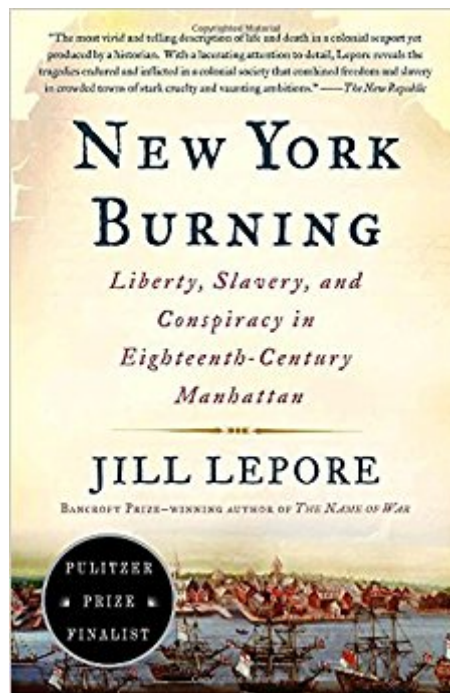




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# New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, And Conspiracy In Eighteenth-Century Manhattan



## Synopsis

Pulitzer Prize Finalist and Anisfield-Wolf Award Winner  
In New York Burning, Bancroft Prize-winning historian Jill Lepore recounts these dramatic events of 1741, when ten fires blazed across Manhattan and panicked whites suspecting it to be the work of a slave uprising went on a rampage. In the end, thirteen black men were burned at the stake, seventeen were hanged and more than one hundred black men and women were thrown into a dungeon beneath City Hall. Even back in the seventeenth century, the city was a rich mosaic of cultures, communities and colors, with slaves making up a full one-fifth of the population. Exploring the political and social climate of the times, Lepore dramatically shows how, in a city rife with state intrigue and terror, the threat of black rebellion united the white political pluralities in a frenzy of racial fear and violence.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

New York Burning is a well-told tale of a once-notorious episode that took place in Manhattan in 1741. Though, as Jill Lepore writes, New York's "slave past has long been buried," for most of the 18th century one in five inhabitants of Manhattan were enslaved, making it second only to Charleston, South Carolina, "in a wretched calculus of urban unfreedom." Over the course of a few weeks in 1741, ten fires burned across Manhattan, sparking hysteria and numerous conspiracy rumors. Initially, rival politicians blamed each other for the blazes, but they soon found a common enemy. Based solely on the testimony of one white woman, some 200 slaves were accused of conspiring to burn down the city, murder the resident whites, and take over the local government.

Under duress, 80 slaves confessed to the crimes and were forced to implicate others. When the trial was over, 13 black men were burned at the stake, 17 more were hanged (along with four whites accused of working with them), and 70 others were shipped off to the Caribbean where slavery conditions were even worse. By necessity, Jill Lepore bases much of her research on a journal written in 1744 by New York Supreme Court Justice Daniel Horsmanden, which she describes as "one of the most startling and vexing documents in early American history" and "a diary, a mystery, a history, and maybe one of English literature's first detective stories." Adding cultural and political context to the available evidence, Lepore questions whether there was a conspiracy at all, or if it was blind fear run amok that led to the guilty verdicts for so many slaves. As she points out, fear of slave revolt was a real and consistent theme throughout the early days of the colonies. Crisply written and meticulously researched (the book includes several detailed appendices), *New York Burning* is a gripping narrative of events that led to what one colonist referred to as the "bonfires of the Negroes." --Shawn Carkonen --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Juilliard graduate and Broadway actress McDonald offers a wry and meaty interpretation of Lepore's intense social history of the Manhattan slave uprising of 1741. That winter, black and Spanish slaves allegedly set 10 fires around the city, resulting in widespread panic and a draconian roundup of any slave who was rumored to be even tangentially involved in the conspiracy. McDonald does a fine job with the text, which is heavy on trial transcripts and newspaper reportage. Her voice and Lepore's descriptions create an almost visceral portrait of the events, including-note to the faint of heart-some shocking, CSI-worthy descriptions of the ensuing executions, which included burning at the stake. McDonald sometimes butchers the pronunciation of the Spanish names mentioned in the proceedings, but in general her rendering is spot-on, and her voice is by turns animated, disapproving or conspiratorial. The first two hours can be a bit abrupt and confusing, as this abridgment has omitted much of the background information that helped print readers make sense of the large cast of characters. However, this condensation makes for an exciting recital, and by the second half, listeners will be on the edge of their seats. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I doubt anyone who does not want to read a true historical book with a lot of facts but not as exciting as a non-fiction novel will enjoy this. I liked it because I learned a lot of things about New York that I

was really surprised to read. Seems my beloved New York had a pretty bloody, violent history towards slaves and Catholics and some others the leaders and people did not like. I didn't realize the punishments of the day were just as bad, if not worse, than those of the Salem Witch hunt days. Beware, some of the content may turn your stomach.

This is a great piece of historiography about something few know about at all --- slavery in New York City in the 18th century. How about a slave "rebellion" in New York City, how about more people burned at the stake than in the Salem witchcraft trials, how about dark byways and highways of old New York, barely transformed from its days as New Amsterdam, dark plots in dank places, shrill frightened tyrants overreacting with bloody retribution, burned ruins of an early African American village in Central Park? One cannot make up this stuff, it is too real so it must be history at its best. And written by one of our premier authors of history, a woman who makes our history live in The New Yorker to the acclaim of many, and yet whose best book, this one, is still too little known. If you appreciate Harry Truman's remark that the only new thing under the Sun is the history you haven't read, then this is one to curl up with and marvel at; a great way to spend a rainy day or a dark night.

Did you know that if you were a Catholic Priest on the streets of New York in 1747 that you'd be arrested and hung! Great book if you're interested in the times during which our founding Fathers were growing up. It'll give you a different concept on how slavery was different in NYC as opposed to in the South, and how many of the streets in NYC got there names from English magistrates. If you like history, especially of NYC, you'll love this book.

All history books should be this detailed, this readable, this humane. Lepore knows how to write about a horrible, nearly forgotten episode in NYC history. Unlike many historians, she steps away from overt politics or raw emotion. She knows that this subject is too serious to be shouted. It is the rare history book that is packed with facts as well as knowledge. I felt like Lepore was taking my hand and leading me through the smelly streets of lower Manhattan in 1741, like I could almost see the faces of...what were they, anyway? The victims of a horrible hoax? The demented planners of a plot to burn the city? Or something in between, where thieves can also be the keepers of ancient rites from a distant homeland, where the world is turned upside down? I could go on and on, but just buy the book!

An amazing book

An excellent read. I learned a great deal about a terrible time in NY/US history. Jill Lepore is one of my favorite historians.

Jill Lepore's "New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan" is a valuable and admirable examination of one of the darkest episodes in New York's history: the so-called slave rebellion of 1741 and the brutal vengeance that was extracted. Professor Lepore's painstaking research confronts the reader with a terrible conclusion: even the most respectable of people in society will consent to the deaths of human beings, based on even the tiniest shreds of evidence. Focusing primarily on the actions of Daniel Horsmanden, the City's Recorder, Lepore provides the reader with a background on the attitudes of New York's whites toward their slaves. She makes clear that Gotham was neither the first nor only city to have witnessed slave uprisings. (It had suffered a similar uprising a couple of decades earlier.) But the events of 1741 were unique for several reasons:--the shifting finger-pointing at various groups;--the inconsistency of Mary Burton's testimony, which essentially was the case against several slaves; and--Horsmanden's bizarre behavior toward Mary Burton. Admittedly, I've only superficially studied this dark time in New York's history, so I was shocked to learn that there were actually several "conspiracies": the Negro Plot, Hughson's Plot, the Spanish Plot, the Roman Plot, etc. Each plot was hatched depending on who confessed to what. Worst of all, the white population of New York--fueled by racism, xenophobia, paranoia, and, not the least of all, bloodlust--went right along with it. And, with the exception of an intriguing anonymous letter from Massachusetts, it seems the rest of the colonies went along with it, too. While Horsmanden is just short of villified in this book, he is not alone in his culpability. Professor Lepore's "New York Burning" will disturb many readers. The accounts of the slaves and the few whites burning, hanging, begging, and praying are graphic and heartbreaking. Still, this is an incredibly important book for anyone interested in the history of our nation and/or the all-too-tragic fragility of race relations in America. For this, Professor Lepore deserves our appreciation

American slavery and the attendant slave revolts were not all initiated in the South as this documentary illustrates. "New York City Burning" is a good read, not only on the NYC slave revolt that took place, but takes the reader to 18th century Manhattan.

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