and interrupting.)

That Cuffee, Gomez's; and Caesar, Peck's, fired Vant Zant's storehouse. That Mary Burton had spoke the truth, and could name many more. Fortune, Wilkins's, and Sandy, had done the same; and Sandy could name the Spaniards, and say much more, which Cuffee particularly confirmed.

Being asked what view Hughson had in acting in this manner? he answered, to make himself rich.

That after the fire was over, Quaco was at Hughson's house, Jack, Comfort's, a leading man, Hughson, wife, and daughter present, and said the job was done, meaning the fire; that he went frequently to Hughson's house, and met there Tickle and Albany.

Quaco said his wife was no ways concerned, for he never would trust her with it; and that Denby knew nothing about the matter. Jamaica, Ellis's not concerned that he knew of, but was frequently at Hughson's with his fiddle. Said he was not sworn by Hughson, but others were.

G. Testimony of Sarah Hughson Against John Ury in return for a Pardon

I know him, and have often seen him at my father's, late in last fall chiefly: I have seen him there at nights in company with negroes, when they have been talking of burning the town and killing the white people. I have seen him make a ring with chalk on the floor, which he made the negroes stand round and put their left foot in, and he swore them with a cross in his hand, to burn and destroy the town, and to cut their master's and mistress's throats. He swore Bastian, Vaarck's Caesar, Auboyneau's Prince, and Walter's Quack: he swore them to keep secret, not to discover him or any body else, if they were to die for it. I have heard Ury, and the negroes, talk of burning the fort; and he said, if that did not do they were to begin at the east end of the town, with a strong easterly wind, and that would go through the whole town. He asked me to swear to the plot, and said that I should have all my sins forgiven, if I kept all secret; and he swore me on an English book, and my parents and Peggy were by; and he swore Peggy too; and I heard him tell her, that all the sins which she had committed should be forgiven her; and he told her, that priests could forgive sins as well as God, if they would follow their directions. That he used to christen negroes there; he christened Caesar, Quack, and other negroes, crossed them on the face, had water and other things; and he told them he would absolve them from all their sins.

H. Testimony of James Favieres, New-York Merchant, and Bastian March 19, 1742.

James Favieres was a New York City merchant and the owner of a ship being used to transport confessed participants in the 1741 New York City slave conspiracy to the West Indies. While in New London, Connecticut, he questioned an enslaved African named Bastian about his knowledge of the conspiracy.

Q. Bastian, seeing you are now to be transported, and that it hath pleased the governor to pardon you for a crime, wherein many of your associates have suffered death, you need not fear any dangerous consequences by giving me an impartial account of all you know concerning the negro plot, tell me all you know of that affair from the beginning to the end, without amusing me with any falsehoods; and this you may depend upon, it will in a great measure obtain a pardon likewise from God, for your many and detestable sins.

A. Sir you may depend upon it, that I shall declare to you nothing but what I am very certain of.

Q. Who was the first person that introduced you at Hughson's?

A. Caesar, belonging to my master (Jacob Varick).

Q. The first time you were at Hughson's, what did you do there?

A. Hughson himself filled me a bumper of liquor, and after having drank it, I found myself quite intoxicated; but I remember he brought me a book, and bid me lay my hand on it, and bid me swear, and told me if I refused it he would kill me upon the spot, finding myself in so great a stress, to save my life I took the oath.

Q. What book was it that Hughson made you swear upon, was it a bible?

A. I don't know what book it was, but by its make I thought it looked like those books you call bibles.

Q. What was it Hughson obliged you to stand to, and after what manner did you swear?

A. By lightning and thunder, and by hell flames, that I would set fire to whatever I came across, and destroy as many whites as I could.

Q. What did you propose to do, if in case you had got the upper hand of the whites; did Hughson make you any promise?

A. He promised to make us all free.

Q. Did there generally use to resort many negroes at Hughson's?

A. Yes, for I have been there many a time when I have told fifteen, often twenty, and sometimes thirty negroes.

Q. Did you use to eat and drink there, whenever you went to see Hughson?

A. We always had a good supper and never wanted for liquor.

Q. The night after the fort burnt, did you return to Hughson's?

A. No, but the night after that we were a jolly company, and had a fine supper prepared for us, and seemed all of us to be well pleased with our late good success.

Q. Do you know any whites that were concerned with you? did you ever see any at Hughson's at your meetings?

A. I have seen Will Kane there very often, and two or three soldiers whom I knew not, and another little man who was also a stranger to me.

Q. Was that little man young or old? of what make was he? and how did he employ his time among you?

A. He was far from being a tall man, but short, very lean, and a pale visage, nor was he old, his place was at the upper end of the table; he often encouraged us to remain firm like men in our designs, he read and wrote a great deal.

Q. Do you know what he wrote?

A. I have seen him take the names of the negroes down, from time to time, by way of list.

Q. But how could Hughson, who was but a poor man, support so great an expense at his house? there were suppers every night for you all, candles and many other things, the charge of which must have been very great; this goes beyond my comprehension; for you know the person who wrote so much must have had lights to see; I say I do not know how he did to support all that charge!

A. The negroes brought what they could steal to him; the white man you speak of was short sighted, and never wrote or read without spectacles.

Q. They say he (John Ury) was a Romish priest; do you know any thing about that?

A. I do not know that he was a priest; but he used to exhort us like a minister, to continue steadfast in our intentions, and used to throw his hands about like a preacher; and he said to us at the meeting at Hughson's the second night after the fort was burnt, now God has prospered us in the beginning in burning the fort, and we need not fear; we must be resolute and proceed in the work, and no doubt God will prosper us in all; that the town was too much alarmed at present, but they must go on when the fine weather came, that they (the negroes) need not fear, he would forgive them their sins if they kept true to their engagements, and by-and-by the Spaniards would come, and then they should be free.

Q. Have you been baptized by that little man, they called a priest?

A. No, but I have been told by some negroes of our company, that the little man had baptized them.

Q. Is it true, you were to burn the English church?

A. Yes, we agreed to burn it last winter, but the man whom you call priest opposed it, and advised us to stay till spring, when there would be a larger congregation.

Q. Your intentions then were to destroy all the whites while they were in church; how were you to go about it? had you arms? and could you think otherwise but that many would have made their escape through the doors and windows? explain me these things as well as you can.

A. We had combustibles prepared by doctor Harry, made up into balls, which we were to set fire to and throw them upon the roof of the church, which sticking fast would set fire to the shingles; after which, guarding the doors, we were to let none pass, but destroy them all in the church with our fire arms, for we had a great number of them at Hughson's.

Q. Where did you use to keep your arms at Hughson's? for when the searchers were sent there they were not to be found.

A. I believe not, for the plot beginning to come to light, Hughson to secure himself, had them all thrown into the river, before that they were hid in a hole in the cellar.

I. John Ury's Defense in the New York City Slave Conspiracy Trial

John Ury was one of four White people executed for suspected involvement in the 1741 New York City Slave conspiracy. Not only was he accused for stirring up a slave rebellion, but he was also suspected of being a secret Roman Catholic priest and an agent of the Spanish government. Witnesses against him included Mary Roberts, a White indentured servant who received £100 and her freedom in exchange for her testimony and Sarah Hughson, whose parents were convicted and executed during the trials and who was promised a pardon in return for testifying against Ury.

John Ury's Response to Testimony at his Trial

It is very incongruous to reason to think that I can have any hand or be any way concerned in this plot, if these things be duly weighed: that after the discovery of the conspiracy and the execution of many for it, that I should act such a lunatics part if I were guilty as to continue in this city. . . . [T]he negro who confessed as it is said that he set fire to the fort did not mention me in all his confession doubtless he would not have neglected and passed over such a person as I am said to be namely a priest . . . [N]either Huson (Hughson), his wife nor the creature that was hanged with them and all that have been put to death since did not once name me . . . I fear all this trouble of mine

springs from and is grounded upon, the apprehensions of my being a Roman priest, and therefore must be a plotter some believing there can be no mischief in a country but a priest (if there) must be in it

The Last Speech of John Ury

Fellow Christians - I am now going to suffer a death attended with ignominy and pain; but it is the cup that my heavenly father has put into my hand, and I drink it with pleasure. . . . I lift up my hands and solemnly protest I am innocent of what is laid to my charge: I appeal to the great God for my non-knowledge of Hewson (Hughson), his wife, or the creature that was hanged with them, I never saw them living, dying, or dead; nor never had I any knowledge or confederacy with white or black as to any plot: and upon the memorials of the body and blood of my dearest lord, in the creatures of bread and wine, in which I have commemorated the love of my dying lord, I protest that the witnesses are perjured; I never knew the perjured witnesses but at my trial. . . .

And now, a word of advice to you, spectators: behold me launching into eternity; seriously, solemnly view me, and ask yourselves severally, how stands the case with me? die I must: am I prepared to meet my Lord when the midnight cry is echoed forth? . . . Oh, sinners! trifle no longer; consider life hangs on a thread; here to-day and gone to-morrow; forsake your sins ere ye be forsaken forever: hearken, now is God awfully calling you to repent, warning you by me, his minister and prisoner, to embrace Jesus, to take, to lay hold on him for your alone saviour, in order to escape the wrath to come; no longer delay, seeing the summons may come before ye are aware, and you standing before the bar of a God who is a consuming fire out of the Lord Jesus Christ, should be hurled, be doomed to that place, where their worm dies not, and their fire is never to be quenched.

J. Lieutenant-Governor Clarke Corresponds with British Colonial Officials

Lieutenant-Governor Clarke to the Lords of Trade (April 22, 1741)

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, vol. 6, p. 184-186.

The Assembly is now sitting, to whom I had many things to recommend, as your Lordships may be pleased to see in my speech, wherein I have mention'd the unhappy fire, which on the 18 of the last month burnt the fort, most of the records are saved, and I hope very few lost for I took all the possible care of them, and had all removed before the office took fire, but before an engine could be brought, the house was past saving, for it being covered with Cedar Shingles, and all the floors and wainscots old, they took in an instant and burned with that fury, that no human power could extinguish it. The expence of rebuilding will be considerable, but I know the present circumstances of the Province to be much better than ever, and so very good, that that expence will not be felt. A Gentleman of one of the best Estates told me, he supposed that his proportion upon an equal tax would not come to forty shillings. But my private loss is very great and more than I am able to bear without bending under it. Since that fire we have had many in the town sometimes four in a day and some of them apparently kindled by design, which begat a general consternation I have done all I could to discover the villaines both by issuing a proclamation with a reward and otherwise but hitherto without effect, many Negroes are imprisoned on suspicion, but as yet no proof appears against them I now keep a night guard of the Militia who constantly patroll, the people obeying very chearfully, and I have recommended to the Assembly to pass a Bill to oblige them to it under proper penalties.

Lieutenant-Governor Clarke to the Duke of Newcastle (June 20, 1741)

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, vol. 6, p. 195-196.

The fatal fire that consumed all the buildings in the Fort, which from the circumstances of the time and place of the plumbers working I thought was accidental, now appears evidently to be done by design in consequence of an horrid conspiracy to burn it and the whole Town, as your Grace may be pleased to see in the inclosed paper, wherein the confessions and discoveries are written down in their own words just as they were spoken.

The Plott was contrived by one Huson a white man to enrich himself by plunder the negroes were by him brought into it, in hopes of sharing with him and of gaining their liberty; they were mostly sworn by him to

secrecy and many of them died without disclosing it, and even denying it, for some time after the fort was burned I had no other thoughts of it, than that it was accident, but when three or four and once I think five houses were set on fire in a day and some of them apparently by design, I soon changed my thoughts and set myself heartily to work to find out the villany; these frequent fires threw the people into the utmost consternation and confusion; to appease their fears and to secure them from danger, I caused a guard of the militia to mount at the Town hall every night and to go the rounds duely, the Kings Troops doing duty regular as usual; this had a good effect by bringing the people again to think of their private business which for sometime was intermitted, I went constantly to every fire to give directions and to animate the people, and by my care and their activity, only one house, and that a warehouse of little value, was burnt, had the suspicion obtained, when those fires begun that the negroes were at the bottom of it, the whole town might have been laid in ashes, for men in that case would have been more intent upon guarding themselves and their families, than upon extinguishing the fires; The town was to have been burnt the night after the Fort, but was thus fortunately saved; In the evening the fire that was in the ruins of the Fort seeming to be extinguished, the people went to their homes, but about nine o'clock at night a strong North-West wind springing up kindled it again in several places, and the sparks begun to fly so that I apprehended they might set fire to some of the adjacent houses, and by that means endanger the whole Town, wherefore I thought it necessary to alarm the people who coming to the ruins of the Fort again and seeing the danger, thought it the safest way to watch that night and a company of the militia being by my orders in arms and going the rounds prevented the mischief designed.

The loss I have sustained by the fire is greater than at first it appeared to be, and too heavy for me to bear without being supported by Your Graces protection which I most humbly beg leave to ask, and to subscribe myself with the most profound submission My Lord – Your Graces – most humble, most obedient and most dutiful servant

Lieutenant-Governor Clarke to the Lords of Trade (August 24, 1741)

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, vol. 6, p. 201-202.

In my letter of the 20 of June I did myself the honor to inform your Lordships of the Plot to destroy this Town and people, but whatever I then said or could say falls short of what has since appeared; We then thought it was projected only by Huson and the Negroes but it is now apparent that the hand of Popery is in it, for a Romish Priest having been tryed was upon full and clear evidence convicted of having a deep share in it we have besides several other white men in prison and most of them (it is thought) I wish Papists, one of whom is a dancing master, some of them Soldiers in the two companies posted in this town, and the father and three brothers of that Huson who was hanged, Where by whom or in what shape this plot was first projected is yet undiscovered that which at present seems most probable is that Huson an indigent fellow of a vile character casting in his thoughts how to mend his circumstances inticed some Negroes to rob their masters and to bring the stolen to him on promise of reward when they were sold but seeing that by this pilfering trade riches did not flow into him fast enough and finding the Negroes fit instruments for any villany he then fell upon the schemes of burning the fort and town and murdering the people as the speediest way to enrich himself and them, and to gain the freedom, for that was the Negroes main inducement. how long this Plot has been on foot is uncertain one of the Negroes who laid hold on my proclamation owned he was sworn by Huson last Christmas was three years, others two years ago others more lately but when or by what means the Priest and Huson became acquainted is but conjecture most likely it was by the means of Margaret Kerry who lived in Husons house and was executed with him for she being a profest Papist might disclose it to the Priest, be that as it will after he was acquainted with them the design seemed to proceed with more vigour. The conspirators had hopes given them that the Spaniards would come hither and join with them early in the Spring but if they failed of coming then the business was to be done by the Conspirators without them many of them christen'd by the Priest absolved from all their past sins and whatever they should do in the Plott many of them sworn by him (others by Huson to burn and destroy and to be secret, wherein they were but too punctual how weak soever the scheme may appear it was plausible and strong enough to engage and hold the Negroes and that was all that the Priest and Huson wanted for had the fort taken fire in the night as it was intended the town was then to have been fired in several places at once, in which confusion much rich Plunder might have been got and concealed and if they had it in view too, to serve the enemy they could not have done it more effectually for this town being laid in

Ashes his Majesties forces in the West Indies might have suffered much for want of provisions and perhaps been unable to proceed upon any expedition or peice of service, from whence they might promise themselves great rewards, I doubt the business is pretty nigh at an end for since the Priest has been apprehended and some more white men named, great industry has been used through out the town to discredit the witnesses and prejudice the people against them and I am told it has had in a great measure its intended effect I am sorry for it for I do not think we are yet got near the bottom of it, when I doubt the principal conspirators lie concealed.

Lords of Trade to Lieutenant-Governor Clarke (1742)

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, vol. 6, p. 213.

We heartily congratulate you on the Providential Discovery of the late conspiracy and Intended Massacre; The severity you have shewn to the Chief of those concerned in it & yours gentleness with regard to others whom you judged proper Objects of Mercy will, we hope, have their due effect towards securing the Province from any such attempts for the future.