

A Letter to Boston's "Radical Americans"¹

From a "Loose and Disorderly" New Yorker
Autumn, 1770



This picture shows THE FATAL FIFTH OF MARCH OF 1770, called the "Boston Massacre." It lies. Its true meaning can be understood only by SAINT PATRICK'S DAY OF 1741. Read on and be enlightened.

TO THE MEMORY OF BOBBY SCOLLARD,

Southie,
Paddy Duke,
Hit Man,
Harvard Cook,
Soledad Militant,
Teacher,
Race Track Schemer,
No Hair,
Revolutionary...

Dear Radical Americans of Boston,²

Brothers and sisters of Boston, this letter is for you. It is a warning and a reminder. Events are moving fast. The British lion is hungry. We have all heard its roaring. How shall we fight this imperialist beast? How can we stay its unquenchable appetite for our lives, labors and goods? Are we to let the Ruffle-Wearers of our towns lead us to battle against this beast, and when we have defeated it then turn their own hunger against us, to ravage our lives and families under the colors of some American flag instead of the Union Jack? Or, can we defeat them both, the she-lion and her American cubs at the same time?

Even as we try to resolve this question in the practice of our struggles, the political meaning of our efforts is transformed by artful liars in the pay of our own gentry. One Paul Revere, a silversmith, is in the lead of these "historians" of the Ruffle-Wearers. Last week his print arrived in New York, the print describing the "Bloody Massacre" of THE FATAL FIFTH OF MARCH when Captain Preston and some of his bloody-backs shot at our brother workers with their loaded firelocks. On the right his print shows the Captain ordering the red-coats to fire into the crowd that only three paces away had gathered armed with nothing more than snowballs.

We had heard of the massacre. It was the talk of the New York markets and taverns. We knew that the soldiers had come to hassle and mess about with your lives. We knew that the lousy lobster-backs were active in scabbing against the dispute going down in Mr. Grey's rope-yard. We knew of Sam Grey who had advised the soldier who entered the yard looking for work to "go and clean my s--t house." We knew the Irishmen, Patrick Carr and John Clark, who were slain. Of course, we knew the Afro-Indian, Crispus Attucks, who lay dead. How could we not? Since his escape from slavery in Framingham, he'd got around. At six foot two inches, this man, part Natick Indian and part African, cut a pretty prominent figure on our common coast. "The first to defy, the first to die" as your fat man, John Adams, said of him at the trial where that lugubrious crocodile, Adams, defended Preston and his bullies.³

Paul Revere is of the fat man's party. True, he does not defend Preston, but he lies as to who was killed. Why does he not show any African faces in the crowd of the victims? Where is Crispus Attucks? We do not pretend to be skilled engravers, but surely a black face is as readily rendered by the engraver's art as a white face which in any case is defined by the blackness around it. And could he not have by some symbolic emblem in the hat or coat - a shamrock would have looked well for instance - have indicated that our brothers, Patrick Carr and John Clark, were Irishmen?⁴ Why is it that so swiftly after the massacre we find this print carried throughout the North American dominions obscuring the

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essential ethnic combination leading to the first battle of the coming American Revolution?

The answer is that the native lion cubs have well studied what the imperial lion has taught them - DIVIDE AND RULE. The brutality of the English merchants is known around the world, from Bombay to Guinea, from Belfast to Boston. Its appetite for blood and gold is so great that our native "patriots" wish to leech upon us too. The slave traders and task masters of Boston and New York must fight the imperial lion as well as us Irish, Africans, and poor crackers. Though we make all the riches, individually we have nothing. Our only strength is our numbers. Our power is our combination. For fear of that power they lie and conceal our mighty alliance. That accounts for Paul Revere's omissions and distortions.

The importance of this lie, indeed the necessity of it, arose from a fact of our New York history. On SAINT PATRICK'S DAY, 1741, we in New York sought to spice the imperialist dinner with some salt and pepper of our own. Black and white, Irish and African, offered to roast them alive. On that day we set fire to Fort George, the Governor's Mansion, the imperial armory, the symbol of Royal Majesty and Civil Authority, and the haven and security of the rich. We cooked it to a crisp. It was the signal to start fires throughout the town, and the flames of ten fires (eight in six days) was the beacon of general insurrection. We danced in the streets by the light of the conflagration. We drank through the night in the warmth of our just wrath. The flames lit up the sky in billowing bursts of ocher and orange. Their reflections played in the waters of the harbor. The world seemed to turn upside down. Irish were to be governors, Africans to be kings.

I wish to recollect 1741 for you, Radical Americans, though it was thirty years ago. I am a "loose and disorderly person." I belong to the "scum and dregs of the white complexion." When your fat man, John Adams, referred to the victims of THE FATAL FIFTH OF MARCH as the "most obscure and inconsiderable that could have been found upon the continent," the brave words belong to me! Therefore you may dismiss what I say, or doubt its veracity, or question the faltering memory of an old and indigent man. As you ought. Consequently, I'll tell the story only by reference to what has been printed. You can check everything I say in the book that was printed of the trials.⁵ (The trials were long, my friends, beginning in the violent spring and stretching throughout the hot summer of 1741 and beyond. Small wonder they were long, for long was the trail of blood that followed them, long were the clouds of smoke that rose above the city from the burning of our brothers and sisters, long was the voyage of those transported to the West Indies, long was the time that the leaders hung in gibbets on the docks.) The trial proceedings omit

to record the words of defense, only the confessions that were extracted from the miserable wretches who would sell out their brothers and sisters to save their own lives were published in the proceedings. Nevertheless, I shall refer only to what was printed, and leave the rest to your experienced imagination that can easily piece together the fragments. Or better, you can investigate it yourself by asking questions at the taverns, rope-walks, wharfs, and timber-yards of your own city where surely you'll find veterans of SAINT PATRICK'S DAY of 1741.

Thirteen black men and women were burned at the stake in the evenings between May and August. Sixteen black men and women were hanged during the the same period, except in the mornings. Four whites were hanged. Seven whites and seventy Africans were transported out of the King's North American dominions to be sold into slavery in Newfoundland and the Caribbean. Extraordinary marvels took place at these scenes of terror and English law. I shall tell you of them presently. For now, let me lead you into the circumstances of the revolt and guide you to the inner-most places where we brooded and planned our conspiracy.

Do you remember the coldness of the winter of 1740/41? Oh, it was the worst of the century! All over Europe, as we later learned, people rioted for food. In Ireland Bishop Berkeley reported seeing the carcasses of children frozen solid in the lanes, and haggard women fighting one another for the privilege of gnawing on dog's bones. In New York it was very bad too. Provisions were low and the market was bare. Diana, a slave to Mrs. Marchado, laid her child on the ground to spite her mistress. There the simple creature was frozen to



death. John Hughson, considered by many to be the leader of the rebellion, was far more often that winter away from home with his sleigh collecting firewood from the fields and commons. His neighbor and brother tradesman, John Romme, likewise took particular care that winter to get in his firewood. Two Africans, Caesar and Cuffee, and a white lad named Yorkshire made regular deliveries for him. Antonio, one of the Spanish prisoners of war unjustly sold as slaves, walked into town on an errand for his master, and froze his feet in the first snow. By spring he was permanently lame. And if the winter were not bad enough, the horrors of war added to the fears of our town, bringing death and desperation to the poor and deluding hysteria and uncertainty of trade to the ruffled rich.

A year earlier that merchant mountebank, Robert Jenkins, fooled around in Parliament flourishing his severed ear in front of the astonished bigwigs, pretending that Spanish papish predators had sliced it off in unprovoked battle. Yet, we knew from word arriving through Mexico and El Salvador that the London merchants had already instigated trouble among the long-cutters of Honduras and the sailors of the slave fleets (asiento vessels, so-called because the English possessed a monopoly on slave trading to the Spanish Main.)

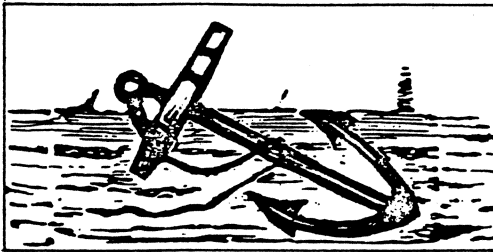
In New York the effects of war were already felt. Captain Lush in March of 1741 had captured (or stolen!) a Spanish frigate. Nineteen of her crew were Spanish-speaking Africans. They were imprisoned. A Court of Admiralty ruled them all slaves. The Vendue-Master at their auction said that the proceedings were warranted because he had heard from a ship's captain who had heard that some of the crew were heard to have been slaves once in Carthage.⁶ Lush profited heavily from the transaction, though he risked the wrath of the Spaniards who promised to burn his house down and even dared to threaten to "tie him to a beam and roast him like a piece of beef."⁷

Though they insisted that they were not slaves - they did have surnames which they duly produced in court - they refused to stand aloof from those who still were. Later these Spaniards were an example of courage and teachers of soldiering technique to those of us less experienced. Antonio, for instance, "had something black, which he said was to throw on houses to set them on fire." He cut this "something" into pieces and distributed them at Hughson's. The slave Ben answered Jack's doubts about the



conspiracy saying, "Oh! you fool, those Spaniards know better than York Negroes, and could help better to take it than they, because they were more used to war."

In the autumn of 1740 an expeditionary fleet against the Spanish West Indies was raised in New York. This alone dangerously depleted provisions against the coming winter. John Hughson and his African associates were pretty sharp in this situation - selling a man-of-war fourteen or fifteen firkins of butter that they had somehow obtained. John Comfort carefully watched to whom the water from his well went. All manner of poor men and boys were pressed in the streets to man this fleet. So few were the young and able-bodied left, that Albany (Mr. Carpenter's slave) "believed an hundred and fifty men might take this city."⁸ After the departure of the "Cuba men" only the indirect effects of the war touched our city - shortages and hysteria.



The latter we saw in the spring of 1741 in Governor Oglethorpe's letter. Freshly returned from his slaughters in the Florida campaign, he wrote the governor of New York from Georgia saying that all kinds of Spanish priests had infiltrated the northern ports disguising themselves as physicians, dancing-masters, and school-teachers. This was a premature Red-Under-the-Bed theory. To an extent it worked: the wartime delusory paranoia helped hang many of the people here, including that good and learned man, John Ury. Us slaves, "scum," and "dregs" needed no such outside interference from mysterious plotters, though we were grateful for whatever help we could get. What we wanted was an attack by sea on our city: if the European imperialists were at each others throats we could supply the coup de grace from within.

Preparation for the insurrection of SAINT PATRICK'S DAY, 1741, had begun months in advance. The Spanish POWs and the War of Jenkin's Ear both played a part that Bastian, a slave, summed up in this way: "they had a parcel of good hands, Spanish Negroes, five or six of them who could join with the York Negroes: that they expected that war would be proclaimed in a little time against the French, and that the French and the Spaniards would come here." Their expectations were disappointed. However, other problems were resolved. In forming a coalition of African slaves, Irish servants, free Negroes, Afro-Hispanics, native Americans, and some discontented white

soldiers of uncertain progeny, in the repressive atmosphere of a Calvinist, merchant city, we were able to overcome some important problems of command, weaponry, ideology, and communications.

Command

At the trial some of the characteristics of the command structure emerged. The city was divided in two parts: the east and west, with John Romme's house being the headquarters of the "Fly Boys" in the east, and John Hughson's house the headquarters of the "Long Bridge Boys" of the west. Each had their captains and was further subdivided into companies. Juan was to be a captain, same with Jack. Ben and Toby also were appointed captains, assuming their masters' names as Captain Marshall and Captain Provoost. Around Christmas time about forty Negroes of Long Island formed themselves into a company, mustered out on Sunday afternoons, and trained themselves in the use of "borrowed" arms. Indeed, back in 1740 word of the plot had spread into the country around New York. In Westchester it was heard that "there would be bloody times in York before harvest." A slave in Long Island was heard saying, "if they burn their backsides, they must sit down on the blisters, but said further, let them go and prosper."⁹

Though he denied that he could read and write, Ben, who also had access to his master's horse and weapons on account of his master's frequent absences, kept a list whereupon all the conspirators affixed their marks against their names that he had written out. Those who worked the hardest and took the most risks also took the grandest titles. Thus, Caesar was to be the governor. Hughson the King. And Peg, "The Newfoundland Irish Beauty" was to become the Governess.



Weaponry

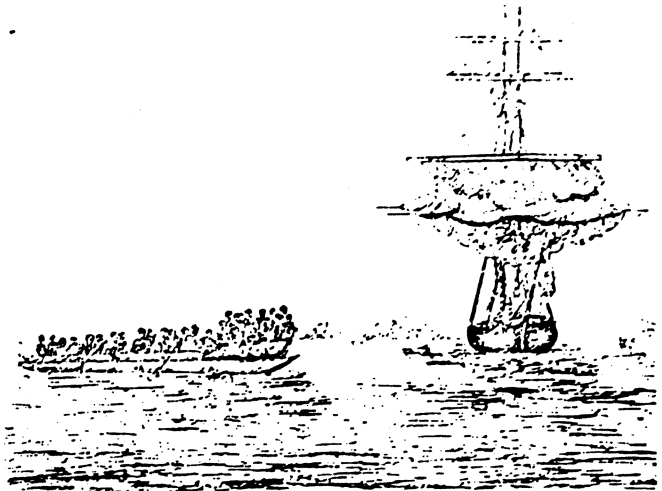
Weapons were stockpiled all that winter. Hughson collected money from his African comrades (who'd reappropriated it from their masters) to buy arms and ammunition in New Jersey. The Spaniards offered technical advice in the manual exercise of arms. Powlus, one of them, sold nine knives at the meal-market for 2s. 6d. We knew something about detonators and explosives too. When it came to pyrotechnics, none knew more than "Doc" Harry, an African living in Nassau, Long Island, since his expulsion by the New York magistracy for what they were pleased to call "mal-practice in physic"! "Doc" Harry understood that poisonous, therapeutic, and explosive properties of substances, knowledge that he had begun to study in his native Guinea.

Once after a supper meeting at Hughson's he cried out, "Hurrah for Guanas boys, for he had Guanas boys enough." Guano, as some of you Boston radical Americans must know, is the excrement of bats and birds. Those of you who have sailed on the Peruvian coast or around the off-shore islands of Florida's Gulf coast, will have seen huge mounds of it and the cliffs covered with it, like icing on a cake. "Doc" Harry had learned how to make gunpowder from this, and other explosive forms. Much later, on board the ship that transported him to Hispaniola, Bastian remembered, "We had combustibles prepared by doctor Harry, made up into balls." Several of the many fires that broke out after SAINT PATRICK'S DAY were ignited by his preparations, though it was a smoldering hickory or walnut fire-brand (such hardwoods can keep an ember alive for twenty-four hours with the minimum of oxygen) that Quaco had actually used to ignite Fort George that day.

Ideas

The ideas that propelled so many to such desperate action were not given a full hearing at the trials, because the justices were less interested in what we had to say, than they were in pretending that we were all the stupid agents of the Pope. However, sometimes a few words would slip in, and I can safely leave it to you to read between the lines and to choose for yourself any among the many communitarian traditions alive in our century that they belonged to.

The white soldiers wanted money. It was as simple as that. They had not been paid in months, and when they were paid it hardly satisfied their wants.¹⁰ The Irish soldier, Kane, born in Co. Athlone, told Johnson, the journeyman hatter, "D--n ye, don't be down-hearted, never fear, for we shall have money enough by-and-by." Hughson used to say "the country was not good, too many gentlemen here, and made negroes work hard." The Newfoundland Irish Beauty remembered him telling Cuffee, an African leader,



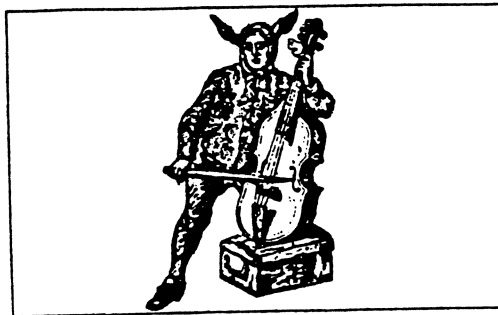
"they should steal all that they could from their masters: then he would carry them to a strange country, and give them their liberty, and set them free."

My! my! my! did those Dutch and English property people in the jury hate old Hughson! He was guilty "not only of making negro slaves their equals, but even their superiors, by waiting upon, keeping with, and entertaining them with meat, drink, and lodging." Equality might have been the watchword of the insurrection. Quak "said he would ride in a coach after he had destroyed his master." 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) would have more."

Equality and freedom. Cato complained "it was hard a case upon the poor Negroes, that they could not so much as take a walk after church-out, but the constables took them up; therefore in order to be free, they must set the houses on fire, and kill the white people." Caesar recruited Bastian to the insurrectionary preparations with the single question, "Whether he would join along with them to become their own masters?"

We also had amongst us veterans of other rebellions, some old-timers (long departed to their reward) who remembered in New York the Rebellion of 1712, and some recent arrivals who had participated in the St. John's plot, and the Antigua Rebellion of 1736. Referring to the latter, Cataline was overheard in his master's yard saying, "the negroes were fools to do here as they had done in the hot country; for they all burnt and hanged for it in the hot country." Will, a slave to Mr. Ward, the clock-maker, was an embittered veteran of the Antigua Rebellion. He'd been a leader of the plot and later turned King's Evidence to save his skin which is why he had to flee that island for New York, and it accounts for his sullen bitterness.

He used to complain "that the Negroes here were cowards; for that they had no hearts as those at Antigua." Poor Will! He'd betrayed his people once, but he made up for it in New York (if you want my opinion!). He taught us how to construct a dark lantern, so we could meet and see each other at night without attracting notice from our masters who had forbidden the use of candles. Will was burnt at the stake on July 4, 1741.



Do any of you people remember Robert Barrow? He used to go by the names "Runwell" and "Barbadoes" too. The guy hanged in London in 1737. He sailed in Guinea, Virginia, and Barbadoes. He deserted the first slaver he sailed on and lived with a maroon colony of runaways in Antigua, news of whose rebellion he carried back to London whence perhaps it reached you.¹¹

Communication

Our most difficult problem was communication. A place of communication was one problem. Means of communication was another, and no less serious.

The Africans were from several different nations and spoke as many languages. You wouldn't know this from their names which either suggested that they were Latin speakers (Caeser, Cataline, Cato, Pompeii, Mars, Primus) or that they spoke some dialect of English (Cork, Dundee, Worcester, Suxsex, Deptford, Scotland, Hanover, Windsor). Only a very few retained an African name (Sambo, Cuffee, Quaco, Quamino), or were known by new American names like the two fiddlers, Braveboy and Curacoa Dick. A new Afro-American lingo helped us. Jack, the cooper, spoke a "dialect so perfectly Negro and unintelligible" that the court had to get an interpreter. When "backarara" was uttered, the white people in the juror's box and on the judges seat didn't know it was of them we were speaking!

Then, there were the Irish among us who spoke English or Gaelic. Hughson and Romme spoke either English or Dutch. The Spanish POWs spoke the language of Spain (what else?). Bastian spoke French. Wan spoke in a native American tongue. Campbell and Ury understood Latin and Greek. We were an international, polyglot community. Curacoa Dick could talk some Spanish. Antonio some English. Emmanuel, the sail-maker, understood English and Spanish. Sawney also spoke these tongues, plus "some other language" that Mary Burton (the Judas whose confession was fullest) did not understand.

What brought us together in communication was music, food, and booze. The fiddle was the most important Irish contribution, every bit as important to understanding as guano was to our problem of munitions. Jamaica was an exciting fiddler: he said that he'd play over the masters "while they were roasting in the flames; and said he had been slave long enough." When we all met at Hughson's it was the fiddle that got

the blood stirring and the feet moving. Once Cuffee played away on his fiddle after supper. Another time "Ben played on the fiddle" while "Hughson's wife and daughter danced together in one part of the room, and the negroes in another."¹² After a meeting upstairs, Hughson and others came down and found two Negro men affiddling to them ...one fiddler belonged to Holt, named Joe, the other Kierstead's Braveboy."

In the summer of 1740 the slaves met in "Bowrey-land" at a frolic organized by the free Negroes. Curacoa Dick fiddled so well that Sussex paid him two Dutch dollars. At the same frolic Braveboy was introduced to the plans of insurrection: "they were going to have a small fight, and if he would be on their side he should lose by it, and that they would have him, because he was a fiddler."

I don't know what tunes they played, though "Fire on the Mountain" and "The Coloured Aristocracy" are still popular. Perhaps they hacked away at some of those beautiful but tricky compositions of Carolan's that had recently been introduced to our shores by some sailors who had heard the great bard's creations before he died in Ireland in 1738. In any case this "music of the devil" got people together in a way that we understood each other despite all our languages. The slave masters' policy of creating a Babel of discord among us, their servants and slaves, was overcome by a little fiddling, and quite a lot of eating and drinking.

The drinking was illegal. An Act of the New York Assembly forbade the serving of drinks to Negroes, and in the spring of 1741 the jury presented more than a dozen "disorderly houses," ordering the constables to close them down, for nothing more than serving a dram now and then. It was in the summer of 1740 that Admiral Vernon (who always appeared on deck in a grogham cloak) ordered that the rum measured out daily to the sailors be mixed with water. Threnceforth, Jack Tar was not quite as jolly as he used to be, subsisting on "grog."

But for us on shore, it was only the best. Rum made many a fine brew. Egg punch was a favorite. "Flip" was easily made with sugar and water. Caeser and Cuffee having robbed the cellar of a tavern back in 1735, decided to commemorate the occasion by forming the "Geneva Club," to drink the



An Irish Feast

juniper-flavored alcohol, a Dutch contribution to civilization and the drink of mortal desperation of the London poor.¹³

The club had the "impudence to assume the style and title of Free Masons, in imitation of a society here: which was looked upon to be a gross affront to the provincial grand master and gentlemen of the fraternity at that time..." Ha! Ha! Ha!

Most of the eating and drinking was done at John Hughson's waterside establishment. A word needs to be said about this extraordinary man and his family. His brother was a boatman. His mother-in-law was a fortune-teller. His daughter perhaps the most stalwart of all the conspirators. And his wife as grand a helpmeet as any army might desire. Hughson himself was a shoemaker, a son of St. Crispin, so he knew the callouses and corns as well as the soles of the many people who visited his house, especially on Sunday afternoons, when a great many country Negroes and whites came into town.

His place was reputed to be, and surely was, a receiver's ken. A Negroe butcher supplied him with meat, and his many country friends kept his larder well-stocked with game. In that very hard year his generosity was appreciated by hundreds of folks who could find upon the planks put on top a pair of tubs, a banquet of food and fellowship. A Peculiarity of these meals was frequently noted in the proceedings of the trial. But, whether it was peculiarity of the meals or of the court reporter's imagination, is something that you can judge as well as I.

The fact is, that the printed proceedings of evidence on the life and death of one hundred forty men and women notes more than a dozen times that everyone ate on a table cloth! Strange, eh? Here are some excerpts from the court proceedings that I include just to show you what I mean:

1) "Hughson took a flask of rum out of a case and set it on the table, and two bowls of punch were made; some drank dram; a cloth was laid."

2) "...two or three tables were put together to make it longer; Hughson's daughter brought in the victuals, and just as he came in Sarah brought the cloth and laid it."

3) "...came there about four in the afternoon; a great many Negroes there, about thirteen or fourteen; the daughter alid the cloth after he came in."

4) "That some time after Christmas he was at the house of John Hughson, and that there was a supper there...the cloth being laid and taken away by Margaret Kerry..."

What they were trying to get at is evidence of "papal practices." To the severe Calvinist burghers of New York, a simple table cloth seemed to be akin to the pall, paten, purificator, frontal cloth, cere cloth, and fair linen of High Church ceremony. So what? even if it was. Sarah and The Newfoundland Irish Beauty, though reputed to be papists, only intended to prepare a clean surface to eat from, so that people could be comfortable. Sure, it did bring people together. While there certainly was a communal aspect to the meetings, this was not Holy Communion! And while for many this was their last (good) supper, the meal was a far cry from Mass!

Hughson's was a meeting place. There the oaths were sworn in preparation for SAINT PATRICK'S DAY. Some kissed the Bible. Some swore by thunder. Some took off their left shoe and placed their toes in a charcoal ring described on the floor. Once Ury stood in the middle of the ring, a crucifix in his hand, and commented on the meaning of the 117th Psalm:

O praise the LORD, all ye nations:
praise him all ye people.

Hughson's house had many rooms and room for many beliefs - African, Catholic, Antinomian, and whatever else a man or woman might think. The place was often called "Oswego" in honor of the Iroquois traders with whom Hughson had once lived. Some of these, like "Indian Wan," brought their religion to the place.¹⁴ Hughson's "Oswego" was for all ye nations, all ye people, as Ury expounded.¹⁵

There weren't many other places to meet. Shipboard, woodlots, the commons, the meal market, the "Bowery-land:" that was about it, except for Gerardus Comfort's water-well and Crocker's cock pit. At those places business could be done without Roosevelt,



Schuyler, De Peyster, Keteltass, or Van Zant overhearing. Everyday slaves were sent to fetch tea water and tote it back in kegs. Jack, Dundee, Daeser, Brash, and Ticklepitcher first heard of the plans at the well. In fact, so great was the hysteria of the summer of 1741 that just to have been seen pumping water was evidence of conspiracy! "Cato went to the pump to wash his hands, and Fortune pumped the water for him." Fortune was hanged on this kind of evidence! The pump was especially busy in the autumn when the West India fleet was being fitted out and supplied.

The other place of meeting, free of the barking of masters and the cowering of slaves, was at Crocker's cock pit. Cuffee lost a Spanish doubloon there in a bad bet. Hughson and Campbell, a Greek and Latin teacher, had met there since at least 1738, playing chequers and "discoursing." The man, Ury, who'd come up from Philadelphia and the two "Dublins" in upper and lower Pennsylvania, lived at the fighting cocks. There he baptised the son of John Ryan, an Irish servant brought over the previous summer. There he impressed a gambling house carpenter with his fine reading voice of Latin and Greek. There he set up school for a few young scholars. There he sat up at night discoursing on Wesley's and Whitefield's doctrines of salvation. (How he scorned their bleating!)

It was there too that he made his famous reply to Mary Burton, a reply that soon was the talk of the commons and the water-pump:

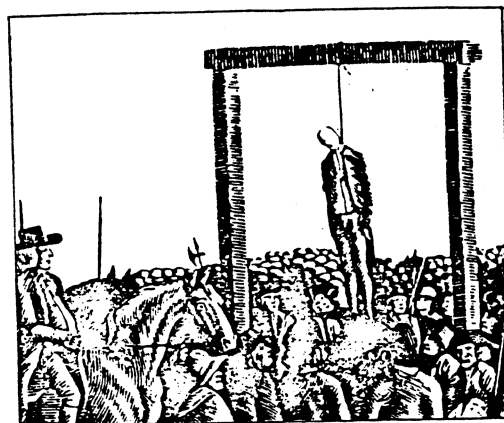
She wished those black toads at the devil.

Oh, said Ury, let them be black, or what they will, the devil has nothing to do with them; I can forgive them their sins, and you yours too.

Besppectacled and hardly reaching five feet in height, his soul was great and his generosity of spirit knew no bounds. It was said that he was a Nonjuring priest. In England he'd been banished for treasonous publications. The son of the secretary of the South Sea Company, the slave trading syndicate for the asiento, he preserved his gentle faith on a simple cupboard altar for his book and candle at Hughson's, and preached his words to the slaveys whose labors had provided his Dad with a foul livelihood.

Before he was topped off at the August hanging, he cried out, "Am I prepared to meet my Lord when the midnight cry is echoed forth? shall I then have the wedding garment on?" Many people there thought that never was there a handsomer spirit, and the same spectators, perhaps moved by his eloquence, prepared midnight curses for his executioners.

Oh, dear Radical Americans of Boston! My heart is heavy with the remembrance of the fine men and women who were lost to us in the hangings, the burnings, and the



transportations of 1741. John Romme, the shoemaker, with a memory of the Rebellion of 1712. Cuffee, intrepid and expert hunter of pheasant and rabbit. Othello, the Chief Justice's slave, who carried our news to Rhode Island. Jack the cooper. Ben, the mariner, who read to us aloud. Scipio, a cooper, and another reader. Galloway, who promised to make us all a new paid of leather breeches with victory. Quack whose wife was the governor's cook and got him into the fort for the SAINT PATRICK'S DAY firing. Jack, the tallow-chandler. Coffin, the pedlar. Holt, the dancing master. Corker, who tended the Governor's stables. Connolly, a priest on Governor's Island. Luke Barrington who refused to drink to King George. Kane and Kelly and fifteen bloody backs ready to turn their coats inside out.

Sarah Hughson saw her parents "loll out their tongues at the company." She derived courage from their silence at the hanging and, boy! did she need it. She had to endure more than half a dozen sentences of execution, each followed by His Majesty's Most Gracious respite. Thus the King toyed with her life in a feeble attempt to induce her to a full confession. Just as a cat will play with a mouse before sinking its teeth into the throat of the little creature.

Then, there was the fabulous Newfoundland Irish Beauty, also known as Margaret Soubiero, a.k.a. Sheila McMullin, a.k.a. Salingburgh, a.k.a. Kerry, a.k.a. Salinburr. Peg.

In the autumn of 1740 she took lodgings with Frank, a free Negroe. In February, 1741, she moved into Hughson's house. She laid the cloth, brothers and sisters, yes she did. To see her beauty, her grace, her independence, her fight, her revolutionary loyalty and love for Cuffee, the African hunter and leader of men, was to see the future; for she was the first - even before the drink, the splendid meals, the hot music had brought us together - to show us all that Irish and African could love and struggle together. In the winter of 1740 she showed us the shape and form of things to come. She bore a child, and the child lived. Anne Kannady

was the town gossip, and married to a peruke-maker, as you might expect. She fussed and fretted, needled and goaded, until she learned the color of the baby. Ha! This baby, the child of an Irish and African union, was a new creature, the American product of the "scum and dregs of this earth," showing the world a new face of humanity. (For its color, see page 443.)

Peg was launched into eternity on 12 June 1741. Do not forget her, Radical Americans, remember her as you remember Crispus Attucks and Patrick Carr during your grand orations on THE FATAL FIFTH OF MARCH.

Our revolution of SAINT PATRICK'S DAY, 1741, failed. It is only remembered, if at all, as a "plot or conspiracy." The "patriots" of your town, from John Adams to Paul Revere, your tea-drinking, free-trading "mohawks," in their strutting bourgeois indignation, may have forgotten their names but not their deeds. That is why they acted quickly, and in contradictory fashion, after the Boston Massacre. Why? What do they have to fear from an Irish-African combination? I think that you know as well as I. You have seen them wince as they button their pants and hear the harlot's curse. You have seen their porcelain tea cup shake for a moment in the porcelain saucer when they note that the servant has some fingers missing. You have seen them spill their wig-powder when in the mirror appears in the background a pock-marked old man. You have seen them trip ever so slightly at the sight of a gasping man in the ship's hold. Where is their revolutionary talk and their brave bombast when the winter freezes the rag-covered feet of the women gathering kindling from the commons? What frightened them about New York 1741 was the puissance of our combination. To them a few timbers burning on a cold winter's night or the prospect of the Governor's bricks a-tumbling down were palpable indications of the transience of their rule. That is why your John Adams defended Captain Preston and his gang of assassins. Crispus Attucks and Patrick Carr were ready to "plunder the King's Chest" in the Boston Customs House.¹⁶ Revolutionary hypocrits.

Friends, I have asked your indulgence to recollect our history and I have taxed it as heavily as the King of England has taxed our newspapers. Our words, since his taxes, are now expensive. We cannot afford the time or the money to analyze our history in the detail and with the depth that it deserves. Allow me, therefore, to bring this narrative to a conclusion, by begging your indulgence once more to report to you a thing which many of those who saw it "were ready to resolve...into miracles." For is not the miracle the simplest way of summing up the contradictions of struggle and passing them on to future generations?

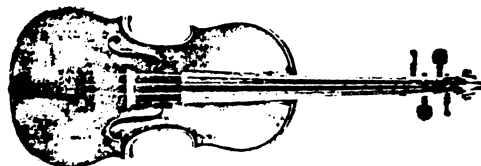
Noise of strange happenings began on 12 June when the Sheriffs brought Hughson out of jail to be carried to his execution. It was observed that on each of his cheeks a red mark, about the size of a shilling, had appeared. In one who was normally of a pale visage, this was remarkable, and many interpreted it as a sign of innocence. Personally, I thought that, if any thing, it was a sign to others to avenge the treatment he must have received in jail. Be that as it may, the tendency to prophetic prognostications began then. Even a year later in Charles Town, South Carolina, the negroes were still making "pre-extended prophesies."

After Hughson's agonies were completed and his body hung limp and heavy as a sack of potatoes, the Sheriffs' officers cut it down and stuffed his carcass into an iron gibbet to hang on the waterfront as a 'teaching aid' (as we might say) to our city's visitors. A week passed. The flies began to gather. Another week passed. The sun grew hotter. During the third week of that July, the slave, York, was brought down to the wharf to be hung in the "Sheriff's Picture Frame," next to Hughson. Then, an extraordinary appearance was recorded, for it was observed that

so much of him as was visible, viz. - face, hands, neck, and feet, were of a deep shining black, rather blacker than the negro placed by him, who was one of the darkest hue of his kind; and the hair of Hughson's beard and neck (his head could not be seen for he had a cap on) was curling like the wool of a negroe's beard and head, and the features of his face were of the symmetry of a negro beauty; the nose broad and flat, the nostrils open and extended, the mouth wide, lips full and thick.¹⁷

Meanwhile, Caesar, whose carcass had been gibbeted a month earlier than Hughson's was found to have been so thoroughly bleached - by what forces of sun, wind, salt, air or otherwise, I know not - that he had turned whitish.

That a white man became black and a black man white were accounted "wondrous phenomena." People flocked from all points of the compass to witness these "miracles." Why or how these transpigmentations took place is a matter perhaps best left to the speculation of the learned scholars of your academies, though, for my part, I can't help but think that there be others in Dorchester, and Roxbury whose speculations might enlighten us all, especially if they were expressed in practice.



Footnotes

1. Despite doubts about the authenticity of this letter, we in Midnight Notes publish it because it raises issues about the racism of the Boston working-class, or, rather, of the racism imposed by the Boston Brahmins upon the working-class, that are rarely aired elsewhere. We have decided to leave the text unaltered, so that those skilled in textual exegesis may submit it to the most rigorous analysis. Instead, our editors have added footnotes bringing the reader's attention to authenticated commentaries of confirmation of the extraordinary events that the letter discloses.

2. Of course, the author of this letter could not intend an allusion to the magazine called Radical America which began publication in Boston two hundred years after this letter was apparently written. Nor is it surprising that the law-abiding and peaceful editors of that magazine have not written about the subject of this letter, inasmuch as anything having to do with treason and plot has been forbidden by the current F.B.I. directives. Yet, the only thing that will unite a cotton-picker and a 'tater-digger is action against a common enemy, something possible in 1741 and 1770, if not 1983.

3. The story of the Boston Massacre (5 March 1770) has often been told, both in bombastic orations of commemoration and in skilled scholarly works. Among the latter we recommend two accounts which do not conceal the ethnic alliance within the working-class struggle that led to it. Richard B. Morris, Government and Labor in Early America (1946), pp. 190 et seq., and Dirk Hoerder, "Boston Leaders and Boston Crowds, 1765-1776," in Alfred F. Young (ed.), The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism (1976)

4. It may be thought anacronistic that the author of this letter refers to the victims of the Boston Massacre as his "brothers," since there were clearly no ties of consanguinity between them nor evidences of our modern class consciousness. Yet, that was the designation used by the men of 1741 to refer to those knowledgeable of the conspiracy.

5. He refers to A Journal of the proceedings in the Detection of the Conspiracy formed by Some White People in Conjunction with Negro and other Slaves, that was printed in New York and London in 1744. It was republished in 1810 and once again in 1971 with an excellent introduction by Thomas J. Davis, in a volume entitled The New York Conspiracy. Subsequent page references are to this modern edition published by Beacon Press.

6. In Venezuela.

7. Page 179.

8. Page 259.

9. Page 386.

10. As editors we have been disappointed to have found so few studies among our colleagues in English, Irish, African, and American history that study the actual material relations of the 18th century soldiery. We were fortunate however to come across a remarkable Ph. D. dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania about 18th century sailors: Marcus Rediker, "Society and Culture Among Anglo-American Deep Sea Sailors, 1700-1750" (1982).

11. We have confirmed this information in The Ordinary of Newgate's Account of the Malefactors Executed at Tyburn, 5 October 1737.

12. Bobby Scollard said, "We got to figure this out, baby, we're wasting us and not them. And as one Black dude said to me, 'Hey, lookit, we don't have to love each other, but we've got to treat each other as human beings. We've got to have respect for each other, but that doesn't mean you have to kiss me and I have to kiss you. We just got to make it.'" NEPA NEWS: The Voice of the North East Prisoners Association, III, 4 (April-May, 1975).

13. M. Dorothy George, London Life in the Eighteenth Century (1925), describes the toll on human life that this brew took during the "Gin Decade" of the 1730s.

14. We have searched the records of the trial repeatedly, and have found no evidence for this statement. "Indian Wan," it's true, was a conspirator who often met at Hughson's, but there's no evidence that he shared his wisdom with the others, nor that he didn't.

15. Also unjustified by the evidence, strictly, interpreted.

16. Captain Preston published his account of March 5 in the Public Advertiser in 28 April 1779. Do you wish that the author of this letter had as deep an appreciation of the weakness of 18th century working-class forces as the historian Gene ("hegemony") Genovese evinces?

17. Pages 273-276.

RADICAL AMERICA is an independent socialist-feminist journal, featuring the history and current developments in the working class, the role of women and Third World people, with reports on shop-floor and community organizing, the history and politics of radicalism and feminism, and debates on current socialist theory and popular culture.

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